CFAY Chapel of Hope 'goes all-out' for Feds Feed Families Food Drive campaign

Story and photo by Greg Mitchell, CFAY Public Affairs

Since June 1, Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Chapel of Hope has engulfed itself into the, currently running, 2012 Feds Feed Families Food Drive Campaign, an donated more than $16,000 for those who are in need.

"What the chapel has done is take a portion of the offerings that have been received from various service members and their families and put forth a percentage of that towards contributing to the betterment of the lives of the needy," said Chapel of Hope Chaplain Corey Thornton. "There were no goals set of any sort. Everything was generated from peoples' genuine concern for those who need help."

The Feds Feed Families Food Drive campaign began from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as a direct response to the "United We Serve Act," which was signed by President Barrack Obama in April 2009. The bill called on all American people to contribute to the countries economic recovery by serving in their communities.

The campaign kicked off nationwide June 1 and is scheduled to continue through Aug. 31. For the military-affiliated, this gives Sailors, Marines and their families more than enough time to provide for those who may be in need.

"The biggest thing for me is having the opportunity to write the checks," said Religious Programs Specialist Seaman Keegan Ledesma, religious offering fund custodian. "I think we as people should be mindful of the fact that there are those who aren't as fortunate as us, and this is just one way of helping them with their needs."

In 2011, the federal government collected 5.7 million pounds of non-perishable food items for distribution to local food banks nationwide and the Department of Defense (DoD) contributed more than 2 million alone.

For 2012, DoD has set a goal is 1.5 million pounds; the Department of the Navy goal is 396,000 pounds. This goal equates to one pound of food for every active duty and selected reserves member and demonstrates a voluntary commitment to help those most in need.

"With so many adversely affected by the global economic recession and with areas of natural disasters, such as the recent wildfires in Colorado, there is no better time to contribute to Feds Feed Families," said Thornton. "Donations provide tangible relief to those back home in the United States who are in dire need of our support."

For more information visit www.fedsfeedfamilies.gov, or email fedsfeedfamilies@cpms.osd.mil.

Chaplain Corey Thornton of Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Chapel of Hope observes as Religious Programs Specialist Seaman Keegan Ledesma, religious offering fund custodian, provides an explanation of check distribution as a part of supporting the Feds Feed Families Food Drive Campaign.

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"Every time I walk off base into the Japanese community, I have found that everyone is so nice and polite to me," said Seaman Apprentice Dustin Carothers, a Sailor aboard USS Mustin (DDG 89). "Naturally once they come on base I just want to return the generosity."

One of the popular attractions was tours of *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62), which received 12,400 visitors.

Also, behind their barracks, Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team Marines provided weapon displays and martial arts training exhibitions to the delight of the crowd.

Vendors, serving mostly American foods and beverages, joined with one another to provide an atmosphere of celebration for all in attendance.

"It is really a great chance for us to celebrate the summer with our Japanese friends," said Legalman 1st Class Ronald Alexander of Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet. "Since I have been in this beautiful country, I have had the opportunity to attend Bon Odori and Mikoshi Parade ceremonies off base in the past with welcoming arms, so this is a way that we can pay the Japanese back for their welcoming of us while here in Yokosuka."

Other feature events were an American Idol concert, a car show featuring customized models, a bodybuilding exhibition and a Major League Eaters Pro-Am Soba Eating Contest featuring current Hot Dog Eating Champion Joey Chestnut. Children also had the opportunity to play in a inflatable castle, gyro-gym and on a rock-climbing wall.

Some Japanese performers expressed excitement about being on stage in front of thousands of people.

"I am really excited to have the opportunity to perform in front of the people of the base, and my own people," said Yumi Takai, a belly dancer for one of the live performances. "To come out and see the smiling faces of people enjoying themselves really motivates me to perform at a high level."

The event concluded with a nearly hour-long fireworks display.

"The best thing about coming to base is the feel I get from the Navy community that they are happy to see us," said Toshi Watanabe, who traveled from Yokohama for the event. "I like to come here because being surrounded by Americans gives me an idea of what American culture is like. I look forward to visiting America in the near future, so coming here gives me the chance to interact with them. Every time I come to open base, I always have a great experience."

Belly dancers perform for attendees of the 36th annual CFAY Friendship Day celebration Aug 4. Friendship Day is a summer event that provides the Japanese community a unique opportunity to come inside the gates of CFAY and a taste of the American lifestyle.