DDYJ annual Forklift Rodeo brings out Yokosuka's best drivers

Story and photo by Mark Elrod, CFAY Public Affairs

Members of local commands gathered to demonstrate their skills during the 4th annual Defense Distribution Depot Yokosuka Japan (DDYJ) Forklift Rodeo at Fleet Industrial Supply Center (FISC) building 1907 on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Oct. 23.

The event marks the second time that commands other than DDYJ participated.

"[This is] the second year in a row that we've done it with other commands," said DDYJ Commanding Officer Cmdr. Paul Bourgeois. "We started out small, just internally with DDYJ. There are six other commands that are here and we had good participation and a lot of fun."

The participants either volunteered or were selected to represent their respective commands, according to DDYJ Inventory Action Team and Receiving Division Leading Chief Petty Officer Senior Chief Logistics Support (SW/AW) Rolando Valentin, who helped coordinate the event.

During the event, forklift drivers participate in a variety of events designed to demonstrate their skills and knowledge.

"The whole idea is to show off [and refresh] your skills," said Bourgeois. "It's just a matter of showing how well you can do your job, MLC (Master Labor Contract), military, or USCS (United States Civil Service) [employees]."

In the "Hold Your Water" event, drivers pick up a pallet loaded with open containers full of water and navigate a course laden with various wooden obstructions that the drivers must drive over while minimizing spillage. After finishing the course, the pallet is weighed to determine the amount of water remaining. The driver with the fastest time and the least spillage wins the event.

(Left) MLC employee Shigemi Endo of Defense Distribution Depot Yokosuka Japan (DDYJ) and DDYJ Commanding Officer Cmdr. Paul Bourgeois hold up the 1st place trophy during the awards ceremony portion of the 4th annual DDYJ Forklift Rodeo Oct. 23. Endo was the overall winner taking first place in the majority of the events.

Another event involved the drivers picking up a basketball with the forks of the truck, carrying it to a basketball goal, raising it and dropping it through the hoop.

There was an obstacle course, in which large shipping boxes were covered with balloons that drivers had to navigate while carrying a nail-covered pallet and driving a barbed-wire wrapped forklift. The point of the event was to see who could navigate the course the fastest while popping the fewest balloons.

In addition, there was a timed event which involved the drivers demonstrating their control by placing tennis balls, hanging from the forks by strings, onto the tops of orange traffic cones.

The event that tested knowledge involved the drivers thoroughly inspecting their forklifts for safe operation. Drivers tally points during each event, then the points are totaled to determine overall winners.

There are three medals – bronze, silver and gold – and trophies in the form of miniature forklifts adorned with a placard that are awarded to the overall winners. However, the medals and trophies are only part of the prize.

"They are bragging rights, saying they are the best forklift driver in Yokosuka Base," said Valentin.

In addition to fun, bragging rights, medals and trophies, the commands and drivers participated in the event for other reasons.

"They do it for the competition… and to comingle with the other commands," said Navy Exchange Logistics Manager Kim Maldonado. "I think it helps us get along with our neighbors. A lot of us are from the United States and we're mingling with the culture of the Japanese."

At the end of the competition the overall winner was Shigemi Endo of DDYJ, who walked away from the competition with the gold medal, first place trophy and bragging rights as the best forklift driver on board CFAY.

Kanagawa Firefighter Academy graduates visit CNFJ Fire Department

Story and photo by Dan Bowen, CFAY Public Affairs

The 2009 class of the Kanagawa Firefighter Academy visited Commander U.S. Naval Forces Japan (CNFJ) Regional Fire Department on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Oct. 23 to learn about U.S. firefighting and start building a rapport with the men and women they will work with when responding to incidents requiring the cooperation of CNFJ and local fire departments.

The new graduates spent the day speaking with CNFJ firefighters and learning about the equipment and techniques they use. During their visit, they also had the opportunity to tour the Center for Naval Engineering firefighting school to watch live fire drills.

"We have 264 candidates that just graduated after eight months of strenuous training visiting us today," said CNFJ Regional Fire Chief Russell Tarver. "This is our first chance to give them indoctrination on our equipment, and some of our tactics and strategies that we use. It gives us a wonderful opportunity to further our mutual aid agreement and our relations with our outside counterparts."

CFAY has mutual aid agreements in place that enables emergency responders from the base to cooperate closely with local emergency responders during an emergency. Although this agreement is in place, without building an accurate understanding of the techniques, procedures and equipment the different departments utilize, the true potential of the agreement would not be realized.

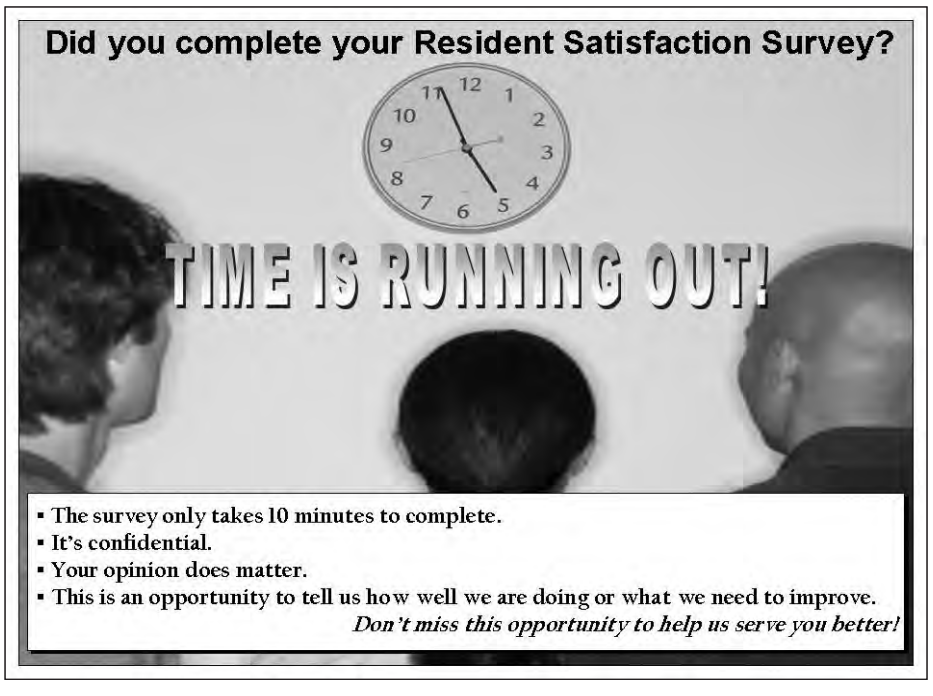
The big attractions for the new firefighters were the American-sized fire engines, which are bigger than Japanese trucks, self-contained breathing apparatuses (SCBA) that allow communication between firefighters during an incident and specialized fire extinguishers that many of the graduates have never seen or used before.

The tours have also had an impact on how some local firefighters view the role of fire prevention education. According to CNFJ Chief Fire Inspector Yuuko Hasegawa, there has been a fundamental shift in the efforts of Japanese firefighters to teach the public, especially children, the consequences of not being prepared in the case of an emergency and how to prevent those emergencies from happening in the first place.

"They had their minds opened towards American-style fire prevention training aimed at kids," said Hasegawa. "Ten years ago in Japan, no one really thought it was appropriate to speak to kids about protecting themselves or their families. They didn't want to expose kids to bad things in life. But, since about a year ago, Tokyo Fire Department has been collecting data in order to start a juvenile fire prevention training program."

Although the exchange of ideas and knowledge is a huge benefit to both departments, the true advantage the CNFJ Fire Department gains by offering their counterparts the chance to tour their facilities is being able to connect with and better relate to their Japanese neighbors.

According to Tarver, coordinating the tours and the thousands of visitors who tour the fire department facilities every year is well worth it.

"I just think it's really good," said Tarver. "Not only for the CNFJ Regional Fire Department, it's good for the Navy overall. We want to present a positive image and I believe that this is one of the best ways to do it."

A recent graduate from the Kanagawa Firefighter Academy presents CNFJ Regional Fire Chief Russell Tarver a T-shirt from the academy to show their appreciation for allowing them to visit and tour the facilities Oct. 23. More than 260 students of the 2009 class visited the CNFJ Regional Fire Department prior to starting their careers as firefighters in Kanagawa prefecture.