Odyssey of the Mind tournament unlocks students' imagination

Story and photo by Kanell Mings, The Sullivans Elementary School

More than 150 elementary students from two Department of Defense Dependents Schools in Japan, met at The Sullivans Elementary School to compete in an 'Odyssey of the Mind' tournament April 3.

The goal of this enrichment program is to encourage students to develop creative thinking and to promote team building skills. Teams from the Richard E. Byrd Elementary School and Sullivans, worked after school for the entire school year to solve a specific problem. They then brought their solution to compete in the tournament.

Odyssey of the Mind (OM) is an international educational program designed to provide creative problem-solving opportunities for students at every educational level, kindergarten through university. Team members brainstorm to solve problems that range from building mechanical devices to presenting their own interpretation of literary classics. Thousands of teams from throughout the United States and aproximately 25 other countries participate in the program.

Parents and teachers serve as advisors to the teams, but the students do the actual work. Sullivans Teacher and OM Coach Derek Allen voiced his praise for the student's involvement in the program and participation in the tournament.

"It was great to see the students' enthusiasm, spontaneity, and creativity on Saturday," Allen said.

Activities included the competition performances by the 16 OM teams, an OM Team creative problem solving egg hunt and a Use-Your-Imagination Show by Sullivans teacher Michael Applegate.

OM teams spent the day building and driving a human-powered vehicle, a camping-trip vehicle, making and operating a series of aircraft that completed a variety of flight plans, discovering two archaeological treasures, designing and building balsa wood columns to balance and support weights and defending a food item under the accusation of being unhealthy. The day culminated with a special surprise party.

The success of this event is not only due to the dedication of the OM students, but also due to the encouragement from more than 50 parents, teachers, Sailors and other community members who spent countless hours serving as coaches and judges for the tournament.

The Sullivans School students take part in a creative problem solving lesson during the Odyssey of the Mind tournament held at the school April 3. Odyssey of the Mind is an international educational program designed to provide creative problem solving opportunities for students at every educational level. More than 150 students from two DoDD Pacific Schools competed in the tournament.

The OM students and coaches wish to acknowledge the support of, and thank, the Yokosuka Officers Wives Club, The Sullivans School PTO, The Nile C. Kinnick High School Band and Color Guard, and the Yokosuka Middle School National Junior Honor Society.

For more information on Odyssey of the Mind, visit the Web site www.odysseyofthemind.com.

Sailors celebrate start of spring with Shinsen Gakuen orphanage

Story and photo by MC3 Dominique Pineiro, CNFJ Public Affairs

Commander U.S. Naval Forces Japan (CNFJ) Sailors volunteered their time to host children from the Shinsen Gakuen orphanage and give them a taste of American culture during a community service project held at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka April 3.

IT2 Lisa Boutxanyho, assigned to Commander U.S. Naval Forces Japan (CNFJ) and dressed as the Easter Bunny, greets a child from the Shinsen Gakuen orphanage during a community service project sponsored by the CNFJ Blue Jackets Mess April 3.

The CNFJ Blue Jackets Mess hosted a variety of Easter-themed games throughout the afternoon for the children and brought them toys and candy. They also provided the children with hot dogs and potato chips during an American-style picnic.

The Blue Jackets Mess is comprised of Sailors between the pay grades of E-1 and E-6. Its stated mission is to provide for the welfare of the command and the community. The Blue Jackets Mess plans and coordinates functions and activities which will best serve the command, and enhance Navy awareness within the local community.

Yeoman 1st Class Karen Cypriensmith, the Blue Jackets Mess president, said CNFJ has developed strong ties over the last three years with the orphanage and hopes to continue to work with them in the near future.

"It gives them a chance to see how Americans celebrate the start of spring and Easter," said Cypriensmith. "It also helps improve our already strong relationship with the community by letting the children and the people who work at the orphanage know we care."

Cypriensmith added that the experience was exciting, but it is important that the group "show our positive impact on and off base."

Once the children finished eating, the Sailors concluded the day with a surprise Easter egg hunt prior to the children's return to the orphanage.

"Seeing the smiles on their faces and knowing they enjoyed themselves was the high point of the day," said Informations Systems Technician 2nd Class Lisa Boutxanyho, who dressed up as the Easter Bunny for the Easter egg hunt. "I love to see kids happy, they remind me of my little niece. It makes me feel good being out here."

CNFJ Senior Sailor of the Year, Quartermaster 1st Class Andrey Mihaylovski said that he was glad to see that the children enjoyed their day.

"I really enjoyed hanging out with these kids," Mihaylovski said. "I'm really hoping to make a lasting memory for these kids."