Blue Ridge spreads goodwill during visit to Vladivostok, Russia

By MC3 Melvin F. Orr III, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) and embarked 7th Fleet staff Sailors arrived in Vladivostok, Russia May 7 for the first visit to the city by the flagship since 2006.

Blue Ridge and embarked 7th Fleet staff Sailors and Marines of Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team Company Pacific participated in a parade in the city center celebrating Victory Day, a national holiday celebrating Russia's victory in Europe in World War II. Cities across the country held parades simultaneously in celebration of the holiday.

Sailors visited the Veterans' Center as part of a community outreach project where the 7th Fleet band performed for more than 200 veterans and university students.

"I'm stoked about visiting Russia," said Musician 2nd Class David Drescher, a member of the 7th Fleet band. "This is a great opportunity to see Russia, considering I probably wouldn't visit on my own time. The band hasn't visited Vladivostok since 2006 but I've heard stories that the audiences are fun and engaging."

Blue Ridge Sailors and embarked 7th Fleet Sailors competed with sailors from the Russian Pacific Fleet in volleyball, basketball and soccer at the Makarov Pacific Fleet Naval Institute Russia Federation. *Blue Ridge* also hosted a chess competition between Sailors and visiting Russian children.

Culinary Specialists 2nd Class Kevin Massey and Edgar Tandoy participated in a cooking competition at Fabrika, a Vladivostok restaurant, during the visit. Massey and Tandoy paired up with Russian chefs and competed against each other. The two Sailors competed in a shipwide contest with dozens of challengers and later in front of a 12-judge panel representing different parts of the ship to earn the opportunity to compete further.

"Russia offers our ship and crew a unique and important opportunity to build relationships and share cultural exchanges in a place rarely seen by service members," said *Blue Ridge* commanding officer Capt. Rudy Lupton. "The crew will be out in the local community, side by side with our Russian counterparts, reinforcing the professional reputation our service has around the world."

Blue Ridge and embarked 7th Fleet staff Sailors also visited Regional Children's Cancer Ward, Mayak Children's Rehabilitation Center, and Parus Nadezhdy Children's Rehabilitation Center as part of community outreach projects to donate school supplies and sports equipment as well as play games and sports with the children. Children from the Mayak and Parus Nadezhdy centers visited *Blue Ridge* for tours.

Blue Ridge departed its forward-deployed home of Yokosuka, Japan March 2, for a spring deployment to further positive relations with regional partners. The ship made port visits to Busan, Republic of Korea; Hong Kong; Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia; Jakarta, Indonesia; Pattaya, Thailand; and Fukuoka, Japan, before returning to Yokosuka May 14. The 19,000 ton ship can carry more than 1,300 crew members and serves as a command and control ship for 7th Fleet operations. *Blue Ridge* serves under Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group 7/Task Force 76, the Navy's only forward-deployed amphibious force.

***USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) Commanding Officer Capt. Rudy Lupton disembarks the ship as it arrives in Vladivostok, Russia May 7. *Blue Ridge* Sailors engaged in a number of community outreach events in Vladivostok and marched with members of the Russian military during a parade commemorating the 65th anniversary of Victory Day, a national holiday in Russia.**

U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Daniel Viramontes

More than half of junior Sailors have retirement savings accounts

By Bruce Moody,
CNIC Fleet and Family Support Program

More than half of the Navy's junior enlisted Sailors have retirement savings accounts through the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP).

A report released by the Secretary of Defense Office of Personal Finance, shows 62.7 percent of the Navy's active-duty E4 Sailors as having TSP accounts.

More than half of junior enlisted Sailors have retirement savings accounts through TSP, according to a report released by the Office of Personal Finance.

U.S. Navy file photo

As Sailors rise in pay grade, so do the numbers contributing to their retirement funds: while 39.5 percent of E-1 Sailors have set up a TSP account, the percentage increases to 50.4 percent for E-2 and to 56.4 percent for E-3 Sailors.

The manager for the Navy Personal Financial Management program is located at the headquarters of Commander Navy Installations Command. Arnie Norem, the program manager, attributes the numbers to a training curriculum which has been developed with Navy Education and Training Center and Center for Personal and Professional Development.

Training begins at boot camp, Sailors graduate from Recruit Training Command and immediately get two days of training in personal financial management.

"Sailors are shown how to create a spending plan," Norem said. "We go over everything from car buying and credit management to financial planning for deployments."

The training continues throughout a Sailor's career. It's presented at least annually during all-hands general military training and each time a Sailor is promoted.

A Sailor going through petty officer indoc will get training on consumer awareness, savings and investments. At the senior ranks, training focuses on topics like retirement planning.

In addition to training, commanding officers appoint Sailors as command financial specialists. These Sailors are generally first class petty officers and go through a weeklong course which prepares them to educate and counsel personnel on financial management issues.

"It's a powerful program," Norem said. "It prepares shipmates to help shipmates and their families."

Fleet and Family Support Centers (FFSC) also provides classes on a variety of issues and individual counseling on financial management.

"One-on-one sessions at the FFSCs are available for Sailors and family members and it's free," Norem said. "That same kind of service off base can be very expensive."

The TSP is a retirement benefit that is offered to employees of the U.S. Government. It is similar to "401(k)" plans available to many private sector employees.

The TSP provides the ability to participate in a long-term savings and investment plan. Participating in the TSP can significantly increase retirement income, though financial planners say getting started early in life is key. Contributing early gives money more time to increase in value through the compounding of earnings.

More information about the TSP is found at http://www.tsp.gov.

The Chief asks:

"Did you know May is Asian Pacific Heritage Month? Asian and Pacific Islander American officers made great strides in the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, as more attained flag rank. Ming Chang, who was born in Shanghai, China, was promoted to the rank of rear admiral in 1980 and is believed to be the first naturalized Asian American to achieve flag rank. For his last tour in 1990, Chang served as inspector general of the U.S. Navy.

"Another successful Asian and Pacific Islander American is U.S. Navy Capt. Tem Bugarin, who became the first Filipino to assume command of a surface ship, *USS Sagina* (LST 1188) in August 1989. During this period, Vice Adm. Robert K. U. Kihune was promoted and became the first Hawaiian to achieve that rank.

"Bugarin also served as commodore for Afloat Training Group Western Pacific in Yokosuka, Japan, from Sept. 1991 to Feb. 1994.

"If you didn't know, now you know." – MCC(SW/AW) Eric Hannah, CFAY Public Affairs