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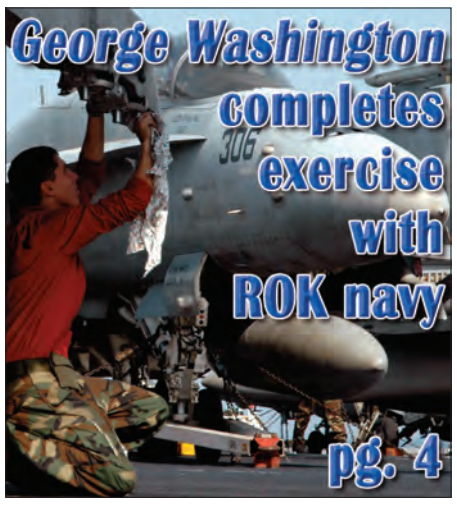

Out of this world: NASA *Endeavour* astronauts visit CFAY

Story and photo by Mark Elrod, CFAY Public Affairs

Astronauts from NASA visited Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Oct. 14 to meet and share their experiences regarding their missions with Sailors and their families.

The three astronauts who visited were part of the seven-member crew who completed the shuttle's 23rd mission, this past summer.

"Our crew flew on the Space Shuttle Endeavour this summer on [mission] STS 127 and after the mission we get the opportunity to go around to different locations and to share a little bit about NASA," said NASA Astronaut U.S. Navy Cmdr. Christopher J. Cassidy. "We're very happy to share what we feel is the importance of space exploration with people. And it just gives us the chance to do that and I think it's very important that we continue that."

During their visit, the astronauts spent time interacting with CFAY personnel in the Benny Decker Theater and the Commodore Matthew C. Perry General Mess.

At the theater, the astronauts held question and answer sessions with students from The Sullivans Elementary School, Yokosuka Middle School and Nile C. Kinnick High School.

"Talking to students is always a fun thing to do. The middle school aged ones, in particular, I think are the perfect age, because I think they are old enough to understand how neat it is and how challenging it is to do a space mission, but still young enough and naive enough to come up with some crazy, innocent questions and I just really enjoy [kids] that age," said Cassidy.

The Sullivans School student Jacob Werner, and his 3-year-old brother Mason enjoyed the experience of meeting astronauts.

"They're so cool," said Jacob. "They find stuff that's never been on Earth."

"I want to go into outer space," said Mason.

Mason, like some other kids, may have childhood dreams about going to space. According to Cassidy, some astronauts had that same dream when they were children.

(Left to right) NASA Astronauts Navy Cmdr. Christopher Cassidy, U.S. Marine Corps Col. Douglas Hurley and Dr. Thomas Marshburn greet members of Yokosuka Cub Scout Pack 33 at Benny Decker Theater during a visit to CFAY Oct. 14. The visit was part of a NASA community outreach.

"Some astronauts, from the moment they can remember, they're thinking about being a space person," said Cassidy.

However, simply dreaming of being an astronaut is not going to get someone into outer space.

see ***ASTRONAUTS***, pg. 9

The Sullivans School displays Hispanic culture with performance

Story and photo by Ben Avey, CFAY Public Affairs

Culture is the living, breathing expression of how people live. It can be heard in music, seen in dance and felt through the poetry of its people.

That is what more than 200 students from The Sullivans Elementary School brought to spectators during two performances highlighting the culture and heritage of the Hispanic community at the Benny Decker Theater Oct. 15.

Organized by The Sullivans School Foreign Language Department to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, the program featured 10 poems that were either recited in Spanish or written by Hispanic authors and 11 dances that originated in Puerto Rico, Columbia, Spain, Panama, Mexico and Cuba.

The student performers ranged from kindergarten to 5th grade and were all enrolled in either the school's Spanish Immersion classes or Foreign Language Elementary Schools (FLES).

Chief Personnel Specialist (SW/AW) John Valentin, whose nine-year-old daughter Zoe performed a traditional dance from Columbia, was thrilled to see his daughter embrace her heritage while having a good time.

"I couldn't stop smiling, I can't stop smiling now," he said. "It was a privilege to watch her dance. She performed really well and it's great to see her recognize her Hispanic heritage."

Adding more authenticity to the performance, students donned traditional Hispanic apparel that was donated by Sullivans teachers and parents.

Students from The Sullivans Elementary School perform a traditional Hispanic dance at Benny Decker Theater on board CFAY Oct. 15. The students are enrolled in Spanish Immersion classes and Foreign Language Elementary School classes at Sullivans and held the performance to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month.

"[Zoe] got up extra early to get ready with her outfit," said Valentin. "She has been excited to say the least. . . she has been showing us her dance routine all week long."

More than 1,300 students and community members came out to watch the show and have given it positive reviews said Sullivans teacher Laura Batista who helped plan the event.

"We are getting many e-mails from staff and parents who were thrilled by the production," said Batista. "One parent said that she came only for the first show and then stayed on for the second one!"

Similar performances have been tentatively scheduled for the Yokosuka Bazaar Nov. 21 and the Yokohama Children's Festival Nov. 22. Additional performances and events for students of The Sullivans School Foreign Language Department are being considered for the 2009-10 school year.

According to the mission statement of the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) Foreign Language Program, which overseas FLES and Spanish Immersion Classes, their goal is to prepare students to meet the challenges of an interdependent world community by enabling them to recognize the importance of learning foreign languages, to value learning about other cultures, and to develop proficiency in one or more foreign languages.