Toys for Tots donation season off to running start

Story and photos by Blake Vives, CFAY Public Affairs

The Yokosuka Toys for Tots campaign officially began with a running start during the fourth annual Toys for Tots 5k run Nov. 13.

Despite frigid weather, spirited runners filled donation boxes with new, unwrapped toys to support the cause.

"This run was the official kick-off event and from now until Dec. 20 you will see Marines in uniform standing weeknight watches in the Navy Exchange next to the Toys for Tots donation boxes," said Semper Fi Society President Capt. Aaron Warby. "Giving up time on their weeknights shows a lot of dedication to the cause from the Marines. I also think it is rewarding for them to finally deliver the toys and see the smiles on the children's faces."

Semper Fi Society member Cpl. Marcia Middleton accepts a new toy donation from a Toys for Tots 5K runner Nov. 13. More than two collection boxes were filled with toys at the kick-off event.

Nick Amodeo finished first place overall with a time of 19 minutes 20 seconds but the Marines of the Semper Fi Society, who sponsored the run, agreed the winners of the day were also the underprivileged children who will receive the toys.

"A toy can be a symbol of hope and love and that somebody is on the child's side when their future isn't looking too bright," said Semper Fi Society member Cpl. Marcia Middleton. "The children who receive the toys live in orphanages or are from single-parent families that have fallen on very hard times and that toy can mean everything."

The Marines are increasing their toy collection efforts in hope of reaching their goal of 2,000 toys.

"During this holiday season our goal is to make as many needy children as possible happy with gifts of new toys," said Semper Fi Society Vice President Gunnery Sgt. Javier Andino. "Through these toys we want to send the children the message that they are loved and the members of the community who donate toys will help send this message."

The Marines also plan to exercise their grilling skills in an effort to collect more toys. "Bring a new toy or give a monetary donation to get a lunch plate the first week in December in the commissary red brick area."

Toys are needed for children from infants to age 18 because those are the ages of children in group homes and orphanages but there can be a shortage of items for older girls. "The 18-year-old girls tend to be the most difficult to give gifts to," advised Warby. "We actually do accept donations of new clothes and those seem to be the best presents for them."

Runners surge forward during the start of the fourth annual Toys for Tots 5k run Nov. 13. Despite frigid weather, spirited runners participated in the event, signaling the official start of the campaign to donate new, unwrapped toys for underprivileged children.

The Marine Corps Reserves usually conduct Toys for Tots campaigns but because there is no reserve unit in Yokosuka the active-duty Marines assume this responsibility in addition to their busy schedules. "We run Toys for Tots here in Yokosuka because this is something that we feel strongly about and is very important to us," said Warby.

Delivery of the toys to less-fortunate children begins the second week in December.

FISC fuel terminal builds friendship with local community

Story and photo by Blake Vives, CFAY Public Affairs

The laughter of children playing, a smiling crowd watching a baseball game and the smell of freshly-grilled yakisoba are not what you would expect to find at a U.S. Fleet and Industrial Supply Center (FISC) Yokosuka fuel terminal, but for one day the employees of the Tsurumi Fuel Terminal in Yokohama welcomed the local neighborhood for a day of fun and friendship.

"Friendship day here is significant because for the past 40 years the U.S. Navy has operated a fuel terminal at Tsurumi," said FISC Yokosuka Kanto Plain Area Fuels Director Brian Dodson. "For most of those 40 years people in the neighborhood knew that the U.S. Navy was operating here but they never got the chance to come inside and meet the people who work here, see the work they do and understand it better."

More than 100 residents of the neighboring community lined up in the crisp morning air for admittance to the grounds of Tsurumi for the friendship day.

"For the past four years we have allowed people to come in and meet us, ask us questions they have always wanted to ask and learn about the work we do here and how we are trying to make sure our work includes environmental stewardship, safety and consideration for the local community," said Dodson.

The events of the day featured a baseball tournament, a display from the Tsurumi firefighters, a picnic atmosphere buffet lunch, and plenty of time to socialize and make new friends.

"I hope our visitors from the local community leave today's event knowing we work here together, U.S. civilians, U.S. military and Japanese Master Labor Contract employees; we do it safely while being environmentally responsible and we do our best to take care of the community in the way we work."

Each consecutive year the number of guests from the community has increased.

"Even with the very cold weather we welcomed 110 guests this year," said Dodson. "This friendship day has truly improved relations between the U.S. Navy here and the local community by allowing us to get to know each other."

This event reflects an increased effort from the Tsurumi Fuel Terminal to reach out to create friendship and understanding. The local members of the prefectural assembly and the Yokohama city councils toured the facility for the first time in February 2006, and the administrators of the neighborhood association toured the facility in June that same year. Personnel from the Tsurumi Fuel Terminal even participated for the first time in the town association-sponsored Bon Odori Festival in July 2006.

"I liken this event to the recently completed CFAY [Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka] Friendship Day," said FISC Yokosuka Fuel Department General Manager Masami Minami. "The friendship day has a lasting positive impact to the community and the fuel terminal and FISC Yokosuka."

The event also provided an opportunity for cultural exchange.

"I was excited because this was my first opportunity to attend Tsurumi's Friendship Day," said FISC Fuels Program Specialist Greg Brownfield.

"I have been studying the Japanese language and culture and I definitely utilized the classroom experience while communicating with the local community."

(Left) FISC Yokosuka Fuels employee ABF2 Sergio Aguilar Lucero and (right) FISC Yokosuka Fuels Program Specialist Greg Brownfield play basketball at the Tsurumi Fuel Terminal in Yokohama with children from the local neighborhood Nov. 3. The Tsurumi Friendship Day allowed fuel terminal employees to become better acquainted with community residents.

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