USO Yokosuka gives single Sailors holiday meal, free calls home

By MCSN Devon Dow, NPASE, Japan

Yokosuka's single Sailor community was treated to a free holiday dinner and a host of activities on Thanksgiving, thanks to special efforts by the local United Service Organizations (USO). The event was made possible by generous donations from AT&T, Kraft Foods and Skype.

"One of the core missions for the USO is to give the Sailors a feeling of being home away from home and we really try to make sure that people who don't have someone else to spend Thanksgiving with really have a happy experience," said USO Yokosuka Operations Manager Danae Hoekstra.

Sailors talk to their friends and family in the United States from webcam enabled computer terminals at USO Yokosuka on Thanksgiving. USO provided a Thanksgiving meal, gave away door prizes, offered webcam calls and free 30-minute Skype phone cards for the single Sailor event.

Photo by Kazuyuki Takagi

Skype donated free webcams and 30 minute phone cards to all Sailors who attended the event. Many attendees put the donated items to quick use in the USO computer stations. The free giveaway attracted local and American media, as Sailors reconnected with families thousands of miles away on one of America's most family-oriented holidays.

"This is a great event for our single Sailors away from home during the holidays," said Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Command Master Chief (SW) Gregory Vidaurri. "Thanksgiving is always a time that we like to spend with our families and friends and by creating an event like this for the Sailors; we show our appreciation for their service and bring them a little closer to home with a traditional Thanksgiving dinner."

Sailors were served plentiful helpings of turkey, ham and other Thanksgiving trimmings. Each table was decorated with Thanksgiving centerpieces crafted by students from The Sullivans Elementary School. Sailors were treated to a Guitar Hero videogame contest and a holiday raffle where they had the chance to win MP3 players, digital cameras and other gifts.

With friends and family half a world away, the USO provided Sailors an opportunity to enjoy the holiday with new friends. Single Sailors like Sonar Technician - Surface 3rd Class Edison Valderrama were able to take advantage of a good meal, free activities and fellowship.

"The food was good, I cannot complain about anything," said Valderrama. "They did so much for us today it was great.

(Right) CFAY CMDCM(SW) Gregory Vidaurri, chats with Sailors during a USO-hosted Thanksgiving dinner at Club Alliance Nov. 26. Sailors were also treated to door prizes and free webcam calls home.

U.S. Navy photo by MCSN Devon Dow

Like all of the commercials say about the USO, 'it's a home away from home,' they really live up to it. At times being on the ship can be a stressful environment, so anytime we are able to come out and partake in things like this are a good morale booster."

For Construction Mechanic Apprentice Christopher Pratt, a Seabee on a six-month deployment to Japan, it was his first Thanksgiving outside of the United States. Despite being away from home, the event was more than he expected.

"The event is well appreciated by the Sailors who are away from their families," he said. "Being away is difficult, but it is one of the sacrifices service members make every day. For the volunteers and the USO to spend their holidays serving us really says a lot about the people here."

Department of Defense bill includes new benefits for federal employees

By Lisa D. Marsh, CNFJ Human Resources Office

The Department of Defense (DoD) National Security Personnel System (NSPS), which now covers about 205,000 civilian employees, will be completely phased out by Jan. 1, 2012.

The defense authorization bill lawmakers recently passed include:

• End NSPS by Jan. 1, 2012 and dramatically downsize the pay-for-performance system that covers intelligence agencies' employees.

• Allow agencies to temporarily rehire retirees at their full salaries and annuities.

• Provide locality pay for federal employees in Hawaii, Alaska and U.S. territories.

• Allow previously retired Federal Employees Retirement System employees returning to the federal government to redeposit their annuities to the civil service trust fund, permitting them to combine their past and new federal service for future retirement benefit calculations.

• Recalculate annuities of Civil Service Retirement System employees who work part time at the end of their careers so they are based only on their fulltime salaries.

• Require DoD to justify sole-source contracts worth more than $20 million.

• Suspend DoD use of public-private competitions for federal jobs under Office of Management and Budget Circular A-76.

• Lifts caps on hiring for DoD civilian acquisition workforce and allow DoD to use expedited hiring to fill acquisition openings.

• Allow DoD to pilot alternative ways of procuring information technology.

The Pentagon has six months to start transferring employees back to their original pay system. For most employees, that will be the General Schedule (GS).

Contact CNFJ Human Resources Office NSPS Program Manager Lisa D. Marsh at 243-8170 or by e-mail to lisa.marsh@fe.navy.mil for more information.

Reconsideration Process update

By Lisa D. Marsh, CNFJ Human Resources Office

For most commands, the pay pool process is now complete and employees can anticipate receiving their rating of record soon. If an employee is dissatisfied with their rating of record, he or she may seek review through the National Security Personnel System (NSPS) Reconsideration Process.

An employee may only challenge their rating of record – not their performance payout, recommended ratings, number of shares or share value, payout distribution, interim review or closeout assessment. Within 10 calendar days of receipt of the rating of record, the employee must submit a written request for reconsideration to the pay pool manager (PPM), with a copy to the rating official and servicing Human Resources Office. In accordance with Department of the Navy guidance, the "clock" for reconsideration requests does not start until Jan. 4, 2010, or the effective date of their payout.

The request must be in writing and state the requested change and basis for the change. The employee may also include a request for discussion with the PPM. Within 15 calendar days of receipt of the employee's request for reconsideration, the PPM will render a written decision, which will include a brief explanation of the basis of the decision.

If the employee is dissatisfied with the decision of the PPM, they may submit a written request for final review to the performance review authority (PRA), within five calendar days of receipt of the PPM decision. The PRA will render a decision within 15 calendar days. This decision is final. Allegations that a performance rating was based on prohibited discrimination will be processed through the Equal Employment Opportunity discrimination complaint procedure. Contact your servicing labor-employee relations specialist at 243-3410 or 243-8198 for additional information regarding the reconsideration process.