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JIOC Sailors help refurbish USO keiki room

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Sailors from the Joint Intelligence Operational Command (JIOC) Volunteer Program organized and implemented efforts to redesign the United Service Organization (USO) keiki room at the Honolulu International Airport.

Intelligence Specialist 1st Class (IS1) (AW) Matthew Siemienski, JIOC's volunteer program liaison, volunteers on Friday nights at the USO. It was during one of those shifts that he noticed that the keiki room needed some attention.

"The children were running around without any direction. Once we put some new paint and games in the room, they seemed thrilled to have some place to call their own. They love watching television and it gives their parents some much needed time to re-sort their thoughts and prepare for the next step in their journey," Siemienski shared.

IS3 Jessica Genest volunteered to lead the operation for JIOC and called for donations and volunteers, and organized fund-raising activities. According to Genest, their command bake sale raised more than \$300 which enabled them to purchase paint, games and other needed items for the keiki room.

"This was a fun project. It was easy to get people to volunteer to do something for the kids. I enjoyed it because it gave me something positive to do while my husband is deployed on the USS Boxer," Genest said.

Siemienski and Genest worked side-by-side with service members from their command to be able to provide new toys and furniture. "We even used child-friendly paint to brighten the room up while keeping in mind the safety of the child," Genest explained.

The USO organization has relied on volunteers to further their objective of providing support to America's troops since 1941. William Johnson, the Honolulu Airport USO Center operations manager, discussed the goal of the USO.

"We work to lift the spirits of America's troops and their families, and we will continue to be here for them until everyone comes home," Johnson said.

The Honolulu International Airport USO often hosts more than 100 people a night. "Monday and Tuesdays are busy days for us here. They are leaving for boot camp and their families come here to see them off," Johnson said.

There are currently nine local military commands that assume direct support for the Honolulu Airport USO Center. The commands are responsible for supplying volunteers one night a week from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. or 8 p.m. to midnight. Johnson said, "We depend on our command participation."

While the USO is always looking for more volunteers and command sponsorships, he also recognizes how fortunate they are to have the support they currently experience. "JIOC has been a vital part of supporting the USO for years. Now with the newly renovated keiki room, we can provide yet another critical element to evolving needs of our service members," Johnson said.
