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CFAY Celebrates Yokosuka Friendship Day 2023



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Story by Garrett Cole, CFAY Public Affairs

The 45th Yokosuka Friendship Day unfolded under challenging weather conditions on Oct. 15, 2023, as rough and rainy weather marked the beginning of the day. However, the resilient spirit of the community persevered as people continued to show up. Later in the morning, the sun appeared, and the festivities picked up, underscoring the determination to celebrate the enduring friendship between the U.S. military and the local Japanese community.

"As the Commander of Fleet Activities Yokosuka, I see Friendship Day as a powerful symbol of the enduring bond between our base and the vibrant Yokosuka City community. It's a day of unity, celebration, and gratitude, where even the weather couldn't dampen our spirits. Just as we weathered the storm today, our partnership with the city has shown its strength through every challenge, bringing joy and warmth to all involved," shared Capt. Les Sobol, Commander of Fleet Activities Yokosuka.

This beloved annual event is a testament to the enduring ties between the U.S. military and the local Japanese community. Natasha McNair, MWR Recreation Department Special Events Coordinator, captured the day's spirit, saying, "Today, we have Yokosuka Friendship Day, our annual open-base event. We have a carnival, vendor tents, water jets, performers on two stages, and special guest DJs. It's a fun day of entertainment and camaraderie between the city and our base."

She emphasized the significance of this camaraderie, explaining, "It's important to have camaraderie because without us working together, it would just be hard to get things done. Working together makes all the difference, not just in everyday life but with work, family, and life. It makes a huge difference, and we would not be able to do much of what we do without the city. They help us with many things, and we want to show our appreciation and give back as well. I think also for our community, it's fun to bring our culture here."

Yoshihiro Shimizu, Director of Military Liaison and Civil Affairs at Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka, shed light on the extensive preparations for the event and the partnership with Yokosuka City. "My work is purely the coordination for Friendship Day. It starts with year-long planning and coordination with the city. We begin by determining the event

date, aiming to benefit our community and theirs," explained Shimizu. "Yokosuka City often plans fireworks, so we align our schedules to ensure a seamless celebration."

He helped introduce a new feature to the festival - a pre-registration process with the city to prevent overcrowding in town. "One of the new features of the festival is pre-registration with the city, which we initiated last year and continue this year. The process aims to help prevent overcrowding in town. After COVID, we resumed our Friendship Day and had too many people. The roads and streets got too congested in the city, and the police had a difficult time, so we wanted to minimize that as much as possible. So the city offered to do the pre-registration," said Shimizu. "To receive up-to-date registration information, the community can visit the Yokosuka City website."

He underlined the importance of this partnership, saying, "This is very important because Yokosuka City is the hosting city for this base, and we have to work closely with them. We should work together and try to benefit from each other by doing something that can bring people into Yokosuka. Yokosuka City feels that the area is good for the sightseeing business."

"Yokosuka City is proud of having a U.S. Navy base and the JMSDF base together here in Yokosuka. They announce to people that 'this is a navy town' and want to promote that. They're supportive of us by making this more about the people. The city wants to promote that the people here on base are nice. They're here to, of course, defend but also to enjoy the city and country as well. To have that, we need camaraderie on both sides," Shimizu added.

Even as this year's festivities sadly concluded without the anticipated fireworks display due to inclement weather, Yokosuka Friendship Day continues to shine as a symbol of unity and partnership, bringing joy to all participating while continuing to build a strong bond between the military and the local community.



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Photos by Taylor Ardito, Garrette Cole, James Kimber, Tetsuya Morita, MC2 Conner Houghtaling, CFAY Public Affairs and MWR Yokosuka

