

Iwo Jima Sets Sail after Successful Fleet Week

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By Mass Communications Specialist 1st Class (SW/AW/NAC) Eric J. Rowley, USS IWO JIMA Public Affairs

Port Everglades, Fla. (NNS) -- Multi-purpose amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) departed Port Everglades, Fla., after successfully completing a week long fleet week May 1.

This year South Florida welcomed more than 2,500 Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen for Fleet Week Port Everglades 2011. The week-long celebration showcased the men and women of the sea services and their capabilities.

"Fleet weeks are an enjoyable experience; every time we do a fleet week we are always treated like heroes and everyone shows their appreciation," said Cryptologic Technician Collection 1st Class (SW/AW) Virginia Sanders, USS Iwo Jima Sailor of the year. "These give us a chance to show everyone who we are, what we do and that we are out there fighting for their freedom. It gives the public a chance to come out and thank us for what we do and for us to show our appreciation for the public."

During Fleet Week Port Everglades service members had the chance to participate in many events including Galley Wars, Celebrity Chef Luncheon, Resolve Marine Group Damage Control Olympics, Salsa dance classes, ride-a-longs with local police and fire departments, community relations projects and several Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) tours.

Iwo Jima also hosted public tours and was visited by celebrities such as Miami Dolphins linebackers Austin Spitzer and A.J. Edds; Connie Francis, a 1950 pop singer; Joyce Kaufman who did a three hour live broadcast radio show from the flight deck and Rep. Allen West, of Florida, who served as the guest speaker for a Sailor of the year luncheon.

"One of the things I got to do was meet Congressmen West," said Sanders. "He is a great speaker. I think meeting him was my favorite part of fleet week."

Service members also had the chance to enjoy some liberty in the Fort Lauderdale area.

"My family got the chance to come see me one day while I was on liberty," said Aviation Boatswain's Mate Fuels Airman Leeanna J. Fulce, of Okeechobee, Fla. "The 'Roll Call' welcome party the first day was really good. They had the Navy band there and they sounded great."

"Everyone I met seemed to accept us with open arms; I really enjoyed their hospitality" said Master-at-Arms 2nd Class (SW/AW) Jack D. Coon, USS Iwo Jima Junior Sailor of the year. "Overall my favorite part of fleet week was having the chance to visit the Alexander Nininger State Veterans Nursing Home with Rear Adm. Alexander, [commander, Navy Region Southeast.] "I was really moved by their companionship and their pride of the military. They were also very excited to see us. Going there made my whole week."

For more news from USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7), visit www.navy.mil/local/lhd7/.

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110426-N-7680E-021 FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (April 26, 2011) Capt. Grady Banister, left, executive officer of the multi-purpose amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7), is interviewed on the Joyce Kaufman Show during Fleet Week Port Everglades 2011. More than 2,500 Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen participate in this South Florida tradition honoring the sea services and establishing relationships through community outreach and increased awareness of the naval services. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Zane Ecklund/Released)

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