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Blue Ridge, Philippine Sailors rehab Trichet Learning Center

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MANILA, Philippines - Nearly 20 Sailors from USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) and U.S. 7th Fleet staff with embarked Marines and Seabees teamed up with Seabees from the Philippine Navy for a community service project at **Manila's Trichet Learning Center Feb. 10.**

"We all came here today to build the kids some shelves, tables and chairs and other things to make their classroom atmosphere more comfortable," said Ensign Jeff Chewning. "I'm proud of our efforts. We all worked together to make this school better for these kids. Their parents may not be able to afford to send them to a more expensive facility, but they deserve the best and that's what we tried to create for them."



Photo by MC2 Tucker M. Yates
Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, Vice Adm. Doug Crowder thanks a student from Manila's Trichet Learning Center for her performance during a community service project.

Sister Irene Chateauvert founded the center because there were no services for special children, other than private institutions which cost too much for most families. Over the years it grew from an all volunteer staff to hired specialists including physical and occupational therapists, psychologists, and special education teachers.

"I feel that it's important to give back to those who are less fortunate or have a harder life than we do," said Aerographer's Mate 1st Class Tyler Mello. "I take pride in the Navy and knowing that we do things like this to help other people. Hopefully this makes their day brighter and their smile wider."

The joint U.S. and Philippine Navy effort brought smiles and was appreciated by the staff and volunteers from the Center.

"It makes me feel fantastic to see the two navies working together," said Stephanie Craw, a volunteer from the United States Embassy Club. "To see people working like this together is so good for me and for the recipients. This makes me proud to be an American, and I'm just so happy that we're doing this for the children."

While the Sailors and Marines were working hard to make the school a better place to learn, the children of Trichet Learning Center worked equally hard to show their appreciation. When Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, Vice Adm. Doug Crowder arrived at the school, the students performed a Navy-themed dance and cheerleading routine that wrapped up with the youngest children holding up signs forming the words, "THANK YOU."

"The kids seemed really happy that we were here and I think that they will enjoy all the things that we made for them," said Hospital Apprentice Richard Drake. "Projects like this basically bring people from two different sides of the world together and make them realize that they can help each other."

Blue Ridge is commanded by Capt. Jeff Bartkoski and serves under Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) 7/Task Force (CTF) 76, the Navy's only forward-deployed amphibious force. Blue Ridge is the flagship for Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet. Task Force 76 is headquartered at White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa, Japan, with an operating detachment in Sasebo, Japan.