

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Sailors and Marines Visit Cultural Center

Story and photo By Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Harry Andrew D. Gordon

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates – Sailors and Marines from aircraft carrier USS Enterprise (CVN 65) and Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 1 volunteered for a community involvement event during a regularly-scheduled port visit to Jebel Ali, United Arab Emirates, July 2.

Coordinated by Enterprise's Religious Ministries department, the crew members visited the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding located in the traditional Bastakiya quarter of Bur Dubai. The Centre consists of a visitor welcoming center with a gathering room, several traditional buildings and a mosque.

Twenty service members, including nine Sailors, 10 Midshipmen and one Marine, participated in the event. The event was designed to enhance relations and cultural awareness between service members and citizens of the host country.

"It is important to understand more about the cultures that we are visiting as we continue to become involved around the world," said Cmdr. John Owen, Enterprise's command chaplain. "The more we can understand other cultures, the better we can interact with them. We all learn and grow from each other."

The Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding, started in 1995, is a cultural awareness platform through which visitors to the United Arab Emirates are able to join in various cultural activities in a friendly, welcoming environment. The event was hosted by Nasif Kayed, the general manager of Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding, and other local Emiratis. The Centre practices the philosophy, "open doors, open minds."

"This is a relaxed environment, where we get to know each other," said Kayed. "We ask each other questions that might come off as rude or disrespectful or maybe weird. We give each other answers and it is not about who is right or wrong or who is better. It is



Nasif Kayed hosts Sailors and Marines from Enterprise at the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding during a community involvement event.

just about people getting to know each other."

During the event, Sailors and Marines shared local food including Arabic coffee, dates, chick peas and chicken and beef biryani. Crew members ate with local citizens while enjoying an honest dialogue about music, food, history, politics, local culture, customs and the religion of the United Arab Emirates.

"We talk about different things. How they are understood and misunderstood," said Kayed. "Hopefully by the end, we can better understand each other."

During their visit, the group toured the Farouk Mosque and observed traditional prayers by Kayed in an effort to improve cross-cultural understanding. The host answered questions about prayers, praying times and the Islamic religion.

"This was a very entertaining event," said Cryptologic Technician (Technical) Seaman Elliot Bautista. "The most rewarding thing about coming to Dubai is getting to know the people and their customs. It was an experience I really enjoyed." ☺