

FEATURED

## Hundreds come out for community day

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

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Hundreds of community members came out to see the display of military aircraft during the U.S Air Force 15th Air Expeditionary Wing community day event last Saturday.

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Rain or shine, nothing stopped hundreds of community members from coming out to see the display of military aircraft made accessible through a community day event organized by the U.S Air Force 15th Air Expeditionary Wing in collaboration with the Commonwealth Ports Authority.

Last Saturday, the U.S Air Force 15th Air Expeditionary Wing—who has been on island for the past two weeks for their annual Agile Reaper exercise—welcomed members of the community aboard three of the aircraft used during this year’s Agile Reaper training; namely the C-17 Globemaster III, HC-130 J Combating King II, and the F-22 Raptor.

Children and adults alike were not hindered by heavy rains or the excruciating heat, nothing was stopping them from taking advantage of the once-in-a-while opportunity to not only experience these aircrafts, but to speak with military personnel.

According to Lt. Col. Logan Sutton, last Saturday’s event was a wonderful opportunity to connect

with the Saipan community.

“It was a wonderful event. Lots of people were able to come and see the planes and meet the men and women who operate them. It’s just a wonderful opportunity to connect with the community who’ve been such wonderful hosts for the last two weeks,” he said.

Capt. Alexandra Buckley shared that they decided to expand last Saturday’s community event by a few hours because based off feedback from the community day following the Cope North exercise conducted back in February, members of the community wanted more time to see the aircrafts.

“The turnout of today’s event was fantastic. We’re really glad that everybody was able to make it out today. We wanted to expand the time from Cope North based on the feedback that we got from that, that it wasn’t long enough. And we brought a couple more aircraft so the people could see what we’ve been flying around the area even if we haven’t primarily been operating out of Saipan,” she said.

Capt. Cooper Graft, a son of Saipan who coincidentally was deployed for the Agile Reaper exercise held in the Marianas, emotionally shared that being back on Saipan and being able to partake in the Community Day event was humbling.

“This is what inspired me to join the military. I was a little kid once taking part in a similar military airshow. Being here now, giving back to the community by showing the what we do, it’s humbling and really emotional,” he said.

Sec. Lt. Margaret Blice said Community Day was special because it was a perfect opportunity to have people come out and connect with their servicemen.

“This community days was really special. We had people coming out all day just showing us love. This community has just been so welcoming and having this opportunity to welcome them to our aircrafts, have them talk to our airmen, and letting us show them our capabilities, it’s been really special,” she said.

CPA executive director Leo Tudela said he hopes CPA will be able to work with the military again in the future to host a similar event.

“I’m very excited about today’s event. There’s a lot of people who came out. I believe this is a good ‘once-in-a-while’ event to host for the community. It gives the community the opportunity to see these military aircrafts. I talked to the military personnel and really pushed for this event because I believe those planes are fantastic for the people to see. I’m very happy about this event and hope to do this again,” he said.

John Moses, electrician for the Saipan Airport, shared that he hopes the community enjoyed the event CPA helped put together for them.

“The event had a great turnout. I hope the community really enjoyed what was prepared for them, especially the children. This event really is important for the children [especially] those who may

be interested in joining the military," he said.

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