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REAGAN CREW ENJOY S.B. SHORE LEAVE : A variety of events were planned to celebrate the sailors' arrival



The USS Ronald Reagan as it arrives in Santa Barbara, as seen from Highway 101 at Sheffield Drive.

STEVE MALONE / NEWS-PRESS



Bacara chef Roger Rioferr slices some tri-tip for Seaman Kristi Romero at the parking lot of Green Hill Software. The barbecue was hosted by Bacara Resort & Spa and was a precursor to the Rock the Reagan concert held across the street at the

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Sailors from the USS Ronald Reagan came out en masse Saturday to enjoy their stay in Santa Barbara and the series of events that were planned for their arrival.

The last time the carrier was here was in August 2005, USS Ronald Reagan spokesman Lt. Ron Flanders said.

Bacara Resort & Spa was a pivotal player in the welcoming of the sailors by providing a series of events that included a welcome brunch from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Miro restaurant. The banquet had a sculpted chocolate replica of the nuclear-powered carrier on display -- a short-lived work of art as those on hand devoured it.

At 7:30 p.m., guest speaker and former jet fighter pilot Capt. Charlie Plumb, who was shot down over enemy territory in Vietnam and survived for nearly six years in a prison camp, recounted his motivation story in Bacara's Screening Room. Afterward in the nearby Director's Lounge, a dessert reception and meet-the-speaker event drew out elected officials, sponsors and the officers and crewmembers.

Bacara Resort & Spa also gave sailors \$300 to \$700 discounts to stay at the five-star hotel. Earlier in the day, the resort sponsored a barbecue for 500 under-21 sailors in downtown Santa Barbara, a precursor to the Rock the Reagan concert at the Arlington Theatre.

Saturday saw State Street speckled with the white and black of uniformed sailors, stopping in at restaurants, bars, stores and other venues.

Petty Officer Third Class Andrew Horner was ambling north when two passers-by cordially struck up a conversation with him.

"It's nice and quaint," the Texas native, who was headed with two other sailors to the Rock the Reagan concert, said of the experience. "People like them have come up repeatedly to shake our hand and extend their hospitality."

Rauneet Bains, 20, from Queens, New York, said she got a bit of the "celebrity" treatment during her sojourn in Santa Barbara.

"The hospitality is great," she said. "People have given us rides, hotel rooms, drinks, food. . . . It's nice to know everyone here appreciates what we do. In San Diego, where we have a big Navy population, we're not recognized as much, so when we come up here it's nice to get the reception we have gotten."

Jamil Ussery, 27, was watching a football game at the Tonic Patio Bar & Lounge on State Street.

"Santa Barbara is really nice," he said. Mr. Ussery had steak and lobster at a local restaurant and said he got a 30 percent discount for being in uniform.

Lt. Flanders lauded Santa Barbara for the way the city has received the sailors.

"Sailors are getting a weekend in one of the most beautiful cities on the West Coast of the United States," Lt. Flanders said. "Residents have accommodated 100 of our soldiers in their homes over the weekend. To the sailors who have been at sea since December and will be in the Persian Gulf till May, this was a great way for them to relax. People treat our soldiers like rock stars."

"Once again, just as in 2005, the people of Santa Barbara have proven that they love sailors, and we just want to say thank you."

Though the weekend was a break from duty, many sailors spent a lot of time volunteering at Santa Barbara School Districts' campuses. Sailors also helped with landscaping at Dos Pueblos High School, painting at San Marcos High School and various projects at Santa Barbara High School. Others visited Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital from 10:30 a.m. to noon Saturday to hand out coloring books created for the event, Lt. Flanders said.

Today's events include a 10 a.m. soccer game showcasing sailors pitted against local fire, police and traveling teams at Santa Barbara City College. There's also a reception aboard the USS Ronald Reagan from 5 to 8 p.m. called the Santa Barbara Navy League Annual Meeting where food, drink and music will be provided to members at \$125 per person.

Also, the Santa Barbara Maritime Museum will be open free of charge today to honor the men and women of the USS Ronald Reagan. Free admission is being provided by sponsorship of Montecito Bank & Trust and the Santa Barbara Chamber of Commerce.

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