Kathleen P. Donnelly, director of the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) Support Equipment (SE) and Aircraft Launch and Recovery Equipment (ALRE) Department, presents Capt. Muhammad Khan, JB MDL deputy commander and NSA Lakehurst commander, with a plaque of appreciation during the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month event at Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD) Lakehurst May 9. (U.S. Navy photo)

JOINT BASE MCGUIRE-DIX-LAKEHRUST, N.J. - Members of the Joint Base MDL community celebrated Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) heritage month during a luncheon here, May 9.

Every year in May, the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD) Lakehurst’s AAPI team hosts an event to celebrate Asian American Pacific Islander heritage, open to anyone who wants to attend.

“We usually have a local event to get together and talk about the Asian culture,” said Dat Le, president of the AAPI team. “We educate the work force on it. It’s also a good time to bring people with different backgrounds together at a lunch and talk to each other.”

Le said it’s a good way for people to learn about different cultures, not just Asian American culture, while experiencing new food from various cultures.
Michael Nguyen, AAPI team human resources advisor, said each table at the luncheon had a flag representing different types of Asian heritage.

At the event this year, U.S. Navy Capt. Muhammad Khan, Joint Base MDL deputy commander and Naval Support Activity Lakehurst commander, was the guest speaker. Born in Karachi, Pakistan, Khan spoke of his ethnical background and how it affected his view and experience of the United States while attending North Texas State University.

“The America I experienced in 1981 was quite challenging,” said Khan. “Mostly, because it was after the Iranian hostage crisis, I would get cussed out just minding my own business.”

Khan spoke about the challenges he faced within himself; he said the negativity he received for being Asian American instilled in his mind that he would not be accepted in the U.S. military. After applying anyways, to his amazement, he was selected.

“This is when my eyes opened to the beauty of the U.S.,” said Khan. “Now I experienced true America, I experienced the diversity and acceptance that I was missing in [Texas]. I found out that this truly is the land of opportunity; the shining city on the hill.”

Le said the main goal of the celebration is to demonstrate the accomplishments of people with Asian descent and give Joint Base MDL a different perspective and point of view on life and the work force. The AAPI team wants service members to learn about other cultures living in their community in an effort to work together better.

“There is great strength in diversity,” said Khan. “We bring so much to the table, so let’s ‘Unite Our Vision by Working Together,’ regardless of color, race or religion.”

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Capt. Muhammad Khan, JB MDL deputy commander and NSA Lakehurst commander, provides the keynote address during the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month event at Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD) Lakehurst May 9. (U.S. Navy photo)