

A Playground for Denver
By Leigh Kennicott
Boulder, Colo., Correspondent

On a recent wintry morning, members of Denver's venerable Gaylord District gathered to admire the completed playground in their neighborhood that was built as a result of the concerted efforts of Ayo Joyner, Gaylord District group leader and president of the North Denver City Park Civic Association. Other people may just see a basketball/tennis/volleyball court, but Ayo calls it "a great exercise in faith."

It all began because Gaylord District leader Huelette Robinson wanted to put into action SGI President Ikeda's suggestion to sink roots into the community. Huelette's involvement in the North Denver City Park Civic Association soon interested Ayo. "I've always been community-minded," Ayo says. After she joined the group, she "turned on full force, and ended up being president."

When several neighborhood groups learned of a \$30,000 grant offered by an asphalt, concrete and aggregate company, they entered into an alliance to try to win the grant. The local Fire Station No. 10 donated the space for the project. Simple cooperation would gain the cash award for them. But, as everyone knows, cooperation is not easy. Ayo had to resolve several conflicts with members from the other groups first.

"Daimoku was the only thing that kept me going," Ayo recalls. "Getting that grant meant practicing in faith. If I had not been practicing hard, I would have gotten easily discouraged."

In fact, it was a discouraging process. One group dropped out of the competition; other groups had different ideas about the function of the park. Ayo had to hold everyone together in a forward-looking manner. The personality clashes she experienced brought her back to her practice.

"I chanted to overcome my anger," she said. "Then I started chanting for one person's happiness, and at the next meeting, she did a total about-face."

Through that experience, Ayo realized how important it was to open her heart to the circumstances of others. With new-found consensus, and battling the deadline, Ayo put together her proposal at the last moment. She chanted sincerely to benefit the community with her ideas, and at last the association won the grant.

But Ayo's struggles weren't over. She clashed with another woman, and so angered her that she wouldn't return Ayo's phone calls.

"I chanted to learn what I had done to turn her off, and then I realized that I was so caught up with getting this project done, I hadn't been listening," Ayo said. "She was my wake-up call, saying, 'Don't forget the kids.'"

"I knew Ayo was capable, because that's what SGI's about — raising capable leaders," Huelette says. "And we don't just focus on the Buddhism part but bring it out into the community."

Gaylord District's newest member, Linda Pyles, adds: "You have to get out into society. Otherwise, how can you show what your practice can do?"

Ayo nods. "Through this project, I utilized the Gohonzon and I truly believe that I gained more than I gave," she says. The members of Gaylord District now look to the future of the park, knowing that kosen-rufu is an ongoing process.

"We're only as good as our most recent achievement," Ayo observes. "It's no good if we pat ourselves on the back for building a playground and the park just sits there." She is now looking forward to organizing the neighborhood youngsters to compete in citywide tennis, volleyball and basketball leagues.