

**They're Cherry Determined**  
**BY IRLENE OWADA**  
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**Against the odds, Denver members follow through with their determination to plant 1,000 cherry trees along the city's Cherry Creek.**

If you've ever wanted to learn how to develop your determination, you might ask the Denver members. Every spring, members here get together and plant cherry trees to commemorate the opening of their culture center on Kosen-rufu Day, March 16. And it hasn't been easy. They've faced their share of obstacles.

In 1989, the joint territory wanted to do something for the community and the environment; but the SGI-USA's gift was turned down by the city. Even though the mayor and a state senator came over to the culture center to help plant the trees, city officials didn't recognize the efforts.

"The first year, we planted 100 trees but only three survived," Brian Matsuo, the joint territory chief, said. "It was a disaster!"

The members tried to save the trees, replanting them in bigger pots and chanting daimoku while they waited for the city to change its mind. But it was too late.

"City officials didn't think we were very serious about planting so many trees along the creek," Mr. Matsuo said. The goal was to plant 1,000 trees, and most people would have given up. But giving up wasn't part of the Denver members' plan. Just like any other goal, the determination was made and obstacles were sure to follow.

"The next year we planted 100 trees again, and this time 80 survived," Mr. Matsuo said. "We learned that taking care of the trees is a year-round job. We did such things as water the trees, wrap and unwrap them and consult with a horticulturist about their development."

But there were more setbacks. "We asked a local university for help, but they were not very supportive," Mr. Matsuo recalled. Instead of helping the members, the university supplied all kinds of data showing that it would be too hard for the trees to survive here.

But members did their homework, too. The creek that flows by the culture center, one of the well-known creeks in the area, is called Cherry Creek. The members discovered that in the past Native Americans of this area enjoyed the harvest of cherry trees. Over time, however, those trees died out because of floods. Now the waters are controlled, but the trees are gone. The story helped members renew their determination that cherry trees would once again grow along the Cherry Creek banks.

Today, more than 400 trees planted by the members brighten the Denver landscape. All the people who pass by can enjoy the cherry trees, especially when they bloom in the spring. And the city, at first reluctant, has now become one of the project's biggest supporters. Two years in a row they've acknowledged the SGI-USA with an award.

In the spring of 1996, the cherry trees had especially beautiful blossoms. It was as if they were announcing the arrival of SGI President Ikeda last June, when he received an honorary doctorate of education from Denver University.

What started as a community and environmental effort has developed into a spiritual one as well. In *The Human Revolution*, President Ikeda writes about his determination to keep going after President Toda's death:

"Cherry blossoms danced in the wind, as if bidding a final farewell. My heart fills with a thousand emotions when I recall that day, the day of my mentor's funeral, and the sight of the blue sky spreading out beyond the blizzard of cherry blossoms....

"What I feel I must do now is fight on in place of my mentor for the sake of world peace

and the happiness of humankind, survive and fulfill my mission in this life. This is the path I must follow as a disciple, to repay my debt of gratitude to my mentor. It is the path of human revolution that he forged for us. As I proceed along this great path of the blossoming of Soka culture, President Toda continues to live on in my heart. I cannot stop praying that he will keep living on forever in the hearts and minds of our fellow members” (tentative translation).

“Every year more and more people come out,” Mr. Matsuo said. Despite such challenges as snow in April just a few days before the planting, new members, like one-week-old Carson Bacon and her mother, Neisha, joined the seasoned planters. Patricia Hall brought her son and grandchildren for the first time. “I’ve practiced all over the world,” said Patricia, whose husband is in the Air Force. “I heard about this at world peace gongyo and thought it would be a nice family activity. I’ve never heard of anyone else doing this, and I love it!”

As shovels clicked and the dirt flew today, small children laughed and played in the warm spring sunshine. Mr. Matsuo stopped long enough to survey the family activity. “When the cherry trees blossom in the spring, for one week, they are full of flowers,” he said. “It is very dynamic, just like life. I hope that the members can feel President Toda and President Ikeda’s spirit here today as they plant the trees.” Then with a determined step, he hurried off to plant more trees.

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