

L.A. Friendship Center To Open
By DAVE McNEILL, Managing Editor
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Los Angeles members will soon have a home of their own. For nearly 30 years, the headquarters for Los Angeles-area members has also been SGI-USA's national headquarters. Now, thanks to a gift from the SGI in Japan, a new Los Angeles Friendship Center will open in the fall of 1998, serving as the center of activities for the five Los Angeles joint territories.

"This new building will help give Los Angeles an enhanced sense of identity and unity," General Director Zaitzu said. "It will become a base station for the area's growth into the 21st century."

This is also the first culture center to be built in the city of Los Angeles. Since 1968, the organization's national headquarters has been located in Santa Monica, Calif., on the Pacific Coast. Most of the community centers established in Southern California have been outside of the city proper. But the new Los Angeles Friendship Center is centrally located at the northeast corner of Fairfax Avenue and Venice Boulevard with easy freeway access.

A committee of some 30 people helped design the new facility, which will be built from the ground up after the earthquake-damaged building now on the property has been demolished. Demolition is expected to begin in June and construction in September. Representatives from the various joint territories as well as from such divisional groups as the Gajokai, Byakuren, and various music groups met for nearly four months to come up with the plan.

"We wanted to build the kind of center that really reflected the members needs," Vice General Director Greg Martin said. "The process was very exciting and led to a unique design."

Two adjoining buildings will be built on the two-acre property. A large triangular building will house multi-purpose meeting rooms, administrative offices and a Gohonzon-room suitable for wedding ceremonies. A dramatic two-story atrium highlights the design.

The second building will house a 350-seat Gohonzon room that will be convertible to a rehearsal site for the various performing groups. Plans also include a gallery space for exhibitions.

An outdoor basketball court is just one feature included with young people in mind. "The committee wanted to create a facility that was children-friendly, somewhere they would want to come," Mr. Martin said. There will also be a library and study area so children who have to do homework will have a place to go while their parents are in meetings. There are also plenty of sitting areas and open space designed to make people of all ages feel welcome.

"I hope the youth can take advantage of this new building and come to discuss various issues and study about faith," Mr. Zaitzu said.

Although the purchase of the property and the construction costs are a gift from the SGI, the acquisition of this property fits in well with the new formula for community center allocation, according to Mr. Martin.

Before the announcement of this new facility, the Los Angeles membership, which constitutes about 20 percent of the nationwide organization, would have been due a new community center in 1998, the year this new building is scheduled to open, he said.

To create good relations with our neighbors in the area, SGI-USA representatives have begun meeting with neighborhood associations and elected government officials.

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