

## Reorganization Report: A Time of Thanks, New Beginnings

By DIANA DECKER & SALLY MARKS MCKEE

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For some it was a sentimental trip down memory lane. For others it was an opportunity to express gratitude. But regardless of their motives, Arizona Territory SGI-USA members came out in record numbers to meet with their old districts one last time before starting the new neighborhood district system in July.

In Corona del Sol District in Ahwatukee, the setting was festive with brightly-colored red, yellow and blue balloons and a banner bidding farewell to Kimio Hashimoto, a member of the Soka Gakkai Scholars Division in Japan, who had spent the last year doing research on health and stress at Arizona State University. The decorations had the dual purpose of bidding goodbye to Kimio as well as to more than a half a dozen members who would be practicing in different neighborhoods.

A special tribute was paid to Masako Fraley, who had been in the district the longest time. The Japanese pioneer member, who has been practicing for 37 years, was heralded for her tireless efforts and compassion.

“Masako has been my rock,” said Elise Mitchell, as tears filled her eyes. “She has kept me grounded. She will really be missed. But wherever she goes she will bring the same stability and strength to the members as she has for us in Corona del Sol.”

Other people expressed their appreciation to one another, as well as their gratitude to district leader Sue Sutcliffe. They reflected on the past but also focused on the future.

“This meeting was an opportunity for us to celebrate the friendships that we have developed together,” said Jim Berry, who will be a district leader in a new neighborhood. “But those friendships will always be there. And what we’ve learned will transfer into our new neighborhoods.”

In another part of town, eight north Phoenix members gathered in Marsha Robb’s home to celebrate their final Grand Canyon District meeting.

The discussion on the changeover to the neighborhood system focused on the article by General Director Zaitzu, “Standing Alone But Not in Isolation,” (June *Living Buddhism*, pp. 4–5). Taking initiative in the neighborhood, being at the helm, not just a passenger, is the important point.

Mr. Zaitzu chronicled the efforts of one woman, Sylvia Saito, who chanted to change the political situation of Brazil. The situation changed enough that SGI President Ikeda could return in 1984 to an overwhelming reception, contrasting to the oppressive climate that cut his 1966 visit short. The article included quotes from President Ikeda’s 1997 peace initiative:

- “Indeed, everyone of us should realize that we possess the ability of spirit to be the main actor in changing the course of history, and with that conviction, to undertake the task we share of solving the global issue of our time....”
- “The crux of our challenge is whether to simply be a passenger on the ship of fate leaving everything to others, or to take the helm and be responsible for that ship ourselves.”

“The timing is right,” Ms. Robb said. “It’s up to every one of us to take responsibility for our neighborhoods, our world, our organization.”

After the meeting, Jan Rutkowski mentioned Ms. Robb’s role in smoothing the transition of her district to the neighborhood system. “I’ve been impressed with the way Marsha followed through with the new organization,” Ms. Rutkowski said. “She took total

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responsibility for the new neighborhood groups, following through with each individual. Her attitude was that this was a chance for the people to expand their hearts, learning new things with new people. She understood the heart of the change so thoroughly, members had no confusion.”

“I think the neighborhood system will be a good thing,” Nora Stanley said. “Without change, we can get stagnant. Getting to know others and sharing experiences is nice.”

Naomi Larson agreed. “I think it’s going to work out great,” she said. “People realize it is our responsibility to work for world peace where we reside.”

“For the first few times you go to another house, it will be different,” Esperanza Scott said. “I have to get used to it, but then it will be OK. If you chant a little bit extra, that helps.”

“Desert District Bon Voyage — A Hallmark Father’s Day” was the slogan at the district’s final gathering in Tempe. Humor and study, recurring themes for many of the district’s past meetings, was highlighted once again.

A favorite skit from the past, “Much Ado About Gongyo,” was reenacted starring district leader Vladka Preiss in the role of “Ima Griper.” Youth division members Brittany McKee, Alicia McKee and Nana Ogburn played supporting roles under the direction of Steven Ogburn.

Certificates of appreciation and flowers were presented to the many Japanese pioneer women who had helped the district through the years. Afterward, the atmosphere turned a little silly when songs from the 1950s were sung to Gakkai-oriented lyrics. Some of the reconstructed songs included: “You Ain’t Nothing But a Hancho,” “Shakubuku Sue” and “1-2-3 O’Clock 4 O’Clock Chant.”

On a more serious note, Greg Hargis read excerpts from President Ikeda’s lecture “Advancing Together on the Front Line” from the May 30 *World Tribune*. Greg likened President Ikeda’s example of a good leader to the efforts of the their district leader, Paulette Aasen. He thanked her for her efforts and encouraged his fellow members to follow her example. The district, which has been one of the area’s largest for the past 14 years, will have members going into three different headquarters and five different neighborhoods.

“I’m looking forward to expanding my ‘family’ and friendships,” Karen McDougald said with a broad smile.

“But I’m glad we had this last meeting to celebrate as a district one last time. It gives us a chance to say thank you, goodbye and bring about a sense of closure before moving forward to the next challenge.”

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