

Second Sight
By BILL BLACKARD
New York Correspondent

Imagine that you have received the Gohonzon, do gongyo twice a day and share the practice with others. But there's one thing missing: reading the publications. Not because you don't want to, but because you are blind or visually impaired.

Tom Montauredes, a successful composer and musician, has been clinically blind since childhood. His wife, Rita, read the *World Tribune* to him until her own sight started to deteriorate in 1993. She realized there might be other members faced with this difficulty and decided to find a way to have the newspaper recorded.

Pat Vega, a fellow member, got the ball rolling by recording two issues on cassette tape. Tom and Rita were thrilled to once again connect to the world of study, and the three of them decided that recording the *World Tribune* could be turned into a meaningful activity for other members as well.

After singing in the World Peace Youth Culture Festival at Carnegie Hall last summer, Steven Sparagen, a one-year youth division member, wanted to use his voice for kosen-rufu. When he heard about this idea, he devised a format, described below, for recording the newspapers and sharing the tapes with members. Soon after, 10 members came to a kickoff at the Montauredes home at which Robert Miller, who runs the audiovisual equipment at the New York Culture Center, offered the use of the center's AV facilities.

Since that time, the committee, which has swelled to 35 members, has recorded 45 issues. Each Saturday, two or three members meet at the culture center's library and read the entire paper cover to cover within a three-hour period. The photographs are described, and even the cartoons are explained.

The members who request the cassettes initially mail in four blank tapes to the reading committee. Every two weeks, the committee sends the members two recorded tapes containing the contents of two issues. After listening to the tapes, the members return them to the library and receive two more with the latest two issues recorded. The tapes are mailed in special postage-free cartons available from the American Printing House for the Blind, located in Louisville, Ky. (telephone: 1-800-223-1839).

Lorna Duff, who has sight in only one eye due to a childhood accident, is a big fan: "I love to study, and now I can use the tapes to thoroughly read the newspaper."

Sophie Theven agrees: "I can read the *World Tribune* with my whole life now."

Members involved in recording the *World Tribune* are happy about the project, too. Jane Young, a journalist, has taken up singing again. "I feel so uplifted after recording the newspaper," she explains. Mr. Sparagen is teaching voice and speech full time.

Actor Philip Suraci says, "Since recording these tapes, my job benefits have increased tremendously."

Meanwhile, Tom and Rita Montauredes have moved to a beautiful new apartment. "Anything is possible with this great Gohonzon," says Rita, who has regained partial sight after several operations. "To know that so many people will benefit from this activity makes me eternally grateful to President Ikeda and all the SGI members who are making it possible for everyone to read our wonderful *World Tribune*."

Editor's note: This is a regional project in New York. Please don't send blank tapes to New York, as they cannot handle requests from outside their joint territories. Thank you for your understanding.