

City Marks Diamond Jubilee
By GINA JONES, L.A. # 4 Region Bureau Chief
West Covina, Calif., June 12–14

“I never thought our celebration would be this spectacular!” said West Covina Mayor Richard Melendez.

“This was my vision, but I never thought we’d be able to achieve it. We were, with the help of the SGI,” he said, as the city’s 75th anniversary celebration came to a close, a celebration made possible in large part because of the SGI-USA. Held throughout the weekend at West Covina High School, the event attracted nearly 5,000 people.

“Initially our goal was to get together with the community and be a part of the celebration,” said Bill Roe, a vice area leader and coordinator of the L.A. #4 Region Public Relations Committee. But in the end, the SGI-USA’s involvement became extensive, with more than 100 event staff comprised of local youth division members, and SGI or SGI-related performing groups making up almost 70 percent of the weekend’s entertainment. SGI-USA stage crew members spent weeks constructing the stage and sets for the event, which the City of West Covina has requested to use again for their 4th of July festivities.

“Our youth division members consistently displayed such humanistic behavior throughout this event, particularly during crucial moments — so patient and compassionate,” shared regional young women’s division leader, Renu Jiandani. “I was particularly impressed by the men and women working behind the scenes — always pushing the youth to the forefront, allowing them to shine.”

As part of the festivities, an unprecedented Interfaith Ceremony was held on Sunday, with 12 faiths represented. “One thing we found out,” said Mr. Roe, “is that getting religious groups together is very difficult. There has to be a common theme. There’s no need for us to get together to argue about doctrine.” Because the date of the ceremony also fell on Flag Day, “it became the perfect opportunity,” continued Mr. Roe, “to unite around the one thing we all had in common — we’re all Americans.”

The weekend’s activities culminated Tuesday night, June 16, at a local city council meeting, with more than 50 SGI members in attendance. General Director Zaitso accepted an honorary citizenship on behalf of SGI President Ikeda. The city also proclaimed July 3 SGI Day — Victory of Youth.

Mayor Melendez went on to praise President Ikeda and the SGI’s tradition of nurturing youth, while Mr. Zaitso expressed his gratitude to the city and pledged on behalf of the local SGI-USA members to continue to work for the betterment of the city.

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