

Opening Focuses on Children
By CARMEN ROBERTS
Correspondent

The St. Petersburg, Fla., showing of the SGI-USA's "Children's Rights and Realities" exhibition closed on July 31 after a successful three-week stay. Four groups co-sponsored the event: The National Conference for Community and Justice, The Pier (site of the showing), the St. Petersburg International Folk Fair Society, and the Tampa Bay Chapter of the U.N. Association-USA.

The opening date, July 12, was declared Children's Rights and Realities Day in the city, and the opening ceremony focused on children in every way, from a chorus, a local children's dance group and two young masters of ceremonies Lauren Frallicciardi, 10, and Ingrid Brown, 11, share their experiences.

Lauren: Being the MC was not as easy as I thought it would be. I practiced and practiced until I got most of it down, and I chanted to be clear and not to be nervous. Then I found myself at the big day waiting for my cue. Everything was going well, until I made one mistake by speaking too soon. That is when I found out that making a mistake is just part of learning.

The exhibit was very nice and I think it touched a lot of people and made them realize how kids are being treated around the world. It is depressing and makes me feel how lucky I am to have such a good life. I think people really got the exhibit's message — that kids have rights, too. I feel the people who saw the exhibit will try to help children have better lives.

Ingrid: People asked me if I was scared, but I was not. My mom was always telling me to practice my lines and chant daimoku, but I already knew my lines. I could almost say them without looking at my paper. I chanted not be afraid and to have fun.

On the day of the opening, I thought I was completely ready and that I would not get scared, but when we got to the exhibit location, there were lots of people — more than I expected. When I stepped out in front of that big crowd I was a little nervous, but I got through it and I had a lot of fun.

After the ceremony, I received lots of compliments from strangers. I really liked meeting the SGI-USA's general director, Fred Zaitso, and all our VIP guests.

This was a great experience for me, and I thank everyone who made this exhibit possible, not just for me but for everyone who can see it and learn about children around the world. There is one part of the exhibit that I really liked. It is a drawing of a child, but the face is a mirror. You can put your face in the mirror and see what you would look like in that child's world — to feel a bit like that child.

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