

DAY OF NEW YORK ROCKS BROOKLYN

June 19 — a perfect day. The weather was cool with low humidity, the music was fantastic, and the more than 1,000 people who gathered were happy. The occasion was the commemoration of SGI President Ikeda's writing the poem "To My Young American Friends" 18 years ago in New York.

This was the first-ever such event hosted in New York City proper, the previous such festival having been held on Long Island in 1993. The festival, promoted as "One Love, One World, Day of New York," featured poetry, rap, rock 'n' roll, choral, salsa, reggae, Latin and jazz performances primarily by SGI-USA professional musicians, who generously donated their time and talents.

Through the event, organizers hoped to introduce many people to the SGI-USA or renew their interest in it. Hundreds stopped by the public relations/publications table. Seven members renewed their *World Tribune* subscriptions; many people took subscription envelopes to fill out later. One man asking questions had not practiced with the organization since 1988. He was quickly introduced to the leader of his neighborhood discussion group.

New member Gary Cohen was impressed with the whole scene. "I took the Entrance Exam in April and just received my Gohonzon on June 6, President Makiguchi's birthday," he said. "This is the first activity like this that I've attended, along with my girlfriend, who introduced me. The overall atmosphere is so peaceful but upbeat because of the music."

A cloud of dust, flashing red lights and a screech of tires kicked off the event as the New York City Parks Commissioner Henry J. Stern arrived with his entourage. On behalf of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, he praised the event's intention "to promote unity, harmony and peace among teenagers."

Indeed, teens had a great time. Philip Leung, age 16, said: "It is really fun. I'm enjoying the sports — especially football — with my friends. And the music is good, loud and noisy. I brought a friend from school, and he's enjoying it." Brian Light, age 16, said: "I've spent time with many of the other young members, and we've enjoyed this beautiful day. It is hard for me to decide what I am enjoying the most!"

Jim Corwin, a Brooklyn, Queens, Long Island Region leader and festival performer stressed the importance of supporting these youth. "Our teenagers today are looking for answers," he said, "and adults need to take the lead and set an example of tolerance and respect. Music has always been recognized as the universal language. We believe this celebration has allowed us to rejoice and show that all of us have more in common than we think."

— LEAH BRYANT, RIC
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