

**NEW JERSEY RAISES ITS CURTAIN  
BY DIANA ANGIONE  
NETCONG, N.J.**

I never heard anything so exciting. What a perfect beginning!" said one of the 1,500 participants in the New Jersey Region Kick-off Meeting toward "Raising the Curtain on the 21st Century — the Year of Youth."

The event at Montclair High School in Montclair, N.J., which illuminated the region's diversity, opened with the exhilarating bang of the African Drum and Dance Ensemble, some of whose non-members have decided to join the SGI-USA. The Drum and Dance Ensemble was followed by smiling boys and girls waving banners and singing "We've got high hopes" to teary-eyed family members and friends in the audience.

The New Jersey youth division took the lead in planning and organizing this meeting from start to finish. "It was a history we created with our prayer and sweat," said one young woman. Artwork created by youth members floated beneath the colorful specks of helium balloons, giving the auditorium an almost ethereal atmosphere.

The meeting closed with the entire audience singing "Ode to Joy" in German from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony — in a first rehearsal toward next year's target of 100,000 SGI-USA members and friends singing this song at gatherings by zone. The day after, the New Jersey Region meeting was covered in the *Star-Ledger*, New Jersey's largest newspaper.