

YOUTH LED THE WAY IN MARCH

Open the Century With Victory!

Youth Division members from Studio Oaks Chapter in Los Angeles #1 Region sponsored an introductory meeting on March 18 to commemorate March 16, Kosen-rufu Day. The event's theme was "Open the Century With Victory," a phrase that came from one of SGI President Ikeda's speeches.

Starting with the kick off, each youth division member who participated in planning and carrying out the meeting pledged to create a victory in their life. The youth wanted to stand up and be counted! Their focus was on becoming more capable people and on raising the younger youth division members to become future leaders. Says Young Women's Chapter Leader Stacey Humphrey: "We really wanted to give the younger people an opportunity to expand their capacities by taking responsibility for various aspects of the meeting. They are the future."

Many junior high/high school division members directed various aspects of the festivities, including working with the Boys and Girls Group to create artwork and decorations. The meeting was also greatly supported by the men's division and the women's division, who helped immensely with behind-the-scenes work.

Among the 139 people who attended the gathering were 24 guests, some of whom participated by dancing, greeting, acting in the skit, or doing behind-the-scenes work! Other aspects of the meeting were a panel discussion, which allowed guests to ask questions to six SGI members, an experience by a junior high/high school division young woman, a musical interlude with piano and singing and a short video presentation.

After the vibrant, dynamic meeting, people went to the park for a BBQ, entertainment and dialogue. This March 16 commemorative meeting was a huge success. The Studio Oaks Chapter youth members are determined to build on the victories and friendships developed through this March 16 celebration and to further develop their capacity to work for kosen-rufu.

By Jessica Mingo, Los Angeles

I Will Value My Own Life

It was good against evil—Dr. Evil, that is—in a skit performed by the Rocky Mountain Region West Area youth March 19 at the Denver Culture Center to commemorate March 16, Kosen-rufu Day.

The West Area youth portrayed many characters (Dr. Evil from *Austin Powers*, Adolph Hitler, a Mafia mercenary and High Priest Nikken Abe) to elaborate on the Victory Over Violence pledge—"I will value my own life." The characters, who gather together for the "Evil Awards," discover that their acts of tyranny and destruction are no match against the power of chanting.

Nearly twice as many youth division members from the four areas of the Rocky Mountain Region—West, North, East and Colorado Springs—participated in the planning and facilitating of the meeting than last year. Presentations by each area included skits, musical performances, readings and experiences.

Youth division members from the North Area expressed the VOV pledge, "I will

value all life,” with a guitar duet of “Compassion Song,” a rendition of the Bob Marley ballad “Redemption Song.” East Area youth division members served up “Buddha Burgers” and the “Treasure Tower Special” at the Encouragement Café. A reading of SGI President Ikeda’s poem “Youth, Scale the Mountain of the 21st Century” accompanied by the violin was given by the Colorado Spring youth division members.

Bonnie Nash, Rocky Mountain Region young women’s leader, said, “When we were planning the meeting, a lot of the young people involved were really able to delve into some heavy-duty issues like interdependency, global awareness, the value of life and Buddha nature.”

By Lisa Matsuo, Denver

We Are the Future of Society!

Park East and East River Chapters of New York East Region held a joint youth March 16 commemorative meeting in upper east side Manhattan on March 19.

The theme was “Entering an Age of Hope: Youth as the Future of Society!” Thirty-eight members and four guests attended the eventful and joyful meeting, which included songs by the Boys and Girls Group, a message from SGI President Ikeda, a presentation on March 16 and more.

In an open discussion, participants shared their ideas on the advantages of youth, challenging one’s worries and hopes, and their individual missions to contribute to create better society and future.

Cory Taylor, SGI-USA young men’s leader, encouraged everyone to challenge and win over individual struggles and become strong and secure individuals based on faith. He also reminded us that Buddhism is not magic, as if all of a sudden you could change yourself or resolve all problems. Rather, Buddhism is a process of challenge by a normal individual in daily life. Cory suggested we work to mobilize the energy and resources of young people in America by sharing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and life philosophy and support one another in raising more capable young people and moving forward to the future.

All of the youth are determined to challenge themselves in daily life and advance the kosen-rufu movement in New York by aiming toward May 3, 2001!

After the meeting, the members enjoyed pork soup, prepared by the women’s division, just as the members did on March 16, 1958.

Into the Storm: Pioneering a Wave of Peace

March 19, 2000... kosen-rufu for the new century has begun. The Rainier Area March 16 Commemorative Meeting was held at Oakbrook Elementary School in Lakewood, Wash. The year of youth has definitely taken off!

The youth of four chapters—Lakewood, Olympia, Parkland and Rainier—proved their capabilities by working together in perfect unity, *itai doshin* (many in body, one in mind). They showed the true spirit of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

The program began with a skit clarifying the significance of March 16. The youth produced various segments that blended together perfectly the history of presidents Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda and the beginning of the Soka Gakkai. This performance was at times humorous and deeply stirring and the events that followed were as vibrant as the first blossoms of spring. This day could have been called a spring grand

culture festival.

The four chapters worked tirelessly to plan and rehearse an agenda that dazzled the members and guests, which included songs, dances, a skit and a performance by the Boys and Girls Group. After the performances, the youth presented certificates to the pioneer members honoring their dedication to SGI President Ikeda's vision and declared that the youth will not forget that they are heirs to this legacy.

By Steve McNight, Pacific Northwest

Striving for True Leadership

SGI President Ikeda has taught me that being a leader means I must instill power in the people I lead. To lead for selfish gains will get us nowhere. To lead such a great organization as the SGI, we must have one thing in mind—the benefit of all people. President Ikeda's efforts create a sense of responsibility in me to inspire others to succeed. This issue was presented to me today (March 16) when I was stumped on what to say for this introductory meeting.

What I realized is that it is not easy to be inspiring and help people bring out their individual power and, on top of that, help people realize their collective power. This is what President Ikeda does every day. And for this, I feel the deepest respect for him. From today on I will strive to become a true leader by helping others become true leaders. The future of kosen-rufu lies in our hands, the millions of us following our mentor, President Ikeda, and working together to show the power of our practice.

By Jared Young, Seattle

Idaho Go!

What a great day for Idaho youth! We studied the history and spirit of March 16 and watched a clip of the March 16 video of the 1958 meeting with President Toda. Then we were fed by the men's and women's divisions — the traditional pork soup that was served at the famous March 16 gathering — plus yummy corn dogs. We topped it off with brownies.

The youth then voted to play Lazer Tag and invited the adults. We had a ball.

By Betsy, Boise, Idaho