

**TOTAL VICTORY TOWARD MAY 3, 2001**  
**SCENES FROM THE BEHIND THE SCENES CONFERENCE AT THE**  
**FLORIDA NATURE & CULTURE CENTER**  
**REPORTED BY BRIAN MCCLOSKEY, N.Y.**

On Sunday, Nov. 12, 2000, at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, the last youth conference of the 20th century concluded. One hundred seventy-nine young men and women from around the country attended, with participants coming from as far away as Puerto Rico and Alaska. The theme was “BSG, Complete and Total Victory Toward May 3, 2001!” and focused on raising the bar for the youth division support groups. Everyone seemed to be in agreement that it was time to bring the ability and participation of the support groups to the next level in eager anticipation of President Ikeda’s visit next year.

The conference, which was filled to capacity, had only 47 confirmed participants two weeks prior, which meant many participants had to make travel arrangements at the last minute. In order to get reasonable airfares, many people had to leave the conference early Sunday morning. In response, the conference schedule was adjusted to present as much material as possible *before* Sunday. This led to very long days on Friday and Saturday. In true BSG fashion, the support groups attendees were able to persevere and take the opportunity to connect with Byakuren Leader Stacey Humphrey, Gajokai Leader Eric Freedman and newly appointed Soka Group Leader Ken Nakagawa.

The session opened Thursday evening with dinner, gongyo and encouragement from Senior Vice General Director David Kasahara and a video from the support groups leaders themselves starring Byaku-woman, Gajo-guy, Byakuren Girl, and Soka Man. Beginning that evening, and following every gongyo throughout the conference, were presentations from the Western Zone youth on President Ikeda’s recent poem “Soar — Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!” Attendees were encouraged to make it an early night as the following day included four sessions and ran nonstop from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Each session at the conference was planned and presented by the young men and women in each zone: Northeastern, Western, Southern, Central, Southern California, Mid-Atlantic and Northwestern. Friday’s sessions included a lecture on the mentor–disciple relationship by SGI-USA Youth Leader James Herrmann, “The History and Spirit of Byakuren, Soka Group and Gajokai,” “BSG in Daily Life” and “Soka Spirit.” Each session carried a distinct tone based on the topic and the means by which each zone had chosen to present its respective topic. Some sessions included skits, songs and experiences, while throughout the sessions Hedio Lobo, Mike Fujie and Ali Rhezai were shooting and editing a documentary video presentation of the conference participants.

Kyung-ah Hwang, a Byakuren member from New York, related her experience for the Soka Spirit session and told of her ongoing struggle to help her entire family try to disconnect from the temple, of being able to heal an aneurysm through her daimoku and the support she received from her fellow Byakuren members.

On Saturday morning, the Northwestern Zone support groups members presented a very entertaining skit and song on propagation. They were back by popular demand to deliver the song again at the talent show, which followed dinner

that evening. Afterward, the Byakuren met with James Herrmann, and the Soka Group and Gajokai met with SGI-USA Young Men's Leader Cory Taylor, and then with their respective leaders for a heart-to-heart dialogue on the direction of their groups and to address the concerns of their members.

For many of the participants, the conference concluded only a couple of hours later when the first shuttles began leaving shortly after 4:00 a.m. As a testament to the determination and responsibility of the SGI-USA youth support groups, every shuttle left on time with no accidents and with all their passengers — no small accomplishment.

James Herrmann and Cory Taylor held guidance sessions throughout to help support the goal of the conference — to infuse the behind-the-scenes groups with the spirit to connect closely with President Ikeda and achieve “Complete and Total Victory” through Buddhist practice and activities as Byakuren, Soka Group and Gajokai members. Four days, three groups, 179 people, one goal: “Complete and Total Victory.”