

**GREAT STRIDES IN 2000  
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SGI-USA MEN'S LEADER**

This 50th Central Executive Conference was a great milestone for our movement in the United States. I clearly remember the first one, which was held with SGI President Ikeda in attendance in February 1990.

We've certainly come a long way in these past 10 years. Especially this year, we have made great strides in our development. Let me share a few examples.

In terms of new facilities, we just opened our first activity center on the paradise island of Kauai in Hawaii. Our second activity center is opening in Austin, Texas, on Dec. 7. Five more activity centers will open soon in Fresno, Calif., Milwaukee, Wis., South Jersey, N.J., Pensacola, Fla., the island of St. Maarten and the New Haven/Hartford, Conn., area.

In addition, a new community center in Orlando, Fla., just opened. Two more community centers are already under way in Queens, N.Y., and Southeastern Virginia. Two new community centers were also announced at this CEC: Santa Rosa, Calif., and Brooklyn, N.Y. Congratulations!

Also, for the first time in 10 years, the number of new members joining our organization exceeded 2,000, reaching 2,097 people.

Participation in conferences at the Florida Nature and Culture Center exceeded 5,000 for the first time.

Financial contributions were up by more than 20 percent over last year.

More than 50,000 members and guests participated in the 40th anniversary celebrations of the worldwide kosen-rufu movement.

While 1,900 members took the Entrance Exam, 1,800 members took the Elementary Exam.

Thank you very much for all your efforts in these areas. It's not the numbers themselves that are important. Rather, they indicate that the members must be receiving benefits, because without their efforts, this great advancement could never have been possible.

But the best is yet to come. If I could summarize the essence of what I felt at this CEC, it was "What great fortune to be alive at this time, together with President Ikeda, at the brink of creating a new era." SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima captured this essence by saying, "I can't fathom what causes we made to have such good fortune."

I'd now like to share some key points from the CEC. First and foremost, the SGI-USA Council approved the function of the zone as a new level of the organization. Until now, the zone has functioned as an administrative branch of the national headquarters. What does this mean and why is this important?

First, as with any other level of the organization, the zone exists to support the members, carry out communication and administer personnel appointments.

As you know, we have been continuously expanding the number of regions, doubling in the past few years to the current 30 regions, with new ones being created every year. Communication for the national headquarters with so many entities is virtually impossible.

But more importantly, the official formation of the zone is an extremely important step in the decentralization of our organization. The eight zones of SGI-USA — Central, Mid-Atlantic, Northeastern, Northwestern, Pacific, Southern, Southern California and Western — will allow each area of the country to consider its own realities, capturing the

creativity of its membership and moving forward with the feeling that “We are the SGI-USA.”

As you also know, we will be holding SGI-USA Family Youth Culture Festivals next summer in each zone. Through these festivals, I hope the men’s, women’s and youth divisions can unite to raise thousands of youth—this is the key point, not just singing “Ode to Joy.” As a step toward this, we’d like to ask that the youth be given the responsibility to plan, execute and lead the March discussion meetings, which they want to make into four-divisional introductory meetings. This will take the place of their March 16 activities and will become a steppingstone toward the summer festivals.

In the coming year, as we did in 2000, let’s advance together with the confidence that SGI-USA is an organization that can unite this country and help it move forward. We are it! Let’s be proud that we are members of SGI-USA, which is on the verge of revealing its true mission to society.