

Hawaii's 40 Years: A Journey for World Peace

Photos by GREGORY NAKASUJI, GEORGE FUJIOKA and GEORGE YOSHIOKA

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The governor of Hawaii, Benjamin J. Cayetano, declared Oct. 1 Soka Gakkai International-USA Day. Anne Kobayashi, his executive assistant, presented the proclamation at SGI-USA Hawaii's 40th Anniversary General Meeting, in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the SGI peace movement that began on Oahu on Oct. 2, 1960, when SGI President Ikeda arrived on his first journey outside Japan.

At that time, Hawaii District was created, the first one outside Japan, and Harry Hiram, a local resident, was appointed its first leader. In Hawaii, families of many ethnic backgrounds—Hawaiians, Filipinos, Chinese, Samoans, African Americans, Portugese, local Japanese and more—were soon to join and start creating the foundation for Hawaii's organization.

For many months leading up to the 40th Anniversary General Meeting, the youth brainstormed and discussed how best to celebrate this very special milestone in the annals of the Hawaii peace movement. The Hawaii Convention Center provided the largest venue to accommodate the statewide membership who would participate—3,500 members and guests were expected (SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima welcomed the 4,000 who attended, including 200 from the neighboring islands of Hawaii, Maui and Kauai).

With support from the men and women and the Boys and Girls Group, the youth-sponsored event unfolded.

The selected theme, "Honoring Our Past...Creating Our Future..." was illustrated through story, song and dance. Hawaii's SGI story unfolded in the tradition of oral history, with a grandma sharing with her grandson, who was experiencing conflict with his friends and within himself, how our peace movement came to Hawaii's shores. All was illustrated through vignettes taken from the "Sunrise" chapter of *The New Human Revolution*, volume 1. The talented, multi-ethnic members of the SGI, young and old, added to the story with songs and dances. A special highlight was guest artist Danny Couch, internationally acclaimed entertainer, performing his signature song, "These Islands," which made its debut at the 1998 Miss Universe Contest in Hawaii and recently was adopted as Hawaii's state song. To this melody was added the graceful motions of hula dancers.

The history of the SGI on Hawaii was also capsulated in a video—beginning with the 1960s and flowing through the decades—that featured photos and mini-interviews with pioneers and today's youth. There were smiles and tears as many members recalled their personal paths, their struggles and triumphs, through the many years of their SGI activities. The Aloha spirit, shared heart to heart, permeated throughout the center as old friends reunited and new friends were embraced.

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Popular singer Danny Couch performs his song 'These Islands.'



Cathy Kishi, Pacific Zone Youth Leader:

Taka Ishii, Pacific Zone Youth Leader:

Through the preparations for this 40th Anniversary General Meeting, we could understand further the significance of SGI President Ikeda coming to Hawaii 40 years ago. There was a skit in our meeting based on the "Sunrise" chapter of *The New Human Revolution*, volume 1, which is all about President Ikeda's 1960 visit. Many of the youth who performed are high school and college students. Together, we studied the "Sunrise" chapter and learned what it was like in those early days. The grandmother of one of the young women in the skit was one of the pioneers who was there in 1960. This young woman was really excited to be an actor in this skit.

The youth understood more the mission they have to be practicing in Hawaii, at this time in history, from preparing for this 40th Anniversary General Meeting. They realized that these people in *The New Human Revolution* are the same people they always see at the Culture Center—this gave them a deeper sense of pride. A number of youth who were not involved in activities at all before this event got really involved. They started to come to activities enthusiastically and started to do gongyo and chant a lot. From now on, we want to involve them in smaller group activities, where we will continue to study Buddhism with them more.

Things are a lot different now than they were 40 years ago, and the youth today do not face the same challenges that the pioneers did. But this does not mean that the youth are not suffering. They are facing violence, drugs, peer pressure and school and family problems. Hawaii also has serious economic problems. It is because of these problems that we can really prove the power of Buddhism. As long as we can capture the same spirit that the pioneers learned from President Ikeda—to face all their problems fearlessly—then I think Hawaii will continue to advance.

We learned how to work with the men's and women's divisions, too, through this event. A lot of times, we had clashes of ideas. We as youth have a lot of creativity, but we sometimes do not think of the details. We learned so much from our seniors, and we want to show our respect for them by continuing to grow. I feel like everyone, including President Ikeda, is waiting to see our progress. WT



(Above) The Boys and Girls Group's dragon dance began the day's cultural performances. (Below) The Hawaii Culture Center is the result of the members' efforts since 1960 to develop the kosen-rufu movement in Hawaii.



(Below) Youth create a local Victory Over Violence display depicting the social challenges Hawaii is now facing.



(Above) Anne Kobayashi (center) presents a proclamation to SGI-USA Hawaii leaders. (Below) A children's art exhibit in the Convention Center foyer.



SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima encourages members at the Maui Community Center, Sept. 28. He also visited the members on Hilo, Sept. 27, and Kauai, Sept. 29.