

'Global Ambassadors' Ignite Seattle



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The Bodhisattvas of the Earth have emerged! They have arisen! They have started to stir, to move! Here, on the American continent, the winds of a new era have begun to blow.
—Daisaku Ikeda (Aug. 11 *World Tribune*, p. 5)

With SGI President Ikeda's powerful and inspiring words, more than 365 youth opened the Pacific Northwest Region's Youth Culture Festival, Oct. 8 highlighting the theme "Global Ambassadors of Peace!"

The culture festival, held in three performances at the University of Washington's Meany Hall Theater, commemorated the 40th anniversary of President Ikeda's first visit to Seattle. Roughly 2,400 SGI-USA members, friends and dignitaries attended the event, including U.S. Rep. Jim McDermott.

Using President Ikeda's poem, "Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!" as a roadmap, the youth told the story of a grandson who, with the guidance of his grandmother, awakens to his mission as a global ambassador of peace.

Along the way, the grandmother illustrates her words of wisdom with

each performance, which included the vigorous reverberations of taiko drummers, cultural dances from throughout the world, the Youth Band, a solo flag dance and Crescendo, an adaptation of the popular Broadway show "Stomp."

To prepare for the event, youth from throughout Washington, Oregon, Montana and Idaho dedicated eight-and-a-half-hour days for weekend rehearsals, which included an hour of chanting and study of *The New Human Revolution*, volume 1, at each practice. The Gropp family, of Salem, Ore., took the eight-hour roundtrip to Seattle each weekend to participate on the dance team.

The youth challenged each setback, whether it was adapting to a change of venue two weeks before the performance or one of the lead actors spraining her ankle hours before the performance.

"When I first heard about it, I didn't think it was going to be that hard," said Yoko Kono, 15, a high school sophomore who helped choreograph and teach the dance team. "As practice went on, it got more difficult." Kono said she challenged herself to encourage other dance members, relying on a section of President Ikeda's poem to keep moving forward.

Pablo Figueroa, 15, a high school junior who helped prepare study sessions for practices, said the culture festival challenged him to maintain a consistent practice

while building new friendships.

"I think the most valuable thing I got out of it was just really feeling President Ikeda's spirit," he said. "All the (obstacles) that we encountered made it so much more than a performance."

Brenda Sawyer, who co-directed the culture festival, said the event would not have been possible without unity among all the members. SGI-USA men's and women's members drove participants to early morning practices, prepared snacks and lunches, sewed costumes and provided constant encouragement to the youth.

For Sawyer, the culture festival was an opportunity to develop a sense of confidence. With each obstacle, she said, she read and reread a portion of President Ikeda's poem to refresh her spirit.

"People who can reach out to others and help them, even in a small way—that's what a global ambassador of peace is to me," she said. "People who muster that courage are the ones who will emerge victorious."

The culture festival was capped off by a region-wide general meeting Oct. 9 with SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima, who came to Seattle directly from a visit to Japan. In addition to receiving encouragement from him, members viewed a video of President Ikeda receiving an award from Morehouse College in Atlanta. **WT**



Photos by DIXON HAMBY