

SGI-USA WOMEN'S COMMEMORATIVE MEETINGS BECOMING EXAMPLES OF SPLENDID COURAGE

More than 30,000 members and guests attend meetings commemorating SGI-USA Women's Day, which celebrates the courage of women.

Throughout the month of February, more than 30,000 SGI-USA women and their guests gathered in locations across the country in commemoration of Feb. 27, SGI-USA Women's Day.

On Feb. 27, 1990, at a meeting at Soka University of America's Calabasas campus, SGI President and Mrs. Ikeda attended the 1st SGI-USA Women's Meeting, and President Ikeda delivered a speech that has become the focal point of the SGI-USA women's division members (see p. 7).

In his message to the 2001 gatherings, President Ikeda writes: "All of you who have gathered in America have an important mission. My wish is that all of you will uphold the ideals engraved in this profound Buddhism while becoming examples of splendid courage for the whole world to see" (Feb. 2 *World Tribune*, p. 1).

The women of Chula Vista Chapter in Southern California held their meeting at the Chula Vista Library Auditorium on Feb. 24. Chula Vista Mayor Shirley Horton presented SGI-USA Vice General Director Theresa Hauber with a proclamation declaring Feb. 24, 2001, as Chula Vista Chapter SGI-USA Women's Day. The mayor praised the women of SGI and reflected on women's power, courage and influence, and the great contribution that they make to society. She also asked for the members' help in expanding her program for abused children.

In Washington, D.C., more than 2,500 women of varying races, religious backgrounds, nationalities and political perspectives gathered for the "Imagine Peace" conference on Feb. 25 at the World Bank to exchange ideas and develop relationships. (Please see next week's issue of the *World Tribune* for full coverage of the conference.)

In Austin, Texas, women met on Feb. 25 at the new Austin Activity Center, filling it to capacity with 98 members and 14 guests. It was a diverse crowd typical of SGI-USA, with many nationalities represented, including members originally from Guam, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, France, Italy, and Mexico.

Members were asked to bring a small memento to create a collage expressing their feelings as women committed to world peace. The collage board was 5 feet tall by 4 feet wide and shaped like the state of Texas. Dorothy Pocaigue, from Guam, brought a series of pictures of her 35 nieces and nephews. She spoke of recent teen suicides on the island and expressed the hope that "if we, as women, take the reins, then we can show the world that war and conflict are not the solution. We can create a better future for our sons, daughters, nieces, nephews and grandchildren."

Also on Feb. 25, close to 300 joyful members met at the Albuquerque Community Center for a program that encompassed all facets of women in society. The theme of the meeting, "Wise Women Will Change Society," was displayed through music, experiences and presentations. The meeting closed with a traditional Native American song and dance, after which everyone gathered for refreshments and dialogue. The high spirits and sense of accomplishment were obvious, with people continuing to share two hours after the

meeting officially ended.

Despite a forecasted blizzard, nearly 100 women gathered at the Omaha Community Center, some driving as much as two hours to get there. Large paper dolls, paper crane mobiles and bouquets of flowers decorated the meeting place. In contrast to the cold outside, the community center was warm, friendly and electric. The members enjoyed performances, small group discussions and refreshments afterward.

In an effort to provide a warm environment in the midst of a long winter, women in Spokane, Wash., decorated their community center with a Hawaiian theme. The members welcomed 15 guests to their meeting, and many courageous women shared their experiences of victories in faith.

Speaking about the nationwide efforts, SGI-USA Wo-men's Leader Matilda Buck said: "I was so impressed by the depth and the hearts of the women. These are all busy women, but they reached beyond themselves, putting aside their personal routines, and invested so much meaningful effort into every gathering. The range of meetings was fantastic, big and small, from patio gatherings in the Southwest to the peace conference in Washington, D.C.

"I also heard wonderful stories about the participation of all the other members. This was an activity of tremendous teamwork. And, wow, are the guests responding to it all—many have already indicated that they want to start practicing. As SGI President Ikeda said in his message: 'What wonderful opportunities we have been given to put our faith into practice! What a great place to be at this moment in time!'"

From reports by Emi Gwin, Carol Chastang, Barbara Fellman, Michele Chwastiak, Judith Hayes Austin, Barbara Saragosa and Jessie Keeney.