

FNCC CELEBRATES FIFTH ANNIVERSARY
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On June 19, the SGI-USA's Florida Nature and Culture Center completed its fifth year of operation. SGI President Ikeda officially opened the center, which the Soka Gakkai donated as a gift to SGI-USA members, on June 19, 1996. The 21st SGI General Meeting was held June 23 in the FNCC's Friendship Auditorium, welcoming SGI representatives from 52 countries and territories around the world.

"Together with members around the world, I truly rejoice at the opening of this wonderful Florida Nature and Culture Center," said President Ikeda at the meeting. "Every inch of the center's grounds sparkle with the members' beautiful sincerity" (*My Dear Friends in America*, p. 459).

The FNCC is located on 125 acres of restored wetlands in Broward County, Fla. The Florida-style campus of 15 buildings draws influence from Mediterranean and Latin architectural styles while only occupying one quarter of the site. The remaining acreage is comprised of untouched or restored wetlands and the 20-acre Toda Lake and fountain. Amid the oak trees and sabal palms native to the Florida landscape, discussions on philosophy and everyday life experience take place in a relaxing atmosphere.

In its first five years, the center has welcomed nearly 20,000 people to more than 160 SGI-USA conferences, providing faith encouragement, relaxation and rejuvenation to participants from throughout the world. "There should be time for sleeping and time for chanting," President Ikeda commented at the center's opening. "People should leave energized and filled with hope."

"The FNCC, in my opinion, is one of the greatest gifts from President Ikeda to SGI members in America," says Rajan Gainey of South Carolina, who has attended two conferences at the center. "Every time I go there, I enjoy myself, learn a great deal and really feel President Ikeda's compassion for all the members. It's a place where everyone can revive their spirit and determinations."

David Kasahara, executive director of the FNCC, is determined to fulfill the center's mission of encouraging conference participants to continue their journey of faith. "Our staff will continue to strive with the spirit to make this center an oasis of faith," he said, "where each and every person who visits will feel the heart of President Ikeda."

Twenty conferences are scheduled for the remainder of this year, including sessions specifically for youth, language groups, Buddhist study, parents and much more. To find out more about the FNCC and how you can attend a conference, please contact your zone or region office, or visit the SGI-USA's Web site at www.sgi-usa.org.