

CELEBRATING PRIDE ACROSS AMERICA

All over the country, thousands of SGI-USA members and their friends took part in annual Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Pride celebrations.

In his message to the pride activities all over the nation, SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima wrote: “Your actions to commemorate the annual Pride events as Bodhisattvas of the Earth are truly wonderful! I hope all of you live lives of splendid beauty and unrivaled happiness. And I hope that through your brilliant activities, you will show the world the true image of the beautiful and diverse SGI family.”

In San Francisco, more than 150 marchers handed out 7,000 pieces of literature along the parade route June 24, which provided information on the SGI. A beautiful float also provided a stage for a powerful taiko drum performance and a dance from the Mystic Flava troupe.

Hard work from more than 20 members at an SGI information booth during the course of the weekend resulted in many new guests at a July 8 introductory meeting. All told, about 300 people visited the booth with sincere seeking spirit.

SGI-USA members joined New York City’s 32nd Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride March and hosted an information booth at PrideFest, the accompanying street fair.

There were more than 200 members and guests in the march. One of the marchers, Trish Hartog, shared her impressions of the day: “I watched the faces of the people lining the streets, some looking as if they were studying us, and I imagined they were thinking: ‘So this is what Buddhists look like. Look how happy they are.’ And we were!”

On June 24 in Seattle, more than 50 SGI-USA members, along with an amazing 10-member drum corps, celebrated by leading the Seattle Freedom Day Parade. The drum corps, which had been practicing for three months, never stopped drumming as the other members passed out more than 3,000 invitations to introductory meetings. The parade was followed up by tremendous performances by SGI-USA members at the opening of the rally.

SGI-USA member Pat Bunevich rode the lead motorcycle down Central Avenue in the parade celebrating Gay Pride in downtown Phoenix on April 21, with an SGI flag on one side and a rainbow flag on the other, while members of Phoenix’s SGI-USA Pride Group lined the streets to cheer and encourage the more than 70 entrants in the Gay Pride Parade.

SGI-USA’s involvement also included sponsoring a booth at the Gay Pride Festival—a first for Arizona. People were lined up two and three deep while they waited for an opportunity to ask questions about Buddhism, spiritual equality and the Victory Over Violence campaign.

A small but mighty contingent of SGI-USA members and friends marched in this year’s Columbus, Ohio, Pride Parade. People along the route cheered and took more than 3,000 SGI-USA brochures.

This was the Chanting Out Loud group’s third year in the parade and first year to have a booth. Members at the booth talked with hundreds of parade goers, collected 79 signatures for the VOV pledge and handed out introductory material.

More than 150 SGI-USA members participated in Chicago’s 32nd Annual Pride Parade, June 24. Nearly a half million people were uplifted and embraced by the sights and sounds of Buddhists engaged in one of the largest community events in the nation.

The SGI-USA unit was led by a rousing drum major and five youth members carrying a banner. The marching unit followed with some 50 members in red, yellow and blue tee-shirts. The marchers passed out 10,000 postcards to enthusiastic spectators. Dance SGI brought cheers from hundreds of thousands of spectators with a jazz dance to “Ode to Joy.”

SGI-USA Vice General Director Darnell Pulphus told the Chicago participants that “this is what happens when people are allowed to be who they are and get their groove on. Don’t ever let anyone mess with your groove!”

— *Diana Elrod, Bill Endsley, Whitney Rank, Lois Litvin, Sally Ann Marks, Kelly Simerman and Linda Thornburg contributed to this article.*