

**SGI-USA FAMILY YOUTH FESTIVALS
VOV ROARS IN EAST LOS ANGELES
BY JOSEPH ROSS
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Are you with me? Stand up and rise, SGI!” said Joseph Shepherd, 20, during his impassioned rap song that drew a roar from the crowd of more than 1,500 participants including family, guests and government officials, attending the July 29 SGI-USA Open House at the East Los Angeles Community Center in La Puente, Calif.

Numerous commendations and awards were presented to SGI-USA, along with the first-ever Honorary Citizen Award from the La Puente City Council, presented to SGI President Ikeda by Mayor Ann Sally Holguin-Fallon. Many other local mayors, city councilpersons, board of education members and the California state assemblyman all gave commendations to the SGI-USA youth for their Victory Over Violence activities with Los Angeles television reporters looking on.

Jay Gomez, representing Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich, said, “Many people talk about school violence, but you are doing something about it!”

On display were the “Gandhi, King, Ikeda: A Legacy of Building Peace” exhibition, information panels on nonviolence and a youth-inspired “peace quilt.” But the heart of the activities building toward this event was the incredible “District Daimoku Swan” campaign, which created harmonious unity and heartfelt trust among the men’s, women’s and the youth divisions on the district level.

Each swan, floating in a display of grace and beauty on a shimmering blue-foil paper lake, consisted of a minimum of 1,860 origami triangle slips, each slip representing 15 minutes of daimo-ku. Among the three areas—East Los Angeles, La Puente and Whittier—were a total of 34 districts that created their own swans, resulting in more than 40 million daimoku chanted in a two-month period.

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima visited with pioneer members, guests, city officials and youth who participated, sharing heart-warming and rousing words that inspired all.

For the finale, the local Youth Division Chorus sang their moving rendition of Beethoven’s “Ode To Joy,” which resulted in tears of joy from all those in attendance.