

TRAGEDY AFFECTS SGI-USA MEMBERS

After the recent terrorist attacks on the United States, SGI-USA members grieve, pray and determine to continue their efforts to build a peaceful world.

The members of the SGI-USA, along with the rest of the world, are mourning the loss of friends and family members, and are praying for those not yet accounted for in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C.

David Seima Aoyama, who served SGI-USA as a staff member and a vice leader in Southern California Zone, died on American Airlines Flight No. 11, which struck the World Trade Center in New York City. He was returning to Los Angeles from Boston on official SGI-USA business.

Born in Hokkaido, Japan, in 1953, Mr. Aoyama came to the United States in 1977, and managed restaurants in Dallas and Memphis before becoming a member of the SGI-USA's staff in 1983. Since 1995, he worked at the organization's national headquarters in Santa Monica, Calif., after serving in its Chicago, Philadelphia and Kansas City regional offices.

"David was my dear friend and a hero in the truest sense of the word," said SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima. "He dedicated himself to the cause of American kosen-rufu for 24 years. I know many people across the country had deep, personal relationships with David based on his many efforts to encourage members. Now is the time to consider what we can do to repay our debt of gratitude for his immeasurable contributions to our movement. Based on the way he lived his life and the Buddhist view of life's eternity, my deep conviction is that he will immediately be reborn in America, and continue to fight together with us for kosen-rufu."

A memorial service honoring Mr. Aoyama was immediately planned for Sept. 15 at the SGI-USA's Los Angeles Friendship Center.

At press time (Sept. 13), several other SGI-USA members thought to be in or near the World Trade Center during and after the attack, including some rescue workers, had not been accounted for. "The very spirit of Buddhism is hope," said SGI-USA Women's Leader Matilda Buck. "Our prayer, without a doubt, is reaching those people not yet found. Let's continue our united prayer for those affected by this tragedy and our support of each other in faith."

In addition, at the time of the attacks, 41 SGI-USA youth were en route to Los Angeles from Tokyo, returning from an SGI training course. Three of the youth flew directly to their home state of Hawaii and one to the Phillipines, where they landed safely. The remaining participants, together on one flight, were diverted to Vancouver, B.C., Canada, where they landed safely and were awaiting transport back to Los Angeles at press time.

"We are all in good health and high spirits," reported SGI-USA Youth Leader James Herrmann from Vancouver. "The SGI members in Vancouver have been amazing in making us feel welcome and safe. We still feel like we are on the training course, studying and praying together constantly. These youth are completely determined to return to their respective areas with a renewed conviction to lead the kosen-rufu movement and ensure that nothing like this ever happens again."

SGI-USA will continue to provide updates to members through official memos sent to community centers. In addition, whenever possible, updates will be sent to subscribers of the *WT E-Mail Express*, a free service. Please see the box below for information on how to subscribe.