

**SGI-USA FAMILY YOUTH FESTIVALS
VIRGINIA FESTIVAL IS A TURNING POINT
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On a sunny hillside be-low Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, the SGI-USA's Blue Ridge Chapter in central Virginia celebrated "A Fall Festival of Culture and Colors" at Piedmont Virginia Community College, Sept. 30.

The event followed an SGI book donation to the college in appreciation for the use of its facilities over the past decade. SGI-USA Virginia/Carolina Region Leader Steve Doty asserted that the activities at the college have "enabled us to explore lasting solutions to the social issues of our day." Head Librarian Linda Cahill responded with excitement to the donation of nearly 40 books on Buddhist philosophy and peace, saying that the college would definitely use them.

The festival represented the collective efforts of many members, some of whom drove three hours to contribute to the event. The youth played a key role in developing and staging the program. Music Coordinator Tara Kabir chanted and took action toward this goal every day for two months, overcoming numerous obstacles and introducing many, many youth to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism along the way.

The results of the members' efforts were reflected in the contributions of an array of talented musicians, both SGI-USA members and friends, who shared their hearts in performances of many styles. In addition, singers and artists of diverse cultures and several languages performed and contributed their work to the festival. In a poem composed especially for the festival, PVCC student Shawn Quarles proclaimed: "This is our opportunity to show love, respect, understanding/... [to] trumpet life and control the wind."

The youth prepared a wide variety of children's activities, from origami to kite flying. Young women's leader Sylvia Yoncich wrote and directed a Victory Over Violence skit, which delighted and encouraged the audience. During brief interludes between musical performances, there was dancing and delicious food organized by members of the women's and young women's divisions, giving members and guests sustenance of both body and mind as well as the opportunity for dialogue.

Virginia/Carolina Region Culture Department Leader Mike Curtis remarked that this festival was a "turning point for Blue Ridge Chapter." The members felt a particular significance in hosting the hope-filled event at this time of uncertainty and collective grief. The festival concluded with a rousing rendition of "Ode to Joy."

As the shadows grew longer, friends departed with a strengthened conviction in the innate power and value of their lives and the confidence that the members of Blue Ridge Chapter are making a difference in their community.