

**NOV. 18 COMMEMORATIVE DISCUSSION MEETINGS  
REVITALIZING AMERICA THROUGH DIALOGUE  
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During the month of November, SGI-USA members throughout the country celebrated Nov. 18, the 71st anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding, at thousands of neighborhood gatherings.

Members of Lefferts-Wingate District in New York enjoyed a lively meeting with several guests, including New York State Senator Marty Markowitz, who is also the Brooklyn Borough president-elect. He presented the district with a certificate of recognition congratulating "Lefferts-Wingate District of SGI-USA in celebration of Founding Day."

Senator Markowitz shared that his most important experience growing up was learning how to interact and be friends with many different people. "If we are to have peace and live in tolerant co-existence with each other, then we should respect our neighbors as we do ourselves," he stated, echoing the meeting's theme of "Dialogue for Peace." "We should learn and understand our differences, our diversity, and strive to build trust among each other."

In Florida, the members of Palm Beach chapter also held an enthusiastic gathering centering on dialogue. It seemed like a long time had passed since the members held their first planning meeting, soon after the Sept. 11 tragedy. While the media was reporting that the majority of the terrorists had lived, worked and gone to flight schools in Palm Beach County, a local company was testing all of its employees for exposure to anthrax after an employee's death. "I knew we would have a wonderful meeting, but I couldn't envision it that night," remembers Anna Brewster.

But by focusing on the ba-sics of Buddhist practice — faith, practice and study — the members created a source of deep encouragement for many. As Anita Raja said on her way out of the meeting: "Wow, I really needed to hear so much of what was said today. I am even more determined to strengthen my practice and make a difference in the world."

In his message to the commemorative meetings, SGI President Ikeda wrote: "Let's make our discussion meetings into forums for enjoyable dialogue grounded in true democracy and equality. Through such meetings, why don't we aim to create an expanding wave of happiness by giving deep inspiration and courage to as many friends as possible?"

"With the conviction that our SGI is the source of light that will dispel the darkness of today's society," he continued, "I ask that each one of you please become a star performer on the stage of kosen-rufu, in the drama of revitalizing America. I sincerely hope and pray that each of you will fully realize your personal mission for kosen-rufu in America, the land of freedom and equality."

*— Ruby Hodge and Karen Zeller-Marsh contributed to this article.*