

FROM NEW YORK, 1

behind these efforts, Chief Petty Officer Rene Geysler, to the practice 16 years ago.

Throughout the meeting, spirited youth division members performed, beginning with 75 Boys and Girls Group members fearlessly singing "Climb Every Mountain." The New Jersey Youth Band with dancers vigorously performed "Ichinen." And the New England youth division enthusiastically jammed on "Victory Over Violence."

One hundred members of the New York junior high and high school division dramatized the Lotus Sutra parable "The Gem in the Robe." The audience was on its feet during dance portions of the skit that included New York City-style breakdancing. Many of these performers were guests who had been invited to participate by their friends.

In his encouragement, Mr. Na-

gashima shared President Ikeda's recent guidance that "now is the time that the SGI-USA can grow, can develop, without limit. I am really counting on America. Never forget, America is the center of the worldwide propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism."

Mr. Nagashima emphasized that this process starts with "each of us expanding our lives, achieving our dreams and becoming happier and happier."

He shared that when he became general director about one year ago, he received guidance from President Ikeda to always treasure the members working on the frontlines. To reply, he decided to home visit as many members as possible. From the more than 1,000 visits he made last year, he said that he clearly saw the power of the Gohonzon. "Our members have tremendous conviction toward the Gohonzon," he said. "They have

achieved many, many impossible things. They are the true heroes of our movement."

Mr. Nagashima closed by encouraging each district to determine to introduce one new member to the practice by May 3, 2001, as a positive step toward the beginning of this new era in kosen-rufu history. "Please remember that your victory in your own life is a victory for America," he concluded. "Let's enjoy our benefits. Let's become as happy as we can be."

With this spirit, the Northeastern Zone members are now beginning preparations for their Family Youth Festival, which will mark the 20th anniversary of President Ikeda's poem written in New York, "To My Young American Friends." The festival will be held July 14 at the Madison Square Garden Theater, with 10,000 members and guests from throughout the Northeast participating. **WT**



SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima speaks.

New York students enact 'The Gem in the Robe' through storytelling and dance.

A spirited jazz band greets members and guests.



The Northeastern Zone Kickoff, held at the Jacob Javits Convention Center, was the largest SGI gathering in New York City since 1986.



A Broadway welcome for the arriving members and guests.

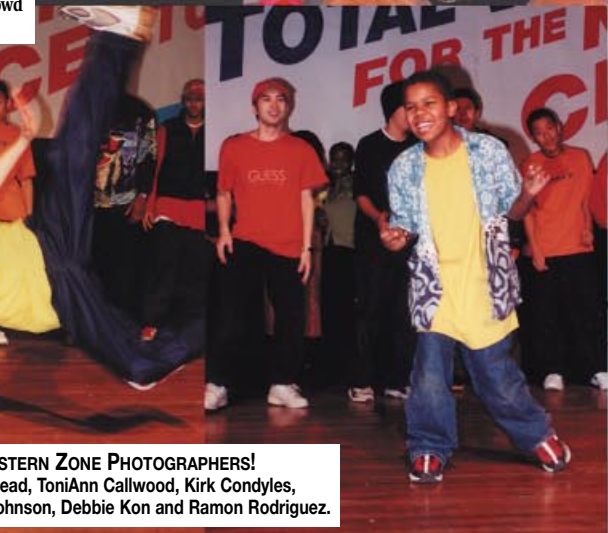


Boston members board a bus for New York City early the morning of Jan. 28.



Boys and Girls Group members sing 'Climb Every Mountain.'

Dazzling New York City-style breakdancing gets the crowd on its feet.



When the auditorium fills up, hundreds of members agree to enjoy the meeting through video display in the lobby.

THANKS TO THE NORTHEASTERN ZONE PHOTOGRAPHERS! Michael Anton, Carol Barnstead, ToniAnn Callwood, Kirk Condyles, Michael Goodman, Hosea Johnson, Debbie Kon and Ramon Rodriguez.

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MESSAGE TO THE NORTHEASTERN ZONE KICKOFF

A New Era Begins

SGI President Ikeda calls the Northeastern Zone Kickoff 'the beginning of a new era for the United States.... Your passionate spirit and courageous efforts to contribute to your respective areas are, without fail, the impetus for opening a new page for our kosen-rufu movement.'

My sincere congratulations on holding your Northeastern Zone Kickoff! This meeting symbolizes the beginning of a new era for the United States. I understand that there are representatives from five regions gathered today — thank you for traveling such long distances.

I am full of confidence that your passionate spirit and courageous efforts to contribute to your respective areas are, without fail, the impetus for opening a new page for our kosen-rufu movement. My deepest respect to all of you, the Northeastern Zone members, who are walking the path of unlimited happiness.

In "Repaying Debts of Gratitude," Nichiren Daishonin states, "A hundred years of practice in the Land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day's practice in the impure world" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 736). The fact that we are living our day-to-day existence based on

the Mystic Law in itself proves the great value and happiness of our lives.

The essence of this Buddhism is found in devoting our entire energies to persevere through each day, always looking toward the future. We are setting ourselves on a steady course for accumulating great fortune by vibrantly chanting daimoku filled with joy and appreciation, and by advancing step by step in our lives — no matter what.

In "Letter to Niike," the Daishonin says, "What a joy it is for us to have been born in the Latter Day of the Law and to have shared in the propagation of the Lotus Sutra!" (WND, 1026). Please make the spirit of propagation your firm foundation and enjoy participating in SGI activities with the conviction that your prayers and efforts for the sake of the Law, your friends and your communities will become unlimited, everlasting treasures in your own lives. I hope that you will today begin anew to advance gallantly.

Let's continue helping our many friends establish their own foundation of happiness with this Buddhism. We can see our own lives expand beyond measure through tenacious encouragement of our friends.

When the Northeastern Zone members take action, I believe, the other regions in the United States will follow suit. You will bring about the expansion of happiness throughout the nation with your immense fighting spirit.

I am sending my wholehearted prayers to each and every one of you, who are following the correct path for American kosen-rufu, so that you will overcome every obstacle and establish a new history in this new century.

I am always praying from the depths of my heart for your continued success, victories and good health. Please convey my best regards to your family members. Please take care not to catch cold!

Daishaku Ikeda
January 28, 2001



Five thousand members from throughout Northeastern Zone attend their zone kickoff, Jan. 28.