

Key Bureaus Make a Fresh Start
BY CARMEN ROBERTS & TERRY ELLIS
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In a Florida conference, reps from public relations, publications and study discuss their individual and collective roles in the U.S. kosen-rufu movement.

Do you know you are an ambassador? Yes, you! But you are not like an ambassador to a foreign country or an ambassador extraordinaire who goes on special diplomatic missions — your mission is much more important. You and everyone else who practices Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism are ambassadors of peace, and your mission with SGI-USA is entering a new and historic time.

This, in a nutshell, was the message discussed and debated from three different angles by representatives of the public relations and publications bureaus, as well as the Study Department, during a special conference this weekend at the Florida Nature and Culture Center.

While the PR representatives gathered in the Conference Center Auditorium to discuss creative ways of reaching out into our communities, Study Department representatives (affectionately dubbed the "Study Nerds") took over the library and brainstormed ways to help individuals deeply understand and use Buddhism in society.

Simultaneously, in a room overlooking Toda Lake, correspondents debated how to make the SGI-USA publications a world-class source of inspiration for both members and their friends.

The atmosphere was one of empowerment. In the words of Paula Granger, a public relations representative from Atlanta: "This is a historic time; I feel as if the mantle is being passed to us." Even when they did not agree, the participants clearly recognized the powerhouse of experience and capability brought to the discussions. "I was blown away by the brain power and the heart of the study group," said Jesse Goins from Los Angeles. "This triad of study, publications and public relations all works together."

People may not have had all the answers — those answers will continue to unfold in local communities around the country — but the conferees were bound by a strong sense of responsibility and passion for the future of the SGI-USA movement.

Those attending the public relations sessions focused on how public relations begins with each person — with the image each person presents to society.

"This is a natural outgrowth of our development," said Bill Aiken from Washington, D.C., who is director of SGI-USA media relations.

"To be a good citizen we must look for ways to interact with the community," he said. "This is an awakening to our organization's identity as a citizen of American society."

Ted Morino, the Study Department chief, saw this weekend as the cause for making a study movement more in tune with American members' needs. "What is needed to make our study movement a driving force for the development of each member's faith has become clearer," he said. "By creating a variety of task forces in the Study Department to implement our study programs, I want to see a most compatible study movement grow in this country."

Representatives of the publications bureaus in each joint territory, who voluntarily do much of the work to produce the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism*, discussed concrete plans.

"The anxiety that I came with about the future of the publications bureau in Hawaii vanished as I participated in this conference," Joanne Tachibana of Honolulu said. "The

healthy and sometimes emotional discussions among regional correspondents with the staff from Los Angeles were frank and bore positive results.”

Al Albergate, the community relations director for the organization, explained that “making friends is the heart of community relations. Why do we need friends? We’re not going to bring about world peace by ourselves. There are many people of good will and integrity, who have the same goals as we do.

“Why not make friends with them, so we can work together? This is what SGI President Ikeda does continually.”

Those common goals include non-violence, tolerance, freedom of religion, world citizenship and non-discrimination.

Conference participants left encouraged about their crucial role in the SGI-USA’s movement for world peace.

“I have gained a heightened appreciation for the need to strengthen my determination to do my human revolution if I am to be an effective PR representative,” said Jim Wallerstein from Rosemont, Pa.

Carol Woodard from Maywood, Ill., chimed in: “President Ikeda says making friends is PR, so I’m in the right place.”

“I am refreshed in faith and my determination, so I’ll return home with new insights to slowly, step-by-step, JUST DO IT,” added Barbara Wright Cullen from Calabasas, Calif.

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