

Alaska Community Center Re-Opens
By BILL LAWRENCE, Seattle Bureau Chief
Anchorage, Ala., May 24–26

Alaska is filled with active volcanoes and vast archipelagos. It has more miles of coastline than the contiguous United States. The Americas were first peopled via this region. In May, the warm sun can shine 20 hours a day. In winter, the long nights can hold steady at 20 degrees below.

This weekend, members of Alaska Headquarters, joined by an exchange party of 46 people from Seattle and Portland, Ore., opened a new chapter of kosen-rufu here as they officially re-opened their Alaska Community Center in a new location. Twenty-two people from Fairbanks Chapter also joined the exchange by making the six-hour drive from Fairbanks to Anchorage.

This weekend commemorates the 14th anniversary of SGI President Ikeda's visit to Alaska in 1983. On that occasion, President Ikeda said, "I hope all leaders have strong faith and warm hearts." This annual commemorative activity is the Alaska members' way of redetermining to live up to that challenge.

What is it like to work for kosen-rufu in Alaska? Lara Middaugh-Gaines of Anchorage speaks of a sense of mission when she says: "Someone told me that people who come to Alaska either live here forever or they have to leave right away. Alaska is so vast and immense. You have to have something vast and immense inside you to stay here."

Being surrounded by water on one side and a vast wilderness area on the other can lead to a sense of isolation. During President Ikeda's visit here in 1983, the SGI leader said:

As an organization grows...there is a tendency for leaders to become too accustomed to faith and practice and to let their attitude toward faith stagnate, thus losing their original purity.... This tendency is normal among common mortals; in fact, it is a dominant force deep within people's lives — history has shown this. We who aim at kosen-rufu and are leaders of faith should never fall into this pitfall, always admonishing ourselves in carrying out a determined practice.

The weekend's activities included district exchange meetings and a trip to Portage Glacier. Seeing the enormous glacier for the first time made Seattle Joint Territory High School Division Chief Michele Higgins think of the youth division's responsibility for the future.

"The youth division must become like this glacier — an unstoppable force for kosen-rufu," she said. "This glacier has such a powerful presence and moves through all obstacles. Its determination is powerful, and it keeps on moving!"

Alaska Headquarters Vice Chief Al Aginbinik put this perspective on the significance of the weekend's activities: "This new community center means a new chapter in kosen-rufu in Alaska. We have really struggled up to now, but struggling means that we are now stronger in our faith.

"People have problems wherever we go, but especially in Alaska, we have many people who are suffering.

"I think that by studying President Ikeda's guidance and putting Buddhism into practice, we can help these people, one by one. We can really use our new community center to introduce a lot of people in Anchorage to Buddhism.

"If you make things difficult for yourself, then you will have difficulty practicing Buddhism no matter where you are. I see our new community center as the world peace

center for Alaska. Right now, we need to make a big leap forward with momentum, focusing on the youth.

“Some members in other states have to drive hours and hours just to get to their discussion meeting. We are fortunate here because we don’t have to drive so far. It can be difficult to practice anywhere, but it’s an advantage to practice here.”

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Title: Alaska Community Center Re-Opens
Subject: World Tribune 06/13/97 n.3143 p.1 WT970613p01 Anchorage, Alaska 05/24/97
Author: Bill Lawrence
Keywords: 05/24/97 Alaska Anchorage Center Community Events National News Re-Opens