

Groundbreaking a Community Event
By JOHN BATES, Bureau Chief
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In a ceremony surging with positive energy, a host of public officials, community leaders and local neighbors gathered with SGI-USA members today to celebrate the start of construction of the Los Angeles Friendship Center.

Sunny, spring-like weather and songs from the America Rainbow Chorus accented the all-around smiles as speaker after speaker praised the SGI's enterprise. Vera de Vera, U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer's deputy, commended the SGI's dedication — "Your efforts will make a tremendous difference in the community" — while Dolores Carnizales of Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan's office said of the future center, "This is exactly what we need." Addressing the SGI's focus on inner life and the effect that has on self-esteem, especially of young people, she shared the belief that "only this type of effort is going to turn Los Angeles around."

Los Angeles Police Department Captain John P. Mutz thanked the SGI "for being here. Our mission will be to support you wherever we can in whatever way we can, and make sure you can do the work you do."

And keynote speaker Lula Washington, whose Contemporary Dance Theater is based in the neighborhood, sensed "positive energy — an overwhelming force bubbling up and expanding out into the area." She called the future center a "safe haven where young people can come and be inspired," a transformative presence that she believed can bring about what are called in Swahili *umoja* and *ujama* — unity and harmony.

But it was 97-year-old community activist Annie Jo Robertson who made the greatest impact with her advice on "how to stay here even longer than me" — "You have to treat people the way you'd like to be treated," she said.

The Friendship Center, the first SGI structure in Los Angeles to be built from the ground up, is scheduled to open in late 1998.

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