

A 'HOME OF HARMONY WITHIN DIVERSITY'

The SGI-USA Los Angeles Friendship Center held an open house last month. It is a major facility for SGI youth activities, as well as a site for public lectures and cultural exhibitions to which the community is invited. It houses a large auditorium, numerous meeting rooms, an atrium, as well as a regulation-size outdoor basketball court.

Multicultural festivities and visits by neighborhood association and public officials highlighted the SGI-USA Los Angeles Friendship Center Open House held Dec. 12, 1998. On hand to enjoy the festivities were Los Angeles City Councilman Nate Holden, Edward R. Johnson, field deputy for U.S. Congressman Julian C. Dixon, and Hattie Steward, who in honor of the occasion presented, on behalf of U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer, a flag flown over the U.S. Capitol. Former State Senator Diane Watson congratulated the SGI-USA "for building this facility in the very center of the city of Los Angeles." Annie Jo Robertson, 98, a community activist and treasured senior in the neighborhood who had delighted the audience at the Friendship Center's groundbreaking a year ago, also attended.

Los Angeles City Councilman Nate Holden attended a meeting of the Pico-Fairfax Neighborhood Association at the center during the open house. He fielded questions from among some 100 representatives and then briefly toured the facility.

Following the formal program and a welcome by SGI-USA General Director Fred Zaitso, a multi-ethnic program of live music, dance and poetry, along with video presentations about the center's aims to become a home of "harmony within diversity," gave the guests a bird's eye view of the SGI-USA.

A highlight of the three-hour stage show was selections by the Universal Dance Studio, a young people's tap troupe that was recently featured in the Los Angeles Times after winning accolades for its show-stopping performances in Cuba. The Zenith Dance Coterie and California Dance Theater also performed, and choreographer Lulu Washington led dancers from her Contemporary Dance Theater in a selection from her dazzling Kwanza show. Outdoor games, indoor crafts and clowns provided further entertainment for the younger children.

— NANCY SIMMS

As a part of the Philadelphia Region's ongoing effort to strengthen its ties to the community, the region's Freedom Chorus opened Pennsauken, New Jersey's Unity Day celebration by performing three songs. Named by SGI President Ikeda two weeks earlier, the 33-person, four-division chorus set a positive tone for the day's festivities. The event attracted nearly 2,000 residents from Pennsauken and surrounding communities. Its purpose was to promote unity through culture and education, matching nicely with the SGI's own goals.

— PATRICIA DANIELS