

NEW ENGLAND CULTURE CENTER OPENS

Joy, appreciation and admiration were the prevailing feelings Feb. 7 as New England members opened a new facility, recently named the New England Culture Center by SGI President Ikeda. Renovations began in July 1998 on the Waltham, Mass., facility, outside Boston. Hundreds of members offered their time and skills to prepare the building's 20,000 square feet of space.

Everyone was thanked for their sincere efforts by the New England region leaders and SGI-USA General Director Fred Zaitso, who also relayed a message from President Ikeda: "Congratulations on your new culture center! I sincerely hope that this center will be a beacon of the New American Renaissance, sending many capable people into society with the message of hope and peace. I am praying for your good health and happiness."

The center's auditorium, built to seat 1,100, is constructed like an amphitheater. Here, the results of members' hard work could clearly be seen — from a new teal curtain framing the stage's proscenium arch to the gleaming parquet floor, from individually hand-washed tiles to the hand-polished woodwork. One person commented that "50 years of dirt and grime had to be cleared away in six months' time" for the opening.

The culture center has a distinguished history: On Feb. 7, 1929, exactly 70 years before the opening, a charter was approved to establish the Hovey Institute, which led to the Hovey Memorial Hall, the building's former name (completed in 1933). Townspeople came to hear lectures (including a speech by John F. Kennedy, when he was Massachusetts governor), participate in education programs and a variety of civic functions. Now the building has a second life with the New England members.

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