

WISCONSIN AREA HOLDS FAMILY FESTIVAL

Children tied to yellow, red and blue balloons; Japanese women swirling in summer kimonos gaily performing what looked to be the Tokyo bunny hop but was really a mining dance; a play starring two bodhisattva parrots; people singing about dreams, sunshine, friendship — all of this was part of the kaleidoscope of Wisconsin Area's second annual SGI-USA Family Festival held on May 23.

Hosted at the Zoofari center next to the Milwaukee Zoo, the event drew a considerable crowd of which half were children. Visitors included guests from Japan accompanying graduating student members and members' friends and family members. The event, planned and executed by the youth division, was aimed at children and attracting new members.

"I enjoyed the freedom given to children to express their thoughts," remarked MaryRay Coker, a member since age 2 and attending with her teenage daughter, Amber. "It was refreshing to hear that some of the next generation have focus in their lives. This means that parents are doing the job that needs to be done. Kids are mirrors of ourselves."

Highlights included "Hold On to Your Dreams," a song written by Tim Gruber and performed by Madison Chapter members. Tim, who is a general music education teacher, asked his students to write about their dreams. He later wrote the music and fashioned the dreams into lyrics.

Milwaukee members performed "You Are the Sunshine of My Life," with both the enthusiasm and finesse usually associated with past SGI movements. There were Japanese songs, Japanese dances, a rip-roaring samba and a gymnastics routine to the tune of "Fly Like an Eagle."

Artists also exhibited their crafts in a nearby lobby, alongside a three-panel display on the SGI.

— ELIZABETH THOMPSON