

WHITE OAK CHAPTER — WHITE OAK, MD.

The 1998 November Commemorative Meeting was a turning point for the members of White Oak District. Because of our efforts then, and indeed, because of our continued efforts, I am proud to announce that our district has blossomed into a chapter —White Oak Chapter—in February 1999, with three districts and six groups.

White Oak is a suburb of Washington, D.C., and is known for its military installation, the Naval Surface Warfare Center. We are elated that our kosen-rufu activities are taking place in the heart of this neighborhood.

The 1998 general meeting attendance goal was set at 100 members and guests. Preparations began in mid-September 1998 with weekly chanting sessions and home visits. A good meeting plan was quickly developed. We soon realized that the expected 100 participants could not be accommodated in anyone's home, so we decided to use one of our community's recreation centers. This meant we had to add to our plans other logistical considerations, such as chairs, microphones and an altar setup.

At that time, White Oak District was comprised of three groups. The group and district leaders shared a supportive and treasured bond of friendship, which we still continue to foster. Together, we advanced in unity and involved as many members as possible in the meeting preparations. The members helped design beautiful invitations, programs, decorations and give-aways. Several rehearsals were held to polish the meeting. Members volunteered to share the expenses, and we were able to give door prizes such as a gongyo book and bead set, SGI publications and books.

The winners of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's book *Glass Children* and Richard Causton's book *The Buddha in Daily Life* were the envy of all. Our meeting was a total success, with participation from all four divisions. The youth division moved everyone to tears when they played "Song of Human Revolution;" the Boys and Girls Group colored a beautiful SGI banner and impressed the guests with vocal and piano solos. A women's division member composed a song, clearly written from her heart, for the occasion; a visiting men's division member from India shared a touching experience.

A total of 93 attended: 70 members and 23 guests. Since then, White Oak District—now a mighty chapter—has sponsored nine people to join the SGI and receive the Gohonzon. Three of these new members are currently group leaders in the chapter. The district goals this year are 100 percent participation, good aftercare for the guests, a renewed commitment to kosen-rufu, and to show our community the greatness of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

— SANDI HOPKINS STOKES