

**PUERTO RICO YOUTH HOLD CULTURE FESTIVAL  
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PUERTO RICO**

SGI-USA Puerto Rico Area marked a new beginning toward kosen-rufu with its first Youth Culture Festival held Nov. 21 at the community center in San Juan. With the firm purpose of making an important cause for the development of the members in Puerto Rico, the youth, with the unwavering support of everyone in the organization, embarked on the task of organizing the festival.

SGI-USA General Director Fred Zaitzu attended, along with Southern Zone leaders Cliff Sawyer, Ingmar Soto and Sheilah Edwards.

Many were the obstacles that arose, even the announcement of Hurricane Lenny's arrival days before the event. Yet, there was no challenge that could defeat the members' strong resolve. In the face of such determination, the hurricane passed by and didn't touch the island.

It wasn't long before benefits occurred. Besides spending a wonderful afternoon enjoying the talents of the members and sharing with guests on the day of the festival, as a result of people's efforts toward the gathering, the community center was painted, and the garden areas renovated and conditioned. Yet, the greatest of benefits was the increased unity among the members.

Under the theme "Creating Value Through Music," the Soka Gakkai spirit reigned on Sunday afternoon as children, teenagers and adults united to reaffirm values and educate others about the struggle to create harmony and peace. To create peace we must count on joy, friendship, tolerance, perseverance and excellence—that's why in the festival these "ingredients" achieved prominence; and in an amusing way, the artistic performances in which talented members acted, sang, danced and played lovely music all magically intertwined.

The youth, headed by José Luis Vargas and Abed Hernandez, were in charge of creating both the festival's theme and theme song, "Bonds of Friendship." In creating the theme song, youths Alexandra Rosa, José Daniel de Jesus, Edgar Abraham and Ivette Pietri also participated.

Under the general direction of Luis Gonzalez and the artistic direction of Alina Marrero, the members went all out and offered the best of their talents in a beautiful, intelligent and motivating show that invited the audience to acknowledge the importance of art and culture in the development of human beings and the triumph of peace over violence.

Edgar Abraham, a teenager saxophone virtuoso, delighted us with his music, while the children widely displayed their acting abilities together with a group of youths and adults that accompanied them. Also prominent was the participation of singers Ana Baiana and Brenda Reyes, both SGI members.

Several musicians from the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra joined the members to offer a beautiful rendition of a classical melody and a group of youth from the city of Ponce offered a martial arts presentation. The participation of these young men and women showed the integration of the SGI in the community.

While all this was happening on stage, another group of members oversaw the booth on "Victory Over Violence," while still others participated in selling books, distributing mementoes and preparing refreshments. All enjoyed themselves intensely in making a dream come true—their first Youth Culture Festival.

Title: Puerto Rico Youth Hold Culture Festival

Subject: World Tribune 12/10/99 n.3272 p.6 WT991210p06 San Juan, Puerto Rico 11/21/99

Author: Delvis Griselle Ortiz

Keywords: 11/21/99 Culture Delvis Festivals Griselle Hold Juan Ortiz Puerto Recitals Rico Shows Youth

The festival had its grand finale with the participation of renowned flautist Nestor Torres, who was born in Puerto Rico and an SGI member for 20 years. “This is the effort of ordinary people toward achieving peace and understanding among human beings, respecting each person’s identity,” said Nestor, visibly moved by the vibrant energy of all those present.

SGI-USA General Director Fred Zaitso told those present that such effort represented a new departure for Puerto Rico to create peace and prosperity in the 21st century. He assured that SGI President Ikeda always prayed for the happiness and health of Puerto Rico members and announced that the SGI leader had a gift for them after the festival — ice cream for all.

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