

MEMPHIS YOUTH PEACE SUMMIT HELD AT PINK PALACE MUSEUM

The first community-wide Youth Peace Summit was held at the Pink Palace Museum in Memphis on Oct. 30. One participant was Harold Ford Jr., a 29-year-old U.S. Congressman from Tennessee, who talked about individual responsibility and individual choice in the context of junior high and high school. "When I was 4 years old and my father took his oath of office in Congress," he said, "I was with him and I said what he said and knew that I wanted to do what he did, even though I didn't understand it. So when I was your age, I knew I had to make tough choices to reach my goal."

Nothing could be more serious than the purpose of this event—to provide a forum for the community's youth to voice their concerns about violence and propose solutions. But it had a joyful side, too, embodied in the hopeful rainbow of young faces, and in the spirited, disciplined performance of Skittles, the Memphis youth division's own drill dance "dream team." In perfect unison, they accomplished each step of their dance routine to the irresistibly youthful beat of "Lollipop" by Aqua.

The event was jointly sponsored by the City of Memphis Center for Neighborhoods and the SGI-USA. Participants included delegates representing seven community youth organizations: Goodwill Boys & Girls Clubs, Bridge Builders, Emmanuel Episcopal Center, Girls Center, Ridgeway High School, the SGI Youth Division, Memphis and YCAP (a YMCA-sponsored Community Action Program). Media presence included local Channel 13 (FOX), the *Commercial Appeal* (the largest local daily), *Time* magazine and *Vanity Fair*.

The summit kicked off with a reading of the Victory Over Violence proclamation by Memphis Mayor Willie Herenton, followed by the SGI-USA video, "Quest for Peace." Participants were invited to sign a personal pledge for nonviolence.

The young delegates were the focus and power of the program. One by one, each organization's chosen representatives mounted the stage, in groups or singly, to speak for hundreds of their peers. All of them made thoughtful, valid points about problems well known to them: robbery, rape, drugs, AIDS, gang violence, teen pregnancy, gun violence, safety and the cleanliness of their neighborhoods.

—GERTRUDE MOELLER