

**YOUNG PEACE KEEPERS PEACEGAME 2000 HELD
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For the third time since the installation of the exhibition, “Linus Pauling and the 20th Century,” local SGI-USA members joined with other local organizations to hold an activity celebrating the exhibition’s informal theme, “the power of one person to make a difference.” The latest activity, called Young Peace Keepers PeaceGame 2000, was held on Jan. 17 in the National Museum of Health and Medicine at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Its purpose was to tackle the topic of violence in schools and commemorate Martin Luther King Jr. Day at the same time.

The 37 students from area junior and senior high schools who participated in this event came from three organizations: SGI-USA, Rosa Parks’s Pathways to Freedom, and Just Me Entertainment. During the daylong activity, as actors in PeaceGame2000, the students confronted issues they face in their own schools and communities and developed skills toward becoming “young peace keepers.” In the process of role-playing in a realistic and potentially violent situation, they strengthened old friendships and developed new ones.

Modeled on the simulations of war—or “war games” devised by the military, peace games nevertheless have very different goals. As Game Director, Larry Seaquist, of The Strategy Group, an independent, international “do” tank, noted, “In a war game there is only one winner, but in a peace game, everybody wins.” Mr. Seaquist, along with the Washington, D.C., Region Linus Pauling Exhibition Steering Committee and SGI-DC youth division leaders, organized PeaceGame 2000. Mr. Seaquist worked on war games for the U.S. military until his retirement, when he began staging peace games. Today’s peace game was the first Mr. Seaquist has directed in which junior and senior high school students participated.

On this day, PeaceGame 2000’s scene was Pristina, Kosovo, and the youth were charged with establishing a multi-ethnic high school there after the Kosovar refugees have returned to their homes. The political and social climate everywhere in Kosovo reflects the destruction to people’s lives, homes, work and more. There is still deep hatred between Kosovar Albanians and Serbs. Violence is a daily occurrence, and now the Kosovar Albanians control much of the country.

Each youth played the role of a member of one of eight teams: Albanian Boys, Albanian Girls, Serbian Youth, Teachers, Parents, School Administrators and Security, Community Leaders, and U.N. Peace Keepers. Separately, each team discussed the questions: “What do you plan to do about these problems: refugee families live in the school, there are only a few computers, and the Albanian and Serbian youth speak and write in different languages?”; “Who can attend this school?”; and “In practical terms, what does it mean to have safety, security and civility in a school and a community?” The youth seriously engaged in their roles, and when they came together, shared their responses in passionate and sometimes heated dialogue:

After this first plenary session, Washington, D.C., City Council member Kevin Chavous reflected on the example set by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Citing King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Chavous noted that peace does not mean to live without tension. In fact, King says that sometimes you have to push to bring tension to the surface. This push is direct action but it is nonviolent: it is the starting point for dialogue. Unless you push against injustice, more layers of ignorance will be built on the existing layers. He said

young people must learn to think beyond their own existence and self-interest.

The second round of team discussions focused on questions of how to achieve the goals set in the first round: “What practical steps can help keep the school and community calm and safe?”; “What practical steps can help the students go to school together in a nonviolent climate?”; and “How can you be prepared for practical steps to reconciliation if there are incidents of hostility?”

With each team’s elected “school board member” sitting up front as though at a town meeting, the youth debated and worked toward agreement on how best to run a peaceful, nonviolent high school in Pristina. For example, they agreed that the U.N. should not only send in U.N. peacekeeping troops, but should also invite peace activists and educators to stimulate dialogue and understanding among the city’s factions. The youth also felt it was important that Albanians and Serbs either learn each other’s languages or adopt a third language, such as English, to help overcome cultural and ethnic barriers. There was a real recognition of the difficulties and creativity needed to advance in such a complex situation.

The PeaceGame ended with Mr. Seaquist bringing the youth back to Washington, D.C., to reconsider their outlook on conflict in their own daily lives. Many of the youth are confronted with violence every day. Some said this event taught them the importance of seeking to understand a person through one-to-one dialogue before passing judgment based on a rumor.

The day concluded with a memorial service for Martin Luther King Jr. Steve Wunder, Washington, D.C., Region young men’s leader, introduced SGI-USA’s Victory Over Violence campaign. He showed the Youth Peace Committee’s Victory Over Violence video, which helped the students think about the connection between passive violence and physical violence, and about the power they have to stop both forms.

Dr. Wilma Harvey, current D.C. School Board member and former school board president, called for adults and young people to join together in partnership for victory over violence.

In closing, Larry Seaquist reminded the young peace keepers that Dr. King taught that each individual can make a difference. If we can cause tension in a nonviolent way, wonderful things can come from it. We can live in this world in which we learn to prevent violence.

Frank Huggins, a high school sophomore, said PeaceGame 2000 put him “in a position to act as an adult, able to make changes.” Lindsey Stokes, a junior, said, “Change starts with one person to help the world: to make a change, start with yourself.” Senior John Stonebraker said the PeaceGame “reinforced for me that everybody has ideas; nobody dominates; when we work in a collective group together we can make a difference.”

Whether these young people happened later that day to catch their PeaceGame 2000 featured on the local six o’clock news, they were invigorated by the activity. They looked fully confident about their ability to make a difference to create peace and nonviolence in their schools and communities.