

NEW YORK HOLDS GOLDEN STAGE GROUP MEETING BY BILL BLACKARD

The first ever meeting of the newly formed SGI-USA Golden Stage Group named by SGI President Ikeda was held at the New York Culture Center on Jan. 30.

The main prayer room was filled with members and guests, plus friends and relatives. There were at least two members present who had been practicing for 40 years.

The themes of the meetings were "The Power of One" and "The Power of Age." The festivities began with a cultural presentation depicting President Ikeda's seven trips to New York City and the growth of the organization that was reflected by each one of those visits. A narrator presented highlights of each of his trips, beginning with his first on Oct. 13, 1960, ending with the most recent, in June 1996, by which time there were thousands of local members. New York West Vice Region Leader and Arts Division Senior Advisor Buster Williams led a small orchestra that played selections corresponding to each of the SGI president's trips. These songs, which included "The Impossible Dream," "Oh, Sensei," "Higher Than the Sky" and "Over the Rainbow," reminded the members of many beautiful meetings with President Ikeda.

A highlight of the afternoon meeting was a collective reminiscence by Sheilah Edwards, Sylvia Smith and Olga Ford. Their humorous accounts of the early days of their practice in New York brought tears of laughter and joy to many members. This was followed by the women and men's chorus' stirring rendition of "The Power of One."

In his final words, Northeastern Zone and SGI Men's Division Leader Tariq Hasan praised the efforts of the pioneer members who have developed SGI-USA into the vital organization it is today.

Hasan asked the members to keep fighting and enjoying an even greater life while encouraging younger members.

The meeting closed with a rousing chorus of "Forever Sensei," sending the members into the New York chill with a renewed youthful spirit.

PROFILE: ETHEL CORWIN BY JIM GERARD

When her son first brought Ethel Corwin to an SGI-USA meeting, she was a timid widower who hated groups, knew nothing about Buddhism and felt Jim was just "going through a phase."

Thirty-one years later, after jetting off to conventions at the drop of a hat, visiting Japan, becoming a district leader in Long Island, N.Y., and engaging in countless activities (including singing in the Sunshine Chorus), Ethel Corwin improbably has found herself in the vanguard of the kosen-rufu movement.

"I thought we'd all forget about it," she says about that initial meeting. "But somehow we didn't. We just kept going, improving our lives and encouraging each other. I have met so many wonderful friends whom I probably never would have if not for the practice."

When asked to explain her steadfastness of faith, Corwin gives many reasons: She first chanted for her son, Phillip, to return home safely from Vietnam, and today, Phillip is a

successful city administrator. She has three wonderful grandchildren—Jim’s children Suzie, Ken and Henry, all SGI-USA members. Four years ago, she survived bowel cancer surgery unscathed.

Mostly, though, chanting makes her feel happy, a joy she tries to convey to those who seek her guidance at the New York Culture Center. Mostly I tell them to believe in themselves and to chant with purpose.” Her son had coaxed her onto the guidance staff from her job as a legal secretary. Even though she’s not paid for her counsel, she proudly admits, “I get paid in good feelings.”

This year Ethel plans to return to the FNCC. “I hope to go swimming this time. Last time it was too cold.”

Oh, and by the way, Ms. Corwin just turned 84.

**PROFILE:
MURRAY SOLOMAN
BY BILL BLACKARD**

Murray Soloman of Endicott, N.Y., began his practice on Jan. 25, 1965. He had agreed to drive his wife, Yaeko, who had been practicing for four years, and some other women to the New York City Community Center for an initiation ceremony. Yaeko had secretly arranged for him to be initiated. He began to practice and soon afterward his home became a huge meeting place for pioneer members.

In 1976, he became general manager for a transportation company in Upstate New York. He and Yaeko moved to Endicott and began to contact members in their local towns. For years they fought to have a community center for Upstate members, and in 1989, they saw their dream realized with the opening of a center in Buffalo. In 1996, early detection prevented him from suffering a major stroke, and a few months later, he also overcame prostate cancer.

Murray says: “As I look back over my 35 years of practice, I realize that I’ve received many benefits without knowing it at the moment. No matter what, we will always maintain the pioneer and stand-alone spirit, practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, protecting the Gohonzon and following the guidance of SGI President Ikeda and other SGI leaders.”