

**ALAMEDA, CALIF., MEMBERS JOIN CITY PARADE
SENDING A MESSAGE OF JOY AND NONVIOLENCE
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Harbor Island Chapter in Alameda, Calif., participated in the annual Alameda Mayor's Fourth of July Parade. Members walked alongside the float to smile, wave to the crowd and pass out pamphlets with information about the SGI-USA and the Victory Over Violence Youth Summit, which will take place on Oct. 22 in Oakland, Calif.

Young dancers brightened the street with their joy and energy, and young people proudly carried the banners and flags proclaiming we were the SGI-USA. Everywhere along the parade route, people's faces lit up when we passed by. They waved to us, asked for pamphlets, wanted to know who we were and got up and danced with the music. The SGI-USA exploded like a fireworks display in the streets of Alameda. Our unabated joy was contagious.

SGI-USA members have always been a vital part of this San Francisco East Bay community through our day-to-day lives in Alameda. As individuals making contributions to our city, we have been spotlighted in the newspapers and local television channels. But we had never let our community know us as an organization of lay Buddhists. Our joining the Fourth of July Parade was like coming out of the closet proclaiming, "We are SGI-USA."

We are often reminded that Buddhism is win or lose. When something has never been done before, like a bunch of Buddhists getting itself into a long-standing, local tradition like the parade, at what point could we declare it a success? Was it in just entering the parade? Was it in getting through all the obstacles that cropped up in preparation before the event? When could we say we had won?

It was clear to us once the parade began and we were representing the SGI-USA to our community, that our victory was celebrating our Buddhism in front of 100,000 people.

Everyone who joined in that day agreed with John Wiitala, an exemplary jazz musician and long-time Alameda resident. "That was the most fun I've ever had playing with the SGI," he said when he got off the float that had traveled five miles through the streets of Alameda, carrying enthusiastic, energetic and outstanding SGI-USA musicians.

Our radiating presence in the parade said: "This is who we are. We are Buddhists. We are unshakably happy." For five miles on the long, hot parade route, our energy and enthusiasm for who we are did not stop. We celebrated our Buddhism nonstop, no matter if there was a crowd lining the streets or one person sitting alone.

Freedom of religion is an inalienable right won with the independence of this country, and it is that freedom that allowed Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to come to the United States. For the first time, it hit me why the SGI-USA's presence in the Fourth of July Parade was so significant. In securing the peace of the land, we in the SGI play a key role. Every once in a while, our vitality and the vibrant truth of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo must be seen and heard in the place where we live. Like a liberty bell, we must ring out.