

'BUILDING BRIDGES OF PEACE' IN MINNESOTA
BY ANGEL LATTERELL
MINNESOTA CORRESPONDENT

On July 30, more than 300 people attended the Minnesota Area Culture Festival at the Labor Union Hall in St. Paul, Minn. A total of nearly 100 participants worked to support the performance and the accompanying art and information exhibits, as well as the pre-performance picnic.

The theme "Building Bridges of Peace" was decided upon to challenge the participants to build new bonds within the community. Their hope was that the culture festival would be a way to bring the ideals of the SGI to the public of Minnesota and help each individual show growth in his or her life.

The audience was treated to the story of a choir whose bus breaks down in a deserted lot. Negativity, in the form of a grumbling man living inside a trash can, tries to create disunity among them, but is thwarted because one person stands up to take action and responsibility for her environment. "I must understand that change starts with myself," she said, "my ability to communicate, my ability to facilitate dialogue, my ability not to hate and my ability to create change in my environment." Her words struck the hearts of each person on stage and the ugly lot is transformed into a place of joy and beauty. Even the unhappy trash can man learned that he too has the power to transform his environment.

Everyone left the festival feeling encouraged and guests left asking questions about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. For those who had worked for months behind the scenes, the feeling of accomplishment was strong. They introduced people to the SGI. They united to create value. They learned about themselves and proved to themselves that by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they could accomplish anything.