

**ALBANY CHAPTER SHARES VOV PROJECT
BY BRYANT WILLIAMS
ALBANY, N.Y., CORRESPONDENT**

It started with a simple comment in April made by a local youth member: "I wish they would bring the Victory Over Violence Exhibit here one day." That was the beginning of a four-month campaign led by the youth of Albany Chapter. After reading the March 17 *World Tribune*, they talked about VOV at the monthly youth meeting. They decided they would bring the exhibit to upstate New York for the "Tuesday In The Park" festival on Aug. 1 in Schenectady and for the African American Arts Festival at the Empire State Plaza in Albany on Aug. 5.

It was suggested they do a car wash and yard sale to raise the money to pay for the exhibit costs, covering shipping and materials. As soon as the determination was made, the obstacles began. During the entire month of May, it rained every week. So, the youth came up with a new plan: "A Bake Sale For Peace."

Members donated money for supplies and the youth baked cakes, cookies, muffins and even some special items. Many chapter members took orders at their jobs for baked goods and the youth baked them that Saturday. At the World Peace Prayer Meeting that Sunday, they set up a table and sold every item.

The next week, they held another bake sale in front of the local WalMart store. When a customer would purchase an item, they would receive a VOV flier and bookmark and have the opportunity to sign the Pledge for Peace. Between the two sales, more than enough money was raised and many people found about VOV.

Although this started out as a youth activity, members from all four divisions worked together to make it a success. The entire chapter chanted for the success of the event.

The public relations committee for the event made the determination to have 2,000 pledges signed at both events. The committee met with the mayor of Schenectady, Al Jurzynski, to show him the "Quest for Peace" video and talk about the Victory Over Violence project. He was so moved by the video, he asked to sign the first Pledge for Peace for the city of Schenectady. The mayor gave his full support when the youth explained that they wanted to work with the school district to share the VOV project.

More than 20,000 attended the "Tuesday in the Park" festival on Aug. 1 in Schenectady. All the members greeted people and explained to them about the SGI and VOV. The booth stayed busy the entire day. Many people would come back with family and friends, telling them they really needed to sign a pledge.

The following weekend at the African American Arts Festival in Albany, members drove from Binghamton, Hudson, Ithaca and New Jersey to support the booth. Once again, the message of peace was well received by the community. One member spent the day riding his bike around getting pledges signed and bringing people back to the booth. The energy from the booth permeated the entire section it was in. Of those who sign the pledge, some had experiences in their own life with violence, others had family members and friends going through tough situation and some just wanted to be a part of change in the world.

Between the two events, there were 1,300 pledges signed — and the members were still not finished.

On Aug. 19, a seminar was held on Buddhism and Victory Over Violence at the Schenectady Public Library. The guests were treated to presentations and dialogue about nonviolence. The second part of the seminar was about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism

and the SGI-USA. It was a wonderful way to finish off the August VOV Campaign.

This activity reached out to many inactive members, giving them a fresh new look at the SGI-USA, and gave the youth a tremendous sense of accomplishment. In the end, the members of Albany Chapter grew much closer.