

**SOKA UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA: MAKING IT HAPPEN
BY MATILDA BUCK
SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER**

After recently exploring Soka University of America's campus-in-progress, surrounded by the roar of tractors and drills, I was bowled over by the scope of this institution—by the magnitude of its goals and by its attention to the smallest detail.

But what really resonates for me is this: Because of Soka University, we—every single one of us—have an opportunity to *be part* of the future. We have a concrete way to support the future, to help the next generation shape its view of the world and especially its view of world peace.

I was reminded of a comment I read a few years ago in the July 8, 1991, *Time* magazine: “The primary reason youngsters need to study multiple cultures is to learn how to develop multiple perspectives. This capacity is essential to developing intelligence. We have, I hope, elevated the question from a political debate concerning whose history to teach to the question of how to enable youngsters to use broad, often conflicting bodies of information to arrive at sound judgments” (Edmund Gordon, Yale University professor of psychology).

This comment brings home to me our essential need to develop broad understanding and flexibility. This is true in every aspect of daily life, whether we are a college student or a corporate executive or a parent. I believe this is a key ingredient in building peace. And that's why Soka University is a natural extension of our commitment to kosen-rufu.

Throughout my own education, it was the rare teacher who cared enough to reach out and encourage me, but what a difference such people made—I will remember them to the end of my life. In my fifth- and sixth-grade years, it was Mr. Boswell's extra effort that gave me hope. I owe him a great debt.

Now, at Soka University, I have a chance to thank Mr. Boswell. Maybe even enable a student to find his or her own Mr. Boswell. What a great feeling!

In October, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the SGI-USA. Forty years ago, it was SGI President Ikeda's unyielding conviction and sense of responsibility to respond to the prophecy of the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin's intent. He did not depend on some clever plan or strategy. Instead, he nurtured the existing, fragile membership with the utmost care and trust.

Take a moment to think about where we will be 40 years from now, and the effect our actions today will have. We can, each of us, “nurture the existing membership with the utmost care and trust” through our efforts to support Soka University of America.

The problems that our children will face—technical, social, and so on—are different from the problems many of us faced in our youth. That's why it is so important to fully empower these students, these future leaders, to help them be flexible, to help them become individuals who can think from many angles. Multiple perspectives and flexibility—these are our insurance for the future.

Gail Thomas, dean of faculty at SUA, agrees. “Flexibility is the key to openness,” she said. “I'm so excited about our multi-disciplinary approach.

“We see today a separation in the workplace—people acquire technical skills, but not people skills like teamwork, getting along, being able to think in broader terms. This is humanism and, ultimately, this is what Buddhism teaches. SUA recognizes that humanism is one of the most important hallmarks of a leader—people who have compassion, the

ability to think broadly and who care about others.”

In November, we have the opportunity to contribute in a concrete way to the SUA scholarship fund. This is money that will go directly to Soka University, earmarked specifically to help with tuition scholarships. In other words, our contributions will make it possible for many students to experience the challenge and the wonder of Soka education.

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima said: “It is not a coincidence that, as a new century dawns, Soka University of America is opening in our country. Perhaps only in future generations, decades or even centuries from now, will the significance of this time be fully appreciated” (September *Living Buddhism*, p. 5).

Nor is it a coincidence that we are the very people who can contribute to Soka University of America. Perhaps we are not individually donating an entire building or endowing a chair, but I am grateful that I can, in a meaningful, concrete way, help enable a student to be part of this wonderful new venture.