

SAN FRANCISCO: 'WE CAN SHAPE THE FUTURE'
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With the awareness that through our own strenuous efforts we can shape the future, SGI-USA members in San Francisco began planning and brainstorming for the 40th anniversary of SGI President Ikeda's first visit abroad in 1960. This historic trip paved the way for the SGI we know today, since before 1960 there was no organization outside of Japan.

In October 1960, at the foot of a statue of Columbus on San Francisco's Telegraph Hill, President Ikeda remarked that his visit would in time "be remembered as a day of profound significance in the history of our movement." Comparing the voyages of Columbus with the contingent from Japan, he further explained, "We are engaged in a far nobler undertaking, for we are striving to create here on earth a new world where indestructible happiness and eternal peace reign supreme."

This year, the San Francisco members wanted to recall this historical event and inspire themselves by reviewing the SGI president's efforts and capturing his vision toward kosen-rufu, so that all the members can deepen their own sense of responsibility.

The weekend schedule included an introduction meeting on Oct. 5, a commemorative meeting on Oct. 7 attended by SGI-USA Women's Leader Matilda Buck and later a Jr. High/High School dance. On Oct. 8, a sports festival took place, followed by a barbecue and various performances throughout the San Francisco Culture Center and Ikeda Auditorium.

At the Oct. 5 introduction meeting, members shared their feelings from reading President Ikeda's recent poem "Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!" Josh Volper, 18, expressed his determination to start his own business to finance his goal of attending Soka University in Japan. One section of President Ikeda's poem that encouraged Josh reads:

*Whatever waves crash over me
I will know no fear!
Even if the lure of lethargy lies ahead,
my spirit, like the dawn,
will continue to shine radiantly.*

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Julie Hamada, a mother of three and a real estate agent, determined to double the amount she chants in the morning after reading the poem. As a result, she begins her day feeling like a racehorse raring to run and has revived many of the goals that had faded from sight. "Through this poem, I feel that President Ikeda is sharing his inner thoughts with us," she said.

Borrowing words from the poem, the "Three Baritones" presented their own version called "Eternal Dream," putting his words to the familiar music of "O Sole Mio." "This song is meant to help us make a determination toward our dreams 40 years from now," explained baritone Horus Tolson.

On Saturday, prior to the commemorative meeting, pioneer members posed beside a gigantic cake made for the occasion. After watching a video showing President Ikeda's accomplishments, listening to the brass band and hearing two members' experiences, SGI-USA Vice General Director Richard Yoshimachi expressed how fortunate we are to spend

our lives together with President Ikeda, and that by matching our lives with that of a mentor, our own lives will definitely develop.

In her words of encouragement, Mrs. Buck stated that to “live as pioneers is the most important thing. We should believe in our own Buddhahood and continue to move forward.”

Activities on Sunday were a culmination of the efforts of countless members exhibiting their talents. A sports festival was held at a nearby playground, featuring a softball game, basketball, a tug of war and relay races. Performances at the culture center consisted of four dance groups, 16 musical groups, poetry reading, comedy acts, a magic show, circus workshop and face painting for kids of all ages.

At the same time, a picnic and festival was held in the Redwood Coast Area to the north. Other activities to further celebrate the 40th anniversary of President Ikeda’s historic visit include an Oct. 15 meeting at San Jose State University, a Victory Over Violence celebration in Oakland, and a meeting at Sacramento State University, both on Oct. 22.