

**WORLD PEACE FESTIVAL LIGHTS UP INDIANA
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Looking toward the future, with a song in their hearts, the members of Indiana Area held their first ever World Peace Festival on Oct. 8. Held outdoors around the Indiana Community Center, the afternoon weather was an unseasonably chilly 50 degrees and mostly overcast. Despite these obstacles however, festival participants determined to warm the hearts of all who attended.

Commemorating the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Indiana Community Center and the 40th anniversary of SGI President Ikeda's first trip to the United States, the festival was inspired by President Ikeda's recent poem "Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!" It incorporated the vision of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth emerging, like the phoenix bird, rising from the ashes of an old, past life. This image inspired the design of the festival logo showing a phoenix, together with the state of Indiana, rising up and flying into a new era.

Production committee members creating the performances used excerpts from the poem as a mission statement for the festival. They also wrote and recorded a theme song for the event, "The Indiana Sun." For the many members who struggled to even believe that an event like this could happen in Indiana, this song became a source of inspiration, as well as a spirited means of inviting people to the event.

As preparations got closer to the day of the festival, members found themselves challenging unprecedented obstacles and encouraging one another in ways much deeper than they had in the past. Many commented on how much they truly appreciated one another's friendships in ways that they had forgotten about through the years. Over and over, the importance of chanting first in overcoming difficulties became evident. Through the example of the youth standing up in their districts, men's and women's division members "emerged" to help support the stage crew, carnival and booth construction, food preparation and other behind-the-scenes efforts. Youth also worked hard to develop a strong behind-the-scenes movement.

The festival began with a carnival, consisting of various games, clowns, etc., as well as information booths on the SGI, Soka University of America and the Victory Over Violence project. Booth participation was also opened to groups outside the SGI who have similar purposes in promoting peace, education and culture throughout society. Participants included the Julian Center, a crisis intervention center for women, and the Peace and Learning Center, an Indianapolis organization dedicated to helping middle school children engage in conflict resolution in a non-aggressive manner.

Charlie Wyles, of the Peace and Learning Center commented that the festival had such a warm environment, and that he was so pleased to be there. He mentioned that he definitely wants to work with SGI-USA in the future.

Members and guests were then treated to a live show. Opening with a beautiful ballet solo set to President Ikeda's poem, other performances included a West African drumming piece by the Jr. High and High School members, a staged opera duet, Women's Chorus and a professional jazz combo.

Byakuren members, showing their spirit to support members with quick action, served hot chocolate and tea to performers and audience members during the show. Our featured special guests, the Minyo Dancers of Indiana, shared their beautiful traditions of Japanese

culture and dance. Minyo had performed in the past within a small space inside the Indiana Community Center, but now they had a large, beautiful stage to do their full performance. They were thrilled to be able to do a complete set of dances, including a number where the Boys and Girls Group and other performers joined.

“Through the festival, I learned a lot about myself,” said 17-year-old Caisy Lun, “and it has motivated me to challenge my dream of attending Soka University of America in 2001.”

After the show, members and guests alike lingered around the community center for hours, basking in the glow of a warm, family atmosphere. Many attending the festival, some of whom had been away from the SGI-USA for some time, commented on the friendly, intimate feeling of the event. They were excited to experience what they felt were dramatic changes in the spirit of the organization. Some made arrangements that very day to reestablish their Buddhist practice.

“Everyone was involved in the festival and helped out until its final victory,” commented Shinichi Hisano, 21, who performed in the drumming group. “As a result of this festival, I learned that the members in Indiana can work together.”

Betty Klein and Barbara Smith also contributed to this story.