

**BREAKING GROUND IN PHOENIX
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SGI-USA celebrates the groundbreaking of the new Phoenix Culture Center and gives part of the new property to the City of Phoenix for permanent access to a mountain trail.

SGI-USA members in the Phoenix area had a double celebration April 21 — one for the neighbors near the new Phoenix Culture Center and one for themselves. SGI-USA's commitment to being a good neighbor was the message throughout.

The dedication of the eastern portion of the property, where the new culture center will stand, assured neighbors permanent access to a horse trail leading into the Phoenix Mountains Preserve. A ground-breaking ceremony for the new SGI-USA Phoenix Culture Center followed. The new center will seat 250, have classrooms and offices, and should be completed in the fall.

Nearby residents were delighted as Al Albergate, SGI-USA director of community relations, handed to City of Phoenix representatives the deed to the eastern edge of the property that includes the horse trail. Then the crowd gathered under a white canopy for the ground-breaking. Red, blue and yellow table umbrellas and a stage backdrop in the same SGI colors stood out against the brown and rust hues of Squaw Peak, a Phoenix landmark.

The Phoenix Mountains Preserve is treasured for its beauty as well as being a wonderful place to hike, bicycle and ride horses. When the former property owner, a saddle club, put the parcel on the market two years ago, a fence was built blocking access to the trail. Neighbors were angry. The donation of the trail area to ensure permanent access solves the problem.

At the ground-breaking, Al Albergate gave neighbors a brief history of SGI, from Shakyamuni to Nichiren, from Makiguchi and Toda to President Ikeda, all the while emphasizing the SGI's commitment to world peace, culture and education. A member of the contracted architectural firm told the neighbors that the new, one-story, 6,000 square-foot building will blend in with the neighboring architecture and will even be lower than some of the nearby homes. A representative from the general contractor discussed controlling dust during construction and other issues.

Local SGI-USA leaders Susan Brewer and Briz Ogburn outlined the activities and events that will take place in the new center and the variety of community issues the members take part in. A Q-and-A session followed, addressing traffic concerns and other issues.

Susan and another member, Ed Casper, had walked the neighborhood in recent weeks, knocking on doors to get residents' thoughts and concerns. An invitation to the dedication and ground breaking went to 90 neighbors. Several called George Nakamura, Arizona Region men's leader, with their comments. One caller, Mike Hull, was enthusiastic about SGI-USA joining the neighborhood. Mike worked in Japan for a Japanese company for five years, speaks Japanese and has a friend who learned Japanese at Soka University in Tokyo. The son of the current Arizona governor, Mike offered to speak at the dedication and addressed the crowd in both Japanese and English.