

**FLORIDA FESTIVAL EXPRESSES DIVERSITY
BY SHARON KAPLAN, MONICA LEMA AND JIM DREISBACH
FLORIDA CORRESPONDENTS**

On April 29, more than 2,000 SGI-USA members, guests and friends crowded the courtyard at the Florida Nature and Culture Center to celebrate the joy of diversity. WorldFeast 2001 afforded the opportunity for the 32 districts that comprise all of South Florida Region to create motifs of culture from all over the world.

Diversity is nothing new for this crossroads of the Americas. Two years earlier, the region held Diversity '99, which was a natural extension of the many cultures represented by the area. Many wondered if anything could top it.

This year, the festival planning committee had something different in mind. "We wanted to show the Buddhist idea of diversity," said Lucy DiCrescenzo, one of the event coordinators. "The focus was to make the district the building block of diversity. So we didn't ask the members to do what comes naturally—representing their own cultures. Instead we asked them to pick from a pre-selected list of countries and cultures. The idea was to allow people to expand their horizons, learn about other cultures and make new relationships."

How was each district going to teach the others about another culture? Through food. That's the reason for the name, WorldFeast. The main course was to discover the true native cuisine, how it is made and then serve one another a taste.

"Everybody in Costa Rica eats tortillas with sour cream and white cheese. We also made *agua dulce*, which is like Coca-Cola there," said Ligia Calviasti, a member of Fountainbleau District who hails from Guatemala. "I talked to a friend of mine from Costa Rica and we researched the country using the Internet. We also contacted the Costa Rican Consulate in Miami to gather information. We even have fresh flowers in our booth that were flown directly to Miami from Costa Rica. My main effort was to try teach the new members how to gain benefit by participating in this activity. The most important thing was that everybody did something."

Beyond the culinary delights, the event was judged a success that was well done. For many who attended, the festival brought them back home.

Frances Haddock, a guest, exclaimed upon arriving, "Look! There's Puerto Rico!" Shortly thereafter, Frances, a native of Puerto Rico, was on the stage dancing to salsa music.

During the three-hour festival, there was hardly enough time to sample all the food because of the great variety of music and dancing. African story telling, jazz, Brazilian piano, powerful original songs, folk dancers from Bolivia and Peru, thundering taiko drums and an inspiring performance of "Ode to Joy" by the Ikeda Rainbow Chorus were just some of the performances that entertained and inspired.

Guests were able to gain a greater understanding of the teachings of true humanism through the video theater in the Miami Community Center. In addition, in one of the community center rooms was an exhibit of visual art by both SGI-USA members and people in the community.

But by far the most valuable memory of the afternoon was the camaraderie and feeling of accomplishment that validated the activity.

"What a wonderful experience," said Loren, a new member and booth coordinator for Sunrise District. "We spent a lot of time chanting just for the success of this festival. We felt that it brought us together as a group. We also found out that we had an extremely talented group. Some could bake, some made costumes, others decorations. We fit together like a jigsaw puzzle."