

**EMBRACING DIFFERENCES IN PORTLAND
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SGI-USA members in Oregon joyfully celebrated May 3, Soka Gakkai Day, at a local middle school, with a spirited meeting of performances and experiences by the youth. The celebration's theme was "Creating True Justice and Unity Through Embracing Our Differences." To the Oregon members, this meant they would stand together in harmonious solidarity, each giving full play to their unique capabilities and making the cause to create an ideal human community.

A tremendous amount of effort went into this event: many practices and rehearsals; coordination of lighting, sound and stage crews working behind the scenes; and lots of daimoku to surmount all the obstacles that come with such a supreme effort. The diversity of performances brought into bold relief the essence of the theme: "The Impossible Dream," performed by Lisa Craner; "In this World," created and performed by Steve Baianu; the Jazz Band; pianist Jennifer Moe; and the Chorus.

The Taiko Drum Corps performed "Kodo Juku." This amazing group originated in Portland two years ago, springing from the determination of one young man. At that time, a cluster of youth came together and studied the basic elements of taiko drumming. They designed, built and polished the beautiful taiko drums that graced the stage.

More youth performed in a skit that illustrated the significance of the Seven Bells. The youth gave their determinations and goals—how they will contribute to society and shoulder the responsibility for kosen-rufu. Elizabeth Dawson confidently proclaimed, "I'm going to be a senator!" The Boys and Girls Group joined the youthful assembly on stage, reflecting the bright future of the SGI-USA's movement.

A dance was choreographed and performed by the Dazzling Unity Soul Sisters dance team. Like the drum corps, this young women's group was created from the determination and vision of one young woman in Portland four years ago. The eight young women embodied the theme of the celebration—youth with widely diverse backgrounds unifying for the sake of our shared and noble purpose of peace.

"There is a new wave of youth in Oregon who want to really do things in the community and help the SGI grow," said Lisa Craner. "They are learning through experience to communicate and understand each other."

The remarks of Jim Cheek, Oregon Area young men's leader, lifted the entire assembly. "SGI President Ikeda's desire is for all people to be happy," he said. "And my desire is for every single person in this room to be happy. The writer George Eliot said, 'It's never too late to become what you might have been.' That little voice, dream, desire that you have, that you've covered up—now is the time to do it."

In a message to every member, Oregon Area Women's Leader Debbie Liptan spoke about the significant milestone of May 3, 2001. "This is a point of departure for all of us," she said. "Many of us are facing huge challenges and major changes in our lives and are making significant efforts to reawaken our dreams. From this day, life is different. What a glorious moment. What a beautiful day!"