

**'WAY OF YOUTH' INSPIRES NEW YORK CELEBRATION  
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Blossoming, youthful smiles filled the SGI-USA's New York Culture Center on April 29, as 400 New York junior high and high school division members and their guests attended The Way of Youth Celebration: A Celebration of Creativity and Friendship. The youth, with extensive four-divisional support, planned the event. It was an opportunity for young members to invite their friends, family and neighborhood youth organizations to the Culture Center to learn about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Passing through a balloon-decorated facade, participants entered an atmosphere charged with music, art and laughter. They immediately heard: "Hello! Is this your first time here?," as youthful tour guides greeted guests and proudly took them on an orientation tour.

New tour groups left from the lobby every five minutes to accommodate the hundreds of teenagers who poured into the event. Each room of the center was arranged to create a welcoming feeling. The walls of the center cheered guests with displays of paintings and Chinese calligraphy created by teenage members.

Guests could choose to participate in numerous discussion groups and creative workshops. Junior high, high school and student division members led the small discussion groups. Topics were taken directly from SGI President Ikeda's book *The Way of Youth*. They included: staying true to yourself, friendship, confidence, dreams and goals, and the bigger picture. Participants were invited to share their personal experiences, concerns and dreams.

"I had to have extra confidence because I was leading a discussion on confidence," said Melody Crowell, an 18-year old college freshman and student division member. "I have never done this before. This was a great training. I was very happy to see so many people enjoy expressing themselves."

After the discussion sessions, the teen guests participated in "creativity workshops." These workshops originated in 1996 under the vision and direction of dancers Bill Thompson and Michon Peacock. They started out as a small dance class with less than a dozen teenage participants. Currently, the workshops attract hundreds of teenagers each month to the Culture Center and have grown to include performance groups in Hip-Hop dance, break dance, modern dance, acting, voice, art, orchestra/jazz band, percussion and video production.

Bill and Michon saw the workshops as a way to develop and nurture the creative spirit of young members and by emphasizing Buddhism and art, raise the next generation of youth leaders. The success of the Way of Youth Celebration was a clear manifestation of their years of dedication to developing the New York junior high and high school division.

After the workshops, everyone gathered in the main room for performances. As each youth group took the stage, cheers and applause were ceaseless. All guests were then invited to participate in the upcoming Northeastern Zone family youth festival to be held in New York City this summer.

Shan Sarafin, SGI-USA high school division leader, gave final encouragement. He stressed the importance of hard work, never giving up and always seeking one's mission. "Today, I want you to think about your mission on the way home," he said. "There is something that only you can do in your life. It is very, very difficult to find it; but never

forget your immeasurable potential.”

“I was very moved by the welcoming atmosphere,” commented 19-year-old Anthony Scipio, a guest. “Everyone was encouraging each other. I have never experienced this kind of thing before.”

Erica Ramos, also a teenage guest, expressed surprise at her encounter with the SGI, noting: “I have never been with this many happy people. This was so much fun!”

For Sansho Scott, a high school division member, the event even inspired him to make a determination for the upcoming festival: “By July, I am determined to increase my grades at school. And of course, I want to invite as many of my friends as possible to the festival.”

*The Way of Youth is available at your favorite neighborhood bookstore or online at [www.middlewaypress.com](http://www.middlewaypress.com).*