

**WESTERN YOUTH GATHER FOR SUMMIT
BY MONA ODIMA
TUCSON, ARIZ., CORRESPONDENT**

From June 29 through July 1, the SGI-USA's Western Zone held its first youth summit on the campus of the University of Arizona in Tucson. More than 300 youth were welcomed from Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma.

The youth stayed in the campus dorms; there were a big field to sit and talk in, two sand volleyball courts and a basketball court within walking distance. There was a Gohonzon room in each dorm, open at all times. Morning and evening gongyo were held in an amphitheater-style auditorium, which was also the location of meetings and the talent show.

Before the study sessions started, SGI-USA High School Division Leader Jomo Thorne talked about the life experiences that brought him back to his Buddhist practice. It was an emotional moment for many youth, since most could relate to his stories.

The first and second study sessions were divided into three groups: 1) junior high and high school divisions; 2) student division; and 3) young women's and young men's divisions. Each group talked about the "The Path of Self-Mastery" and "The Path of Dialogue and Tolerance," based on SGI President Ikeda's book *For the Sake of Peace*. The three groups then came together for the third session, "The Path of Community."

The talent show on Saturday night was incredible. There were more than 20 performances, including bands, soloists, dances, skits and poetry. Performers and audience members alike gave all of their energy to make the show unforgettable. At one point, the whole auditorium was dancing around and the room was filled with love and warmth. John O'Brien of San Antonio said, "The youth summit confirmed for me that the SGI is a family."

Travis Hasall of Phoenix stated, "I found the youth summit beneficial because I had my peer group around me and we related to each other's difficulties."

Abhay Ghai of San Antonio commented: "I now find myself to be a more compassionate person than ever before, more concerned about others. This summit was revolutionary, filled with excitement, and it will bring more growth and fortune into the future."

The summit concluded with an open-mic session, where many thanked the Byakuren and Soka Group members for their time and efforts behind the scenes to make the summit possible. A lot of youth also touched on the struggles and obstacles they overcame in preparation for the event.

Everyone was in agreement that the next youth summit should be longer. The weekend flew by and, before anyone knew it, everything was ending. Parting is such sweet sorrow, but everyone will meet again.