

**SGI-USA FAMILY YOUTH FESTIVALS
NORTHERN OHIO CREATING BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP
BY MARK JENKINS AND M. LAVORA PERRY
NO. OHIO CORRESPONDENTS**

On a sunny Saturday, Aug. 25, an unprecedented 600-plus SGI-USA members, relatives and friends joined civic leaders, educators and local residents at the SGI-USA Northern Ohio Community Center on Cleveland's west side for a "Community Festival of Peace: Creating Bonds of Friendship." The "Gandhi, King, Ikeda: Building a Legacy of Peace" and Victory Over Violence exhibitions and their accompanying videos were viewed during the festival.

During her keynote address in the morning, anthropologist Rachael Chapman from Case Western Reserve University envisioned a society in which systems are in place that support the flourishing of each person's life. She remarked that SGI President Ikeda "teaches us the sacredness of human bonds that make us one family, our sacred potential for human harmony and the sacredness of our place in the universe."

The morning's second featured speaker was Clevelander and Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who stressed how important it is for each person to "think peace, speak peace and act peacefully" in every moment toward creating a nonviolent world. Referring to the community center, a former school building that has been beautifully renovated by SGI-USA members, the congressman asked everyone to "thank [the] SGI for reclaiming this center for the community."

Rep. Kucinich then held a question-and-answer session on his proposed bill, H.R.2459, to establish a United States Department of Peace. If the bill is approved, Rep. Kucinich said, then a U.S. Secretary of Peace, a person who is an expert in the field of nonviolent conflict-resolution, would be "at the table whenever there is a [national level] discussion about using force to deal with violence."

During the Q-and-A session, 15-year-old Sean Eddy and 10-year-old Kyle Sutton, both SGI-USA youth members, shared their insights. Eddy commented on his attempt to "analyze" all sides of a conflict, and Sutton expressed his belief that "people can solve a problem any other way than just shooting someone, yelling at them or calling them stupid."

A youth-only dialogue was then held for 12-17 year olds. More than 40 youth participated in six small groups facilitated by young people who had received special training on conducting dialogue sessions. They discussed the impact of passive and aggressive violence on their lives, focusing on how they could make a difference.

The day then blossomed into a fun-filled celebration complete with food, games and performances by and for all ages. Fifteen Boys and Girls Group members held two lively dance performances. Festivities included face painting, origami, a Japanese tea ceremony, balloon races, the World Peace Rhythm Project (multiethnic, African-style percussionists) and lots of singing and dancing.

Cleveland Mayor Michael R. White and U.S. Senator George V. Voinovich of Ohio each officially recognized the events. The City of Cleveland proclamation from Mayor White read in part, "I...extend our best wishes to Daisaku Ikeda and all the young people in our community and around the world who continue to share the values of peace, culture and education." In his commendation, Senator Voinovich praised the SGI-USA for the Gandhi, King, Ikeda exhibition, which he said chronicles "the lives of...three of the 20th century's most compelling leaders for justice and nonviolent social change."

A local TV station aired a news segment on the festival events. At day's end, many SGI-USA members reported returning home with a renewed sense of the interconnectedness of all life and a deeper understanding of their own unique mission to create a better world.