



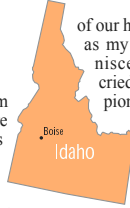
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# First Center Opens in Idaho

By LEAH HOPKINS AND STACIE DAGRES  
Boise, Idaho

I remember moving from Las Vegas in 1976 where 13 SGI-USA districts overflowed with activities and people, to Twin Falls, Idaho, where the closest district was 138 miles west and there were no other active members," shared Frontier Area Vice Women's Leader Sharon Barnes at a ceremony celebrating the much-anticipated opening of the SGI-USA Boise Activity Center. "I would sit in front of the Gohonzon and literally cry for new members."

Recalling golden memories of her pioneering days, she continued: "And who can forget the traveling! A hundred miles to pick up a member and come back to the district meeting; nine hours to Spokane for a chapter meeting and 12 hours back because of a blizzard; taking a plane to Spokane to catch a car ride to Seattle; cramming 22 people with luggage into one van, after the second one broke down on the road—yes, traveling is a big part



of our history. The other night, as my husband and I reminisced, we laughed and cried—especially for those pioneers no longer with us.

We remembered those early years where each person at the meeting wrapped up in a blanket to keep warm. Each of us was filled with the determination to someday have an activity center in Idaho. I've been very fortunate on this journey to be accompanied by all of you, the pioneer members who always knew this day would come. As the cow said to the Pennsylvania farmer, "Thank you for a warm hand on a cold morning."

The new activity center, the first in Idaho, serves members in the SGI-USA's Frontier Area, which covers Idaho and Montana. Members there saw a long-awaited dream come to fruition after many years of dedication to establishing kosen-rufu in their community. The local SGI-USA membership is comprised of people with great determination, patience and vision who celebrated a great triumph as well as a fresh

new start. Members like Mike Gray and his wife, Sharon, who for 30 years have tirelessly promoted SGI-USA activities in Idaho; Jon Purvis who has spread Nichiren Buddhism in Boise, together with his family, for decades; and Earl and Betsy Cook, who moved back to Betsy's hometown in 1996. Boise State Street Women's District Leader Deb Hammel, who moved with her husband, Jeff, from Austin, Texas, said, "I already feel more determined—now, we can meet in larger groups."

Boise West/Meridian & Eagle District Women's Leader Marie Sylvester, said, "I think opening this center means advancement for the whole movement." Marie moved to Pocatello, Idaho, 20 years ago, opened her home for all those years, and traveled to Boise in all kinds of weather. Five years ago, she joined daughter Cindy Spencer and granddaughter Jennifer in Boise.

The SGI-USA Boise Activity Center is located in southwestern Idaho's Treasure Valley, where the landscape ranges from fertile valleys to alpine forests, from deep canyons to desert mountains. With



Boise City Councilwoman Elaine Clegg, center, cuts the ribbon at the activity center opening ceremony, Sept. 25.

a population of about 250,000, Boise is the largest metropolitan center for a radius of 300 miles. Local members had searched all over Boise for 20 months to find a location for the center. Meanwhile, all the members gathered to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo regularly to support.

At the opening ceremony, SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima officiated the ribbon-cutting ceremony with Boise City Councilwoman Elaine Clegg, and Frontier Area leaders Ida Jones and Earl Cook. A local TV station covered the event and aired it that evening and again the next morning.

Councilwoman Clegg expressed her delight in Boise's growing diversity, saying that this activity center is a very welcome addition. Justin Terry, Idaho Human Rights Education Center board member, shared his vision for working together with the SGI-USA to promote peace, culture and education in the Treasure Valley.

Also at the opening, two new SGI-USA members received the Gohonzon, and two other members were recognized for their dedicated efforts in spreading Nichiren Buddhism in Pocatello and Boise. Area Leader Earl Cook said: "Frontier Area members are determined to make our mentor's dream a reality.

And we're at our starting point to challenge the frontier within each of our lives to achieve our mentor's dream of world peace."

In a message for the Activity Center opening, SGI President Ikeda wrote: "This treasure castle will also serve as a forum for friendship and dialogue to deepen bonds of trust with many members of the community, and to make contributions to the community as a whole. Please put friendship and dialogue with the community first. In this way, expand the circles of understanding and friendship toward the SGI as you continue to advance."

The SGI-USA now has a visible presence in the most densely populated area of Idaho. Members are excited at the prospect of partnering with other organizations centered on peace, culture and education.

In fact, Idaho Human Rights Education Center board member, Justin Terry, has already invited the SGI to conduct a Victory Over Violence workshop during the annual weeklong Martin Luther King Celebration, held annually for the past 15 years at Boise State University.

Just as the Snake River winds and flows through Idaho, so will Nichiren Buddhism. **WT**



SGI-USA Frontier Area members celebrate the opening of their new activity center in Boise, Idaho.

**SGI-USA Boise Activity Center**  
2404 S. Orchard St., Suite 750, Boise, ID 83705  
Tel: (208) 336-4684 Fax: (208) 336-4704

## Visiting the Human Rights Memorial



SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima and local SGI-USA members (center) tour the Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial. Idaho Human Rights Education Center board member Justin Terry (right), explains that his Center donated the memorial to the City of Boise in 2002. Visitors can climb a narrow stairway to view a life-sized bronze statue of 13-year old Anne peering out of her attic window (left). Lawns, wandering paths, waterfalls and pools surround a Human Rights Wall containing more than 60 quotations from human rights leaders, the complete text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as selections from Anne Frank's diary.

