

The One That Started It All

Denver, April 27—Snow-capped mountains towered above crystalline Ferril Lake as Denver City Forester Judith O'Connor, the mayor's representative, read a proclamation naming April 27 "15th Annual Cherry Tree Planting Day": "Over the last 15 years, SGIUSA members and SGI President and Mrs. Ikeda have donated to the people of Denver more than 1,000 Ikeda Cherry Trees planted along Cherry Creek corridor to raise humanity's relationship to the environment and contribute to the beauty of the Queen City of the Plains."

The SGI-USA presented a friendship plaque to the mayor giving him the title of honorary chairperson of the project in recognition of his support of the SGI-USA's efforts. Ms. O'Connor accepted for him. "When I drive down Speer Boulevard, and see the cherry trees in bloom," she said, "it brings such joy to my heart. And I think of the incredible gift you give to our community."

"Planting cherry trees is like producing life," President Ikeda wrote in his message. SGI-USA Vice General Director Brian Matsuo added, "This morning, we determined to plant trees for 100 years—we have 85 years to go!"

Fifteen years ago, city officials discouraged this project. They were convinced the imported Yoshino, Weeping and North Star cherry trees from Oregon wouldn't survive in Colorado, since others had previously tried and all the trees died. To survive at this high elevation, the trees require constant care and must be planted at the proper depth. In the winter, to protect them from freezing, the trees must be carefully wrapped in cardboard. Of the more than 1,000 trees planted over the years, an astonishing 70 percent have survived. Witnessing the care the SGI-USA members provide, the city is now very supportive and even funds the project.

Over the years, the local SGI-USA leaders have used the cherry trees as an example to encourage the members, saying that caring for these trees is similar to caring for new members. In both cases, "after care" is as vital as planting the seed.

This activity has become very popular, because, although it's hard, it's fun. Youth and adults both enjoy it. And the Denver members' example has encouraged other SGI-USA members to embark on similar projects, like in the previous stories. —Irlene Owada