

More than \$5 Million Raised in 2020



Contd. on Page 2

Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Families & Friends:

Bhagiratha, an ancestor of Lord Ram, is known to have brought the sacred river Ganga to earth from the heavens. Bhagiratha leaves his throne and dedicates his life to achieving this task and faces several difficulties realizing his goal. The great king finally succeeds and any effort that needs extraordinary dedication and perseverance is termed "Bhagirathan Effort" in India from time immemorial, and the headstream of the Ganga is called "Bhagirathi".

Sewa's work to help the community combat the COVID-19 pandemic reminds me of this ancient story from the Mahabharata, the timeless Hindu epic. Sewa volunteers defied many odds bringing over 500 dharmic organizations together to pool their volunteers and other resources to serve the community. Risking their lives, many Sewa volunteers went out of their way to help the needy and the stranded. The Sewa Ganga that flowed down through their efforts touched many lives, provided protective equipment to first responders, and gave fear-stricken families much-needed courage and support.

Across America, Sewa volunteers stitched masks, served meals, and distributed food to the homeless and low-income families. Their work made 2020 a year to remember for the nimble and vital response they put together to an unprecedented challenge. Recognizing Sewa's services during the pandemic, The Houston Chronicle rated Sewa International one of the top 25 local charities. With our single-digit administrative expenses, a top rating from Charity Navigator, and dedicated selfless volunteer force we are emerging as a charity of choice in the community.

Entrepreneurs, businessmen, and professionals from the Indian American community endorsed Sewa's work and helped Sewa's non-endowment donation soar to five million dollars for the second year in a row. Many wealthy donors evinced keen interest in Sewa and helped our endowment fund reach seven million dollars. This enables us to provide scholarships for deserving students and medical support to social workers in India.

COVID-19 vaccinations have started around the world, and 2021 is going to be a year to rebuild our economy and confidence. I trust that in the coming days Sewa will play a pivotal role in restoring normalcy to our lives and help us reach a new dawn.


Venkat Santhanaraman
Vice President, Finance 

More than \$5 Million Raised in 2020

With last minute appeals, and generous donations from supporters, Sewa International raised more than \$5 million in 2020. Sandeep Khadkekar, Vice President of Marketing and Fund Development, who had been urging volunteers to spread the word on social media and through personal contacts to do a last-minute push, announced ecstatically on December 31 -- "We are seeing donations every minute today -- not seen in past years," and said that between December 30 and 31 more than \$50,000 was donated.

"Sewa International has been at the forefront of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic this year, and we have been privileged to work with hundreds of organizations across the country in delivering food, medicines, money, and various kinds of help to those in need. These donations to Sewa pouring in now reflects both the good work we have done and the trust the people have in us," said Arun Kankani, President, Sewa International.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas: Indian Consulate in New York City Honors Sewa International



Pic: (Left to right) Mani Venkat, Rashmita Shanbhag and Rajesh Sharma of Sewa International

On January 9, Indian Consulates around the world were the venues for celebrating the annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention, which was held virtually this year. Organized over the past sixteen years in India, the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conventions enable the Government of India to acknowledge, celebrate, and honor the contributions of the Indian Diaspora. Given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was held virtually this year but allowed the Consul Generals in different parts of the world to invite guests and giveaway the awards. This year, several Indian American leaders and community organizations were recognized for their contributions towards strengthening US-India ties at the celebrations organized by the Indian Consulate in New York.

Among those honored at the event was Sewa International, which was at the forefront in offering help and support during the pandemic around the US as well as supporting efforts in India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the contributions made by the Indian diaspora community to aid the country's fight against the pandemic.

North Jersey Chapter Celebrates Sewa Milan

An estimated 400 guests gathered for the annual "Sewa Milan" event organized by the North Jersey Chapter of Sewa International on December 12, 2020. The meeting was a gathering of all the Sewa families and supporters for the evening to review the entire year and award LEAD participants for their service. Among the guests and attendees were volunteers, Sewa supporters and their families, and invited guests. Guests included US State Representative from New Jersey's 11th district, Mikie Sherill, Mayor of Parsippany-Troy Hills, Michael Soriano, and the Consul General of India in New York, Randhir Jaiswal. Sixty-three LEAD participants and two "Get Inspired" interns were given the US Presidential Awards and a pin to acknowledge their over 6,500 hours of service to the community.



Walk and Help YourSELF – Sewa’s Volunteers Walk the Talk

Sewa International volunteers in Atlanta, Houston, and the Bay Area in California welcomed the new year by walking five miles and resolving to stay fit and healthy. Organized as part of Sewa’s “Know Your Healthy SELF” initiative, the event encouraged participants to walk, run, or practice yoga wherever they were with no restriction on time or location. Over 150 people took part in the event on Saturday, January 2.

Encouraging Sewa families to embrace a positive attitude and work continuously for their and others’ health by motivating each other to exercise, Sewa International President Arun Kankani sought to draw the curtain on 2020 — a year that was challenging and stressful.



Pic: Dr. Prasad Garimella and other Sewa participants at the Atlanta walking event

Four Elements of SELF

Participating in the walkathon in a park near Sewa’s office in Houston, Kankani emphasized the four elements of Sewa’s SELF program – Sleep, Exercise, Living in the present, and Food and diet. About 50 people participated in the event at the venue and 20 people joined it virtually.

In the Bay Area, the walk went virtual given the COVID-19 situation and 50 people participated. They walked in their neighborhoods over two weekends and reported their status online. Sewa Bay Area Chapter coordinator Guruprasad said the first 50 registrants of the event would get Sewa T-shirts in the mail.

In the Atlanta program held at Rock Mill Park, Alpharetta, GA, Dr. Prasad Garimella, a Pulmonary and Critical Care expert explained how Sleep, Exercise, Living in the Present, and Food (S.E.L.F) help fine-tune our body and mind for longevity. Through a “car and brake” analogy, he explained how these elements are the four pillars of a healthy lifestyle. More than 50 people took part in the Atlanta event which started with Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutations). Later they all enjoyed a five-mile walk.

Sewa International’s Atlanta chapter started the SELF program in November 2020 by organizing a webinar titled “Find Your New SELF: The Transformative Power of Exercise” by the Triathlon Coach and Clinical Psychologist Dr. Harvey Gayer.

In the Midst of the Pandemic, California Fire Victims were not Forgotten

In the midst of the continuing threats from the COVID-19 pandemic many have forgotten that the 2020 wildfire season in California was devastating, and in fact wildfires continue to burn in January of 2021. These wildfires have destroyed lives, homes, and livelihoods. As of December 18, 2020, over 9,639 fires in various parts of the state had burned nearly 4.4 million acres of forest land. According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the 2020 wildfire season was particularly devastating making it the largest wildfire season recorded in the state's modern history. Sewa International is helping people affected by the fire. Sewa International volunteers are working with local partner organizations to assist 1,100 families and aiding emergency workers fighting the fire.



Sewa's Food and Essential Drives are helping survivors deal with the disaster and providing them a chance to rebuild their lives. Sewa International’s Bay Area Chapter volunteers kept their eye on the crisis and sought support from individual and corporate donors so that they could provide immediate relief and plan and implement rehabilitation programs to provide long-term solutions to the fire victims. Having gained experience in building “tiny homes”, for example, the Bay Area Chapter said an \$8,000 donation would help Sewa International build a tiny home for a family that lost their home to the wildfire. The most basic need for us is a roof over our heads and food on the table. It is commendable that the volunteers and chapter leaders are keeping an eye on this crisis and seeking donors to help them bring cheer to those affected by the wildfires.

Anish Nayak of Sewa Among Ten Honored for Community Service, Promoting Hindu Culture



Among ten Indian American young men and women who were honored for their services to the community and for promoting Hindu culture was Sewa International's Anish Jaitly Nayak. The Consul General of India in Houston, Aseem Mahajan, presented the awards and commended the awardees for their leadership and initiatives.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the winners and said that the awards were an acknowledgment of the work done by the Indian Diaspora as well as an opportunity for young people to strengthen their connection with their culture. "The winners will surely help propagate the richness of our magnificent identity, particularly among the young generations," Mr. Modi said in a letter to the Hindus of Greater Houston (HGH), a non-profit organization, which honored the young men and women at its 10th annual awards event on December 19.

The other awardees were Anusha Sathyanarayan (Eternal Gandhi Museum of Houston), Nithya Ramankulangara (Sri Meenakshi Temple Society), Sandeep Prabhakar (Global Organisation of Divinity), Kruthi Patel (BAPS), Vipaschit Nanda (Arya Samaj), Abhimanyu Aggarwal (Hindu Heritage Youth Camp) and Rajit Shah (Vallabh Vidya Mandir).

Two special awards were presented to Namita Pallod of Sanatan Hindu Dharma and Komal Luthra of Young Hindus of Greater Houston. In his keynote address, actor Nitish Bharadwaj said, "Hindus have proved to the world that they assimilate wherever they go. They not only introduce other cultures to India's richness, but also imbibe the positive qualities of the country they live in. NRI's are India's peace ambassadors".

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Aditya Bhandari, a high school senior who turned 18 recently, attended Sewa Bay Area Chapter's LEAD program in 2019-2020. Many Sewa projects such as the COVID-19 initiatives and the California fire relief programs impressed him, and Aditya decided to give back something valuable to the less privileged on his birthday.

Aditya decided to donate 18 blankets to Sewa's Homeless Assistance Program. He knew that by donating to Sewa International, his contribution would reach the needy. Appreciating Aditya for his kind gesture, Sewa's National Coordinator for the LEAD program, Jyothsna Prasad said that developing a spirit of giving back to the community was one of the goals of the LEAD initiative, and that she hoped other young people would join Aditya in making the LEAD program have more impact on society.



Aditya Bhandari posing with the blankets he donated

Sewa International

P.O.Box 820867
Houston, TX 77282-0867

(708) 872-7392
info@sewausea.org
www.sewausea.org



Editorial Team: Vidyasagar Tontalapur, Denver, CO (Director, Communications), Inchara Kumar & Shreya (Interns), Consultant: Prof. Ramesh Rao