

## Sewa Milan 2023: Central Jersey Chapter Volunteer Appreciation

The Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International, USA celebrated the culmination of another year of selfless service with the Chapter's year-end annual event - Sewa Milan 2023 held in December 2023.

For Sewa volunteers of all ages, the end-of-year celebration is a momentous occasion that inspires introspection into their selfless acts of service. Attending and recognizing the benefits of belonging to an organization that provides a platform for service is a special privilege for all. For the committed core volunteers of the Chapter, it was a privilege to actively contribute to and take part in this momentous occasion, which celebrated an incredible year of volunteerism and giving all a chance to join together. The involvement of appreciative adult and parent volunteers further added to the honor bestowed upon the Chapter and the organization.

At the event the Chapter recognized the year-long service efforts of the Chapter's volunteers from the multi-track service offering of the LEAD program, Family Services, Helpline, Disaster Relief, Grant Teams, and the LEAD honorees of the President's Volunteer Service Award for 2023.



*Sewa Milan 2023: Rajesh Ji Sharma, as the Coordinator of the Central Jersey Chapter, played a pivotal role in founding and expanding the chapter into the versatile organization it is today*

Honoring Sewa International at the event was Ms Pragya Singh Consul for VISA Affairs & Attestation representing Chief Guest Dr. Varun Jeph, Deputy Consul General, Consulate of India at New York, Guest of Honor Mr. Belisario Martijena, CEO, Founder of Kleos, and Special Guest Shri Syam Kosigi Ji, Vice President Organization, of Sewa International, USA.



*Mr. Belisario Martijena, CEO, Founder of Kleos*

*Ms Pragya Singh Consul for VISA Affairs & Attestation*

*Shri Syam Kosigi Vice President – Organization Sewa International, USA*

### Chapter Highlights

- ❖ Sewa Milan 2023
- ❖ Sewa Health Screening Camp
- ❖ Central Jersey Pilot Project for Environmental Stewardship
- ❖ Serving the Under resourced – Sewa Winter Coat Drive
- ❖ Addressing Food Insecurity – Sewa Diwali Food Donation Drive
- ❖ Sewa Through the Year: Community Outreach & Engagement
- Special Needs Services
- Feeding Program for Hunger Relief
- Food Distribution Service for the Food Insecure
- Biodiversity & Soil Conservation
- Serving Places of Worship



*Sewa Milan Deep Prajwalan*

**Ms. Pragya Singh** spoke about her incredible journey from a small town in Uttar Pradesh, India, to places like Singapore, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, and now finally New York. For the LEAD volunteers, her story was an inspiration and a real-life illustration of women's empowerment. **Guest of Honor Mr. Belasaria Martijena**, gave a motivational message "Change is Good", encouraging adaptability and growth and serving with "Love, Faith & Hope", a positive and compassionate approach to making a difference. **Special Guest Shri Syam Kosigi** spoke about the 20 years' journey of Sewa International, USA, sharing valuable experiences and achievements.

The event was graced by a number of distinguished guests, including dignitaries, officials from partner organizations, philanthropists, and Sewa volunteers. Youth volunteers of the LEAD program took center stage as the evening's master of ceremonies and performers.

The event commenced on an auspicious note with the rendition of the National Anthems of the United States, followed by the National Anthem of Bharat, symbolizing the essence of pluralism, or more colloquially, the concept of 'Unity in Diversity,' which is deeply rooted in Bharat's cultural heritage.



The initiation of the event was highlighted by the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, known as Deep Prajwalan, symbolizing the transition from darkness to light. This ritual signifies the profound impact of knowledge, particularly Dharma, on all volunteer endeavors and the overall spirit of the event.



Then "Sewa Hai Yagna Kund," resounded in Sanskrit, emphasizing that selfless service is a sacred tribute. This song was specifically chosen to emphasize the idea that the core of the work should be based on a service-oriented attitude, in line with the ideals and values of Sewa International.



The LEAD program's young volunteers gave captivating performances at the event, demonstrating their vocal abilities and being supported by talented musicians on the violin, flute and guitar. There was also a fascinating Jugalbandhi of Bharat's ancient dances, Kathak and Bharatnatyam.

The Chapter Coordinator Rajesh Sharma Ji. was a keynote speaker on the Chapter service activities and spoke about his start of the Chapter in 2018 and its growth into the multifaceted organization it is today.

Rajesh ji spoke about the Chapters initial focus on promoting volunteerism, fund development & supporting the SAC/SHE program, then broadening into the Disaster Recovery and Family Services Program. He highlighted notable achievements of the organization, including receiving the Middlesex County Volunteer Organization Nomination for 2020 and the prestigious Pravasi Bhartiya Award for exceptional service during the pandemic. Additionally, the organization was honored with the NJ Governor's Volunteerism Award in the Health Care Service category.

Moving forward, he mentioned the launch of the Grants and AmeriCorps programs, with the chapter securing the NJ Commission of AmeriCorps Planning Grant for Environmental Stewardship in Middlesex County and of the chapter playing a crucial role in the execution of the 9/11 Service Day Grant from the National Commission of AmeriCorps.

He discussed the ongoing flagship service projects from 2018, including activities such as providing services at camps for underprivileged children in Middlesex County, addressing food insecurity through support for food pantries, and maintaining assistance for senior citizens, among other endeavors. Further, he elaborated on the extensive network of 100+ partners and beneficiaries, highlighted the 25+ unique projects undertaken by the Chapter, and outlined various outreach initiatives in alignment with significant township events.

He also delved into fundraising events dedicated to supporting the welfare and education of 25 children for an entire year, allocating funds for the skill training of 15 women in underserved communities, and expanding the Family Services program to encompass critical care medical health assistance, handling fatal domestic violence cases, providing bereavement support for families, offering supervised visitation support, and organizing the inaugural free Sewa medical camp and Yoga therapy camp.

He shed light on the SewaMeal program, initiated in 2020 to assist a family in need due to the loss of primary breadwinners. He spoke of how this led to the inception of the program, sharing how it commenced by delivering 50 meals to a homeless shelter in Edison, NJ. Over time, the initiative has grown into a thriving project, now extending its reach to offer more than 1000 meals to various underserved communities in Central and South Jersey.

Through the evening audio visuals of the great testimonials from the service partners and beneficiaries of the Chapter's community and humanitarian services were played.

The concluding moments of the evening were marked by the emcees expressing gratitude to all LEADs, including their fellow emcees, for their dedicated service in 2022-23 to the Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International. They also extended their thanks to Sewa International for providing the opportunity to contribute and serve.

The event concluded with the recitation of the 'Shanti Mantra,' a prayer for peace and positive energy.



The evening wrapped up Sewa families and guests being served delicious, homemade meals prepared by Sewa volunteers. As the guests enjoyed their dining experience, they had the opportunity to watch audiovisual presentations showcasing the service activities conducted by the Chapter throughout the year, as featured in the Chapter newsletters.



The Central Jersey Chapter and its volunteers are now launching into 2024 with a dedicated emphasis on "Sewa Bhau".

## Central Jersey Sewa Free Health Screening Camp



In December, the Central Jersey Family Services Team successfully organized its second free health screening camp.

The Chapter partnered with Telangana American Telugu Association (TTA) and Avantic Medical Lab, Edison to provide free blood work to registered participants prior to their health screening.

Planning for the medical camp involved coordinating calls with doctors, managing online patient registrations, outreach to partner organizations, designing flyers, promoting the event on social media, coordinating with the lab for blood work, handling helpline calls, issuing vouchers for blood work, providing waiver forms, and ensuring compliance with the U.S. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) to safeguard all captured health information.

The Sewa medical camp was an incredibly educational experience, encouraging volunteers to work together to coordinate elderly patients with trained professionals to receive an analysis and advice regarding the state of their health. For the LEADs and the adult volunteers this was a wonderful opportunity to acquire lifesaving skills.



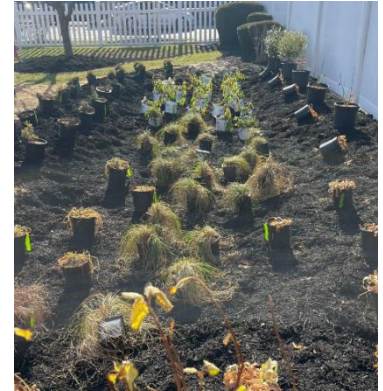
Sewa International had Dr. Vivek Bansal – Endocrinologist, Dr. Deepali Prasad – Nephrologist, and Dr. Vineet Prasad – Internal Medicine, who screened the patients using the blood work reports and tests performed at the camp.

The camp was a success with 50+ registrations. Positive word-of-mouth feedback from the previous 2023 medical camp attracted many patients.

Sewa International expressed sincere appreciation to the doctors, partner organizations, and all individuals who registered.

## Sewa Central Jersey Pilot Project for Environmental Stewardship

In 2023, Sewa International Central Jersey successfully obtained the AmeriCorps Planning Grant for Environmental Stewardship in Middlesex County from the NJ Commission. Following the guidelines of the planning grant a logic-model has to be built. The Chapter implemented its pilot environmental stewardship project so as to be able to generate logic-model and operating grant proposal in collaboration with its Grants Team. The project involved the establishment of a rain garden to tackle a local environmental issue, and in the process making a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation.



*The affected area was dug out then the rocks were placed and the run off was redirected to the site of the rain garden, mulch was placed, suitable native plants and shrubs were brought in and a rain garden was created.*

The chosen site was experiencing a stagnant flood situation due to runoff water, prompting the launch of a rain garden initiative. **30+** Chapter LEADs and adult volunteers gained essential knowledge and skills from master gardeners, leading to the implementation of the solution - the establishment of a rain garden. This pilot project was done in support of a township library in Middlesex County and was done under the supervision by Rutgers University.

This act of planting the rain garden serves as an effective and environmentally friendly approach to tackle drainage issues and minimize flooding on a site. It was specifically designed to capture and manage storm water runoff, preventing erosion, flooding, and pollution. Sewa volunteers were not only satisfied with their contribution to flood mitigation but also delighted with the positive impact on biodiversity and the visual appeal of the area.

## Serving the Under Resourced – Central Jersey Sewa Winter Coat Drive



The Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International organized a Winter Coat Drive this winter season, a great initiative to help those in need during the cold months. **~5,000** gently used winter clothing items were collected by the chapter's committed volunteers to benefit impoverished communities in Central and South Jersey. This effort promoted the eco-friendly practice of recycling, and also provided for those who are struggling to stay warm throughout the chilly winter months.

Sewa volunteers actively engaged with local residents and their networks, distributing informative flyers about the drive. They strategically placed collection bins in various locations, meticulously sorted the collected items, and efficiently loaded trucks to donate the items to multiple beneficiaries. The collected contributions will be directly provided to individuals undergoing hardships, offering much-needed warmth and comfort to those in need.

### **Sewa Beneficiaries:**

Jersey Shore Rescue Mission  
Homefront Group

## **Addressing Food Insecurity – Central Jersey Sewa Diwali Food Donation Drive**

The Central Jersey Chapter continued with their efforts for the Sewa Diwali Food Donation Drive in the month of December. The chapter's dedicated volunteers demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting individuals and families facing food insecurity during the holiday season. Over the month of November and December the Chapter volunteers collected and donated over a total of **9,900** pounds of food items across townships in Central Jersey.

Sewa volunteers employed outreach strategies, such as reaching out to friends and family, engaging with local communities, and setting up donation boxes, reflecting a comprehensive and inclusive approach to gathering support. They utilized various channels like flyers, posters, calls, and door-to-door visits to raise awareness about the cause and encourage people to contribute.

The Chapter sincerely thanks all of the volunteers and donors who contributed to this program; their combined efforts have improved the lives of people who are less fortunate. Their devotion to helping people is incredibly inspirational and helps to create a more supportive and caring community.

### **Sewa Beneficiaries:**

Casa Freehold Food Pantry  
Christina Seix Academy, Trenton  
Food Bank of South Jersey  
FPC Food Pantry, Metuchen  
Hands of Hope Food Pantry, Edison  
HomeFront NJ  
Hopewell Valley Food Bank  
Iselin & Metuchen YMCA  
Middlesex County College Food Pantry  
South Brunswick Food Pantry  
Trenton Soup Kitchen



## **Sewa Through the Year – Recurring Service Activities by the Central Jersey Chapter**

The Central Jersey Chapter has a commitment to Sewa and the dedication to making a positive impact on the local community throughout the year. The volunteers engage in service activities throughout the year to contribute to the well-being of the community to not only help address immediate needs but also strengthen the bonds within the community and promote a spirit of unity and cooperation.

### **Community Outreach & Engagement**

As part of the Central Jersey Chapter's community outreach and engagement efforts, over 30 Chapter volunteers collaborated with the Indian Business Association (IBA) team and successfully hosted its annual Christmas Spectacular in December. The highlight of the event was the Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony, graced by esteemed guests Mayor John E. McCormac of Woodbridge and Mayor Sam Joshi of Edison. Adding to the festive spirit, Santa Claus made a special appearance, generously distributing toys, gifts, and other treats to children. Sewa volunteers assisted with Christmas Tree Lighting, distributed toys, snacks, pizza, ice cream and soft drinks, and even crafted cotton candy and popcorn for the kids. The event was a joyous and fulfilling experience, the volunteers had a wonderful time at the event. In appreciation of the support and commitment demonstrated by the Sewa team in volunteering for the event, IBA has acknowledged our efforts with an award. This recognition reflects our dedication and commitment to making a positive impact in the community. The tree lighting ceremony coincided with local businesses adorning their storefronts, marking the beginning of the holiday season.





This December Sewa LEADs spent time at Metuchen YMCA arranging and placing the X-Mas presents under the Christmas tree that were generously donated by the community and Kiddie Academy to those in need. They were able to decorate the area around the tree with presents to show the benevolence of the YMCA families of Metuchen for those who could use a hand through this holiday season. This was a great experience for Sewa LEADs.



Sewa volunteers from the Central Jersey chapter had a successful experience at Lake Papianni's Winter Wonderland event. They assisted at various stations, including roller skating registration, marshmallow and hot chocolate distribution, Santa photo sessions, snow machines and helping with train/horse rides. The Mayor of Edison, Sam Joshi, visited, adding to the festive atmosphere. LEADs ensured a positive and joyful experience for all visitors, contributing to the event's success.



Central Jersey Sewa LEADs had an opportunity to assist at a musical tree lighting event in North Brunswick. It is the annual event in North Brunswick which brings the township together to set up the Christmas tree and listen to musical performances. LEADs helped organize the event by controlling the lines for food, helping Santa, and assisting people with where they needed to be. Additionally, LEADs also worked along with other volunteer organizations from North Brunswick. As a result, the overall event was a success, and the LEADs were able to play a part in getting the community into the holiday spirit.

**Sewa Beneficiaries:**  
Townships of Edison, Metuchen & North Brunswick

### Special Needs Services

Chapter LEADs played a pivotal role in spreading holiday cheer at AttachAvi Autism Foundation's Christmas party in December. Their dedicated volunteerism was evident as they selflessly served delectable food, ensuring everyone experienced the warmth of the season. The volunteers went above and beyond by actively supervising various aspects of the event, ensuring a smooth and enjoyable celebration for all attendees. LEADs commitment extended to assisting people with check-in procedures, creating a welcoming atmosphere that reflected the spirit of community and generosity during this festive occasion.

**Sewa Beneficiary:**  
AttachAvi Autism Foundation, Edison



### Feeding Programs for Hunger Relief



As part of the Central Jersey's SewaMeal program to provide hunger relief, volunteers prepared **300+** meals this December. One of the meals was on Dec 31st which was a great way to celebrate the welcoming of the New Year.

**Meal Items:** Jeera rice, Peas pulav, Chole curry, Vegetable Pasta, Salad, Cheese Quesadillas, Garlic Pita bread, Portuguese Rolls, Marinara pasta, Chickpea salad, Potato salad, PB&J sandwiches, Chocolate chip cookies, Cupcakes, Brownies.

**Meals' Sponsors:**  
LEAD Sainidhi Tekale Family  
Venkat Rayapureddy Ji

**Meals' Recipients:**  
Ozanam Family Shelter, Edison,  
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Trenton  
United Methodist Church, New Brunswick  
Cathedral Kitchen at Camden

## Food Distribution Service for the Food Insecure

LEADs helped at the Hands of Hope food pantry this December to set up the food and deliver them to those in need. With fellow volunteers, Sewa LEADs made a chain assembly line to bring out, organize, and set up tables of food for families to come by and collect in their cars. LEADs also helped in distributing Christmas presents to the little children. This humbling experience reinforced the impact one can have on others' lives and highlighted the meaningfulness of such acts of kindness.



This December, LEADs at The Franklin Township Food Bank sorted food items. Through this experience they were able to understand what it is like to work in a food bank and have the ability to provide for others that are in need of food. LEADs help donate and sort food, stock shelves, and help the community shoppers with their shopping.

Sewa LEADs helped Jewish Relief Agency where they were given a box to fill with essentials such as non-perishable food items as well as toiletries and diapers. They formed a line and added the items into the box. Then they would take the boxes and deliver them to the resident's home. This experience provided the LEADs a very good understanding of what people that aren't as fortunate need and basic supplies that the volunteers are helping them get access to.

### **Sewa Beneficiaries:**

Hands Of Hope Food Pantry, Edison  
Jewish Relief Agency, Greater Philadelphia  
Franklin Township Food Bank

## Biodiversity & Soil Conservation

Sewa LEADs dedicated their time in December to volunteer for the Boat Building event at Lower Raritan Watershed Boat House. In these "in-person" sessions, LEADs had the opportunity to utilize safe and age-appropriate construction tools, including saws, pliers, belt sanders, and planar machines, all under the guidance of project organizers. The small boat building warehouse became a significant center for learning woodshop skills and exploring various tools for shaping wood. The overhanging boat model served as a constant reminder of the end goal, motivating LEADs to believe in the process and be receptive to advice.

In December's pumpkin compost/ recycle drive LEADs were able to collect a total of 77 pumpkins in varied sizes which were they donated to Rutgers Farm located in New Brunswick.

### **Sewa Beneficiaries:**

Lower Raritan Watershed, Edison  
Rutgers Farm, New Brunswick



## Serving at Places of Worship

Chapter LEADs volunteered at Radha Gopinath Temple in Edison for cabinet assembly and clean-up work. Few LEADs along with parent volunteers helped to clean the shed, temple area, and prasadam space. Another group of LEADs helped assemble cabinet and racks. They all enjoyed working as a team while having fun.

Sewa LEADs were actively served at the Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple in Monroe, in 2023 and in December they helped organize furniture and other items in the storage room and sorted and organized the kitchen too. They further helped in setting up rugs and tables for the poojas. They packed laddus and prepared prasadam cups. They received devotees by applying sacred tilak on their foreheads. They also cleaned up the temple at the end of the day by picking up trash, vacuuming the rugs and sweeping the floors.

### **Sewa Beneficiaries:**

Radha Gopinath Temple, Edison  
Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple, Monroe

The ongoing Sewa activities thrive on consistency and commitment. These service initiatives retain their significance and long-term impact.



## Newsletter Team

- ❖ Aadarsh Sakaravathy
- ❖ Aasmi Bora
- ❖ Abhijith Pai
- ❖ Afia Shaik
- ❖ Akhilesh Pulavarti
- ❖ Amit Jhunjhunwala
- ❖ Hardik Agarwal
- ❖ Mohammad Hasan
- ❖ Nimisha Sarvaiya
- ❖ Nishanth Shankarling
- ❖ Rachit Surve
- ❖ Radha Pant
- ❖ Rishi Horaginamani
- ❖ Sarayau Nalamalapu
- ❖ Tanya Sennamsetty
- ❖ Tulika Punia
- ❖ Yash Pabbisetty

## Upcoming Events

- ❖ Sewa for Suryanamaskar Yajna
- ❖ Sewa for Autism Special Needs
- ❖ SewaMeal for the Underserved at Churches/Shelters
- ❖ Sewa at Food Relief Agency, Food Banks & Food Pantries
- ❖ Sewa at Places of Worship

### REGISTRATION

- Central Jersey SewaMeal Sponsorship  
Donation towards SewaMeal Sponsorship
- Central NJ Chapter General Donation  
General Donation to Central NJ Chapter of Sewa International

Register

Please use below QR Code or link and proceed to click '**Register**' to donate



Click → <https://sewausa.org/event-5084580> and fill the information

## Communication Channels

Please visit our Chapter website and Follow us on Twitter, Facebook & Instagram

**Web:** <https://Sewausa.org/centraljersey>

**X (Formerly Twitter):** @JerseySewa

**FB:** @JerseySewa or Sewa Central Jersey

**Instagram:**  
sewainternationalcentraljersey

**Email:** [centraljersey@sewausa.org](mailto:centraljersey@sewausa.org)

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*'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' – The World Is One Family  
Together We Serve Better*