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India Herald

HGH Steps Up Efforts To Help Community



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By MANU SHAH

Gripped by a sense of urgency as Covid19 raged unabated across the world, Board members and Trustees of Hindus of Greater Houston have stepped up their efforts to help the community during this crisis.

In a conference call on March 22nd, Sewa International, the organization leading the relief efforts, shared an update of their activities.

About 400 Sewa volunteers are on the ground across the nation coordinating the relief endeavors from providing food to doctors and first responders to procuring masks and gowns for hospitals.

Sewa has put together a team of attorneys who are volunteering their time to help with immigration issues along with a team of doctors who have been helping people with their medical concerns. Sewa's helpline 281-909-7392 is manned by volunteers round the clock.

Stranded students are being placed in volunteer homes. Several more organizations, Sewa leader Nikhil Jain noted, have joined Sewa in their efforts.

Star Pipes CEO Ramesh Bhutada urged Sewa to ensure that the vulnerable sections of society – senior citizens and international students were also helped. He also advised people to review their stocks and 401k plans.

Sewa leaders Vasudev Singh and Gitesh Desai highlighted the dire need for funds to support their work and are working to raise \$450,000. Advisor Rasesh Dalal urged all the leaders to communicate this to their members and help in raising funds. Ramesh Bhutada immediately pledged \$25,000, Patanjali Yogpeeth President Shekhar Agrawal contributed \$5000 while Ravi Goel President of Hindu Worship Society donated another \$5,000 on behalf of the Society. Hindu American Foundation Houston Chapter Coordinator Rishi Bhutada was pressed to start an email campaign immediately to include faith based houses of worship in the Governments' relief package. Advisor Parthasarthy Krishnaswamy highlighted the dilemma of Hindu temples

who need to cover the costs of running the temple but are no longer receiving donations as members have stopped visiting the temple.

Board of Director and IACCGH Past President Swapan Dhairyawan spoke of the Chamber's efforts to organize several webinars to provide small businesses with relevant information on how to tackle the financial fallout. An Employment Law webinar is being held on 25 March by Nehal Anand, Shareholder with Littler Mendelson PC. Other webinars will deal with how to get a loan from the SBA and Tax deferments. To attend the webinars, visit www.iaccgh.com

The call concluded with a sobering warning by one of Houston's top cardiologists – Dr. Randeep Suneja who described these trying times as being “the tip of the iceberg” and warned that the situation would get worse. He urged everyone to act like they are infected, practice personal hygiene and social distancing and go to the hospital only if the symptoms such as fever, dry cough and breathlessness worsen. Testing facilities are available at Methodist Hospital in Katy, the Legacy stadium as well as multiple mobile testing centers.

A glimmer of hope comes in the form of hydroxychloroquine, a medicine that is showing promise in treating the virus. Pharmaceutical company Novartis is working to make 300 million doses of this medicine available and there are 6 to 7 ongoing trials on a possible vaccine. The test is normally covered by insurance, is free at government hospitals and is \$150 at a private lab. Dr. Suneja also cautioned people to stock up on 3 months of medication as there could be possible shortages.

Earlier in the call, participants heard a somber and timely reminder of how we need to live our lives in a more mindful manner from Vedanta teacher Joseph Emmett. Speaking on the Hindu approach to this crisis, Joseph spoke of how the human race has been living irresponsibly and is now facing the consequences. This, he cautioned, should serve as a wake-up call for all of us to live a peaceful and balanced life both internally and externally.

The call concluded with a peace prayer.