

Sewa International President Makes Successful Visit to Nepal

These past two months have consumed our energy and directed our efforts to reporting about Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath. So, we take the opportunity now to report about the important visit that Sewa International President, Dr. Sree Sreenath, made to Nepal, May 30 to June 03, 2017 to meet with Sewa Nepal volunteers, and for the express purpose of attending the inauguration of the Dhading Hostel for boys. The Dhading hostel was sponsored by *Hindu Society of North Carolina, Cary, NC*. He was also able to visit four of the six ongoing major projects of Sewa International in Nepal.



Prof. Sree Sreenath, Shiv Mishra (Coordinator, Sewa Columbus OH on his left) with other dignitaries as they unveil the Official Opening Plaque of the Dhading Hostel for Boys. The Hindu Society of North Carolina, Cary, NC, was the lead donor.



Some of the girls at the hostel busy studying.

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Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Supporters:

Namaste! It is a privilege to address all of you in this newsletter. We do contribute to social causes, donate to local temples, and support various organizations. We donate because we feel good within. But we get a higher satisfaction when there is an opportunity to serve our fellow citizens with our own hands instead of just donating money.

It is in the context of recent natural disasters that I write this. While these disasters surely harm lives they also bring to us, as individuals and communities, opportunities to come together and work toward a higher goal. The last couple of months have been very hard on all of us. Hurricane Harvey was followed by Hurricane Irma, and Irma was followed by Maria, bringing much destruction and deep distress to many communities in Texas, Florida, and the Caribbean.

Sewa International is leading our community's effort in Houston. I flew to Houston and put in my "squirrel's might" working with local Sewa volunteers as they bravely stepped in to rescue people and then provide much needed relief. In Houston, for the first time, I learned to recognize water damaged walls in the homes, how to cut the sheetrock, remove and dispose of them, and replace them with the new ones. I was also able to help in removing destroyed household items from water-logged homes.

When I was in Houston, I heard that Hurricane Irma had hit Florida and many Floridians had driven up to Georgia to escape Irma's wrath. I rushed back to Atlanta. From the lessons learned in Houston, Sewa International's Atlanta chapter immediately formed teams in Atlanta and globally (virtually) to mobilize shelter and resources needed to accommodate the displaced people arriving from Florida. Various temples, led by the Hindu Temple of Atlanta, and some Indian-American organizations joined hands with us to serve our neighbors from Florida.

While Sewa volunteers engaged in disaster relief in Houston, Atlanta and Florida, our disaster recovery team started working in the Caribbean Islands with our volunteers from Sewa Trinidad and Tobago leading the efforts in Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda. Sewa International is also working in Puerto Rico and St. Thomas with partner organizations.

Being a volunteer of Sewa International, I feel very proud that we are able to serve the communities we live in while looking out for people across the world. I salute our volunteers, and I urge you to pitch in to help. I promise you, you will prosper from that experience.

Sincerely,
Swadesh Katoch
 Director of Disaster Recovery



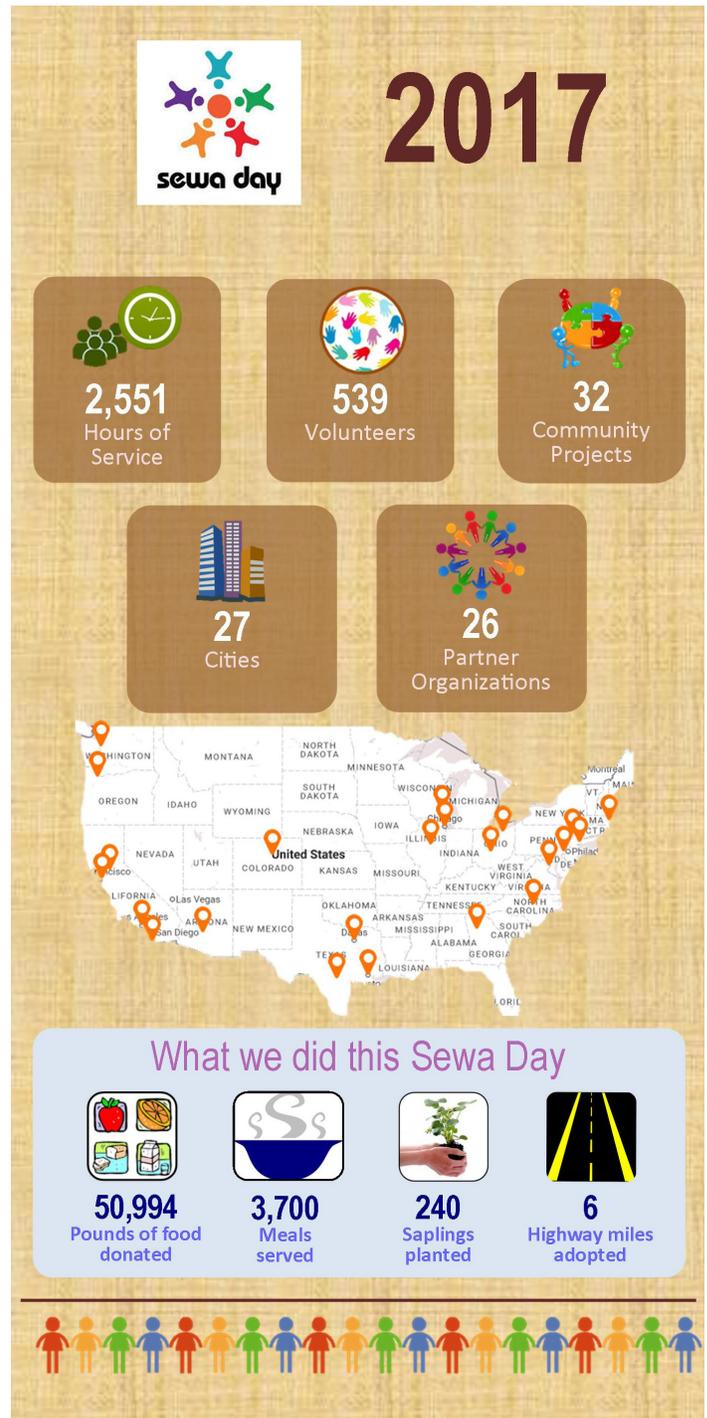
"Service Above Self: Volunteers Reach Out to Communities on Sewa Day"

Sewa-Day 2017 – a day of volunteering – observed over a period of four weeks, from September 09 to October 08 -- was celebrated and observed across the United States by the Hindu-American community for the seventh consecutive year.

Volunteers worked on 32 community service projects in 27 cities across the country. Sewa Day, an initiative of Sewa International, is supported worldwide by three guiding principles: serve humanity to relieve hardship; bring a little joy to others; and help sustain the environment.

"Sewa" is a Sanskrit word that means "service above self". This exhortation to transcend selfish motives is embedded in the dharma (cosmic law underlying right behavior and social order) traditions of ancient India. In observation of Sewa Day, thousands of volunteers from the US, UK, Canada and countries around the world come together to perform *sewa* and experience the joy of giving in its truest sense. By participating in this collective endeavor, volunteers hope that the seeds of *sewa* are watered so that acts of kindness and public service are performed more often.

The occasion was also leveraged to serve the communities hit by Hurricane Harvey in Texas, and Hurricane Irma in Georgia and Florida. While 1,250 volunteers served in Houston alone to help people affected by the hurricane, 539 volunteers from Sewa International and partner organizations, across different age-groups and backgrounds including youth and children, came together between September 09 and October 08 and worked 2,551 hours on a variety of activities to make a difference in their local communities. Sewa volunteers partnered with like-minded organizations that resulted in a steady increase in the number of nationwide events and diversity of projects. From feeding the homeless, cleaning places of worship, tree planting, highway litter removal, course marshaling, and helping other organizations in their activities, Sewa-Day turned out to be a big success this year.



The Dhading Hostel -- "Amako Mayo Chatrawas" ("Abode of Mother's Love") -- was inaugurated on Saturday, June 03. There are 15 boys residing in it currently, but has a capacity to house 50 boys. The Nepal Government will hand over the guardianship of the boys to Sewa International once the building is completed, and the remaining 35 boys will then be moved into the hostel.

For the Bharatpur Girls Hostel, Sewa has purchased the land, and at present 14 girls are living in a temporary accommodation. The hostel, once built, will be able to house 100 girls.

At Nuwakot, another boys' hostel is being built, and the "bhoomi puja" (the traditional ritual to sanctify the land upon which a new building is to be constructed) has been completed for work to begin on the construction. This project is supported by Sewa UK funds. At present, 19 boys are living in a temporary residence, and once the hostel building is completed 50 boys can be housed in it.



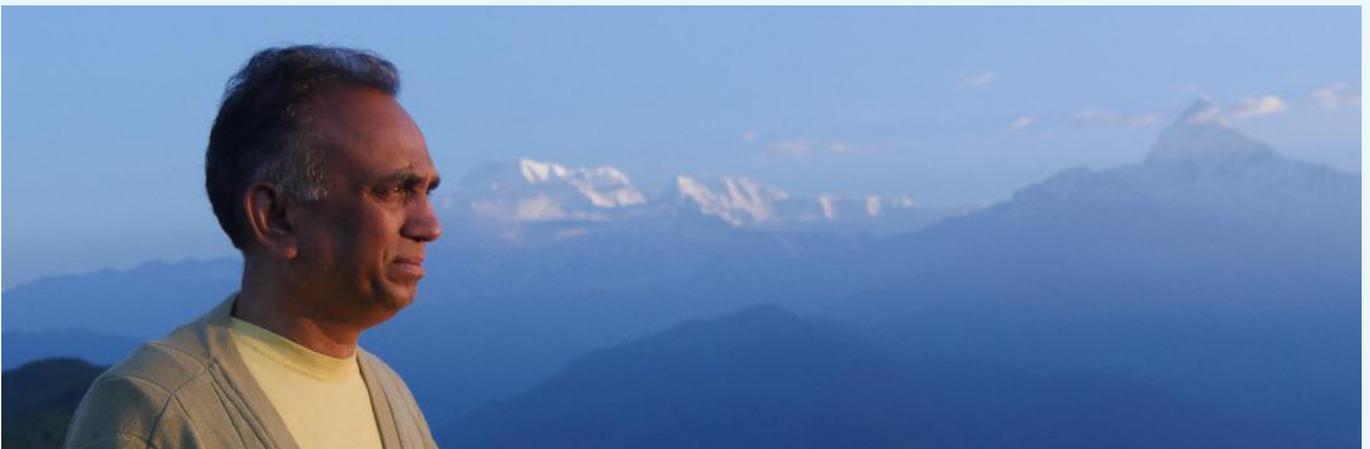
Boys having lunch at the Nuwakot residence.



The "Bhoomi Puja" for the Nuwakot hostel.

Prof. Sreenath also visited Pokhra, where a Sewa Canada project to offer a three-month training program in computer essentials has been over-subscribed. The students must have passed tenth grade to be enrolled in the program.

Two projects that Prof. Sreenath was not able to visit during this tour was the Lothar project (Chitwan District), where land has been purchased to build a hostel with a capacity to house 50 boys. This is a Sewa International project. He could also not visit the Charikot project (Dolkha District), where a hostel to accommodate 50 children is on the anvil. Charikot was the epicenter of the May 11, 2015 earthquake. At present, 21 children are being housed in temporary accommodations.



"The Himalayas both inspire and challenge us", says Prof. Sreenath, in the context of the Nepal projects.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Venkat Bijala is the Joint Coordinator for Sewa International's North Jersey Chapter. Venkat is one of the founder members of the chapter, and has led the summer Get Inspired (GINJ-2017) and the high school *Lead* programs (LEADNJ-2017) successfully. Besides taking care of the chapter activities in general, he is in-charge of all the media activities including compiling and publishing the monthly newsletter, maintaining the volunteer/support contact list, email notifications, and other matters. He is planning to start the *Aspire* program in North Jersey. He gets support for all this from his wife Aparna, and daughters Ananya and Anika, who are also involved in Sewa volunteer work.



Venkat attended the May 2017 Sewa National Conference in Houston, was inspired by what he saw and heard, and urged the North Jersey Chapter to host the 2018 Sewa National Conferences in Parsippany, NJ.

Venkat is a computer software professional working for the U.S. federal government, and lives in Montville, NJ. Originally from Telangana state in India, he feels volunteering for Sewa has given him and his family fulfillment and purpose in life. "My family has been involved with Sewa since the founding of the North Jersey Chapter in 2016, and we are planning and looking forward to more service projects in local communities and to help those in need and support. My family can't wait to witness some of the Sewa projects on our next India visit. We have made many close associations with like-minded people and it is like a big extended family being part of Sewa. We want to see the Sewa Family grow in North Jersey with more service-minded volunteers", he says.

According to Prem Kumar Pusuloori, the North Jersey Chapter Coordinator, Venkat is a great strength for the North Jersey chapter. "He is one of our most involved and dependable volunteers. Venkat entered Sewa without prior volunteering background but very soon became a seasoned volunteer and a source of inspiration for others. Our chapter is lucky to have Venkat and many other dedicated volunteers because of whom we are able to undertake many programs successfully", he said.

Upcoming Events

- Nov **04** : Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, Streamwood, IL – *Rishte Nate* – Musical Fundraising event
- Nov **05** : Keefe Technical School, Framingham, MA – *Nrityameva Jayate 2017* – Dance Competition
- Nov **05** : 7601 Shady Creek Rd, Dublin, CA – *Bike-a-thon*
- Nov **05** : Stafford Convention Center, 10505 Cash Rd, Stafford, TX – *HELP 2017* - Fundraiser Event
- Nov **10** : HSNL Auditorium, Aviation Pkwy, Morrisville, NC - *Gaata Rahe Mera Dil* – a musical evening of Hindi film music
- Nov **18** : 4018 Westhollow Parkway , Houston, TX – *Family Services Regional Workshop and Conference*
- Dec **02** : Orchard City banquet Hall, Campbell, CA – *Annual Dinner Event*
- Dec **10** : High Performing Center, Dublin, CA – *Dance Mela Fundraiser*

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