

Sewa Launches Fundraiser for Los Angeles Wildfire Relief



Sewa volunteers delivered essential aid to communities affected by the devastating Los Angeles wildfires

Sewa International has launched a fundraiser and deployed volunteers to deliver essential aid to communities affected by the devastating wildfires sweeping the Los Angeles area. The wildfires, which began on January 7, have claimed at least 28 lives and destroyed over 14,000 structures. Twenty-two individuals are missing.

The situation remains dire with over 50,000 residents under evacuation orders or warnings. Sewa's Los Angeles Chapter has worked closely with local authorities to provide immediate relief and support to affected communities. Sewa has raised nearly \$20,000 through its fundraiser. All proceeds will go directly towards assisting families and individuals impacted by the LA wildfire.

Sewa International President Arun Kankani requested community members to donate generously to Sewa's wildfire relief fund to provide shelter, food, clothing, and essential supplies to those who have lost their homes and livelihoods to the wildfire.

People can donate through Sewa International's website at www.sewausea.org. Every contribution, big or small, can make a difference in helping wildfire victims recover and rebuild their lives. Here are the links to donate.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1AF2jSfAYc/>

Website:

<https://sewausea.org/SouthernCaliforniaFacesDevastatingWildfires>

Executive Corner

Pranam,

Best wishes on Makar Sankranti to all of you, your family members, and all Sewa Families in your area!



This Sankranti witnesses the largest-ever confluence of humanity on the earth in Prayagraj during Maha Kumbh. More than 400 million people are expected to participate on this auspicious occasion, a magnificent testimonial to timeless, eternal (सनातन) Hindu culture. This Maha Kumbh marks a unique alignment of celestial bodies after 144 years.

On this occasion, our partner organization SAKSHAM is organizing 'Netra Kumbh,' the largest eye camp in the world. The camp is expected to test 500,000 people, distribute 300,000 free eyeglasses and perform free eye surgeries for 50,000 people. More information is available at <https://sewausea.org/netrakumbh>.

As we enter the new year, California fires have taken dozens of lives and engulfed thousands of homes and buildings. Building back the ruined towns and thousands of lives in the coming months will be a monumental task.

Sewa is working on the ground, providing food and other essential items in coordination with other organizations and agencies. To donate please visit <https://sewausea.org/SouthernCaliforniaFacesDevastatingWildfires>

As we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of Sewa last year, our volunteers took up some unique initiatives in different cities. Sewa commemorated the lives lost during the 9/11 attack and the sacrifices made by the frontline workers. Sewa organized dozens of service programs across many cities in the country, reflecting the resilience of our nation. The South Jersey Chapter created a unique memorial near city hall in Chesterfield, NJ, with the help of the entire community. It was the first of its kind by an Indo-American organization in the country (<https://sewausea.org/911Memorial>).

Executive Corner

The Bay Area chapter organized a unique “Bill of Responsibilities” summit with the participation of local organizations and officials (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=vtg6bN5QjHU>). We also organized the first virtual “Education Summit” attended by educationists, philanthropists, partner organizations, and volunteers.

It is also heartening to see people sharing joy with underserved communities across the country through “Sewa Diwali” efforts. This event is now celebrated in more than 200 cities across 38 states with the participation of over 250 pantries and local organizations. It is wonderful to see that Diwali celebrations in our community are spreading joy in our neighborhoods. We have undertaken food distribution in the local communities during this festive occasion, reflecting the true spirit of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam – the World is One Family.

As we step into the new year, we shall continue to expand our services and programs to more cities. This year, we have also launched a new initiative -- ‘Sewa Academy’ -- to help in the training and development of our chapter and program volunteers.

Sewa Academy, offering courses online, will aid all volunteers and teams to stay aligned with the vision and mission, fostering a culture of collaboration and selfless service as well as helping the learning of new skills. Our IT team has also launched a two-year initiative to technologically upgrade the organization to help our beneficiaries, volunteers, donors, and supporters.

I request all of you to increase the reach and impact of Sewa’s efforts by sharing our work with your friends and families and helping them engage with Sewa in their cities. A good starting point is to share this newsletter so that they can subscribe to the newsletter on our website for a monthly dose of inspiration.

Let’s work together to strengthen Sewa’s efforts and ensure another year of meaningful service and growth.

Warm regards,

Arun Kankani

Arun Kankani, President, sewa international, USA

LEAD 2025 Kicks Off in Phoenix with Youth Participants



LEAD Youth and their parents participated at LEAD 2025 in Phoenix, AZ

The Sewa Phoenix chapter recently had the kickoff meeting for its LEAD 2025 program, which empowers youth through community service and leadership development. This year’s program attracted eighty young participants, all committed to engaging in community service throughout the year.

Youths, parents, and mentors gathered to discuss ideas and share experiences during the kickoff meeting. The event also featured a certificate distribution ceremony, recognizing the achievements of participants who completed their volunteering service for 2024.



LEAD volunteers and mentors launched a year of service in Phoenix, AZ

Houston Starts Tree Plantation Drive in Alief Neighborhood

The Sewa Houston Chapter recently launched its inaugural tree plantation drive in the Alief neighborhood, with a grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Despite chilly weather, 85 volunteers of all ages came together to plant 120 native Texas trees in just 90 minutes.



Houston Sewa volunteers planted trees in Alief neighbourhood as part of Sewa's environment and sustainability initiative



Volunteers of all ages joined hands to plant trees in Houston's Alief neighborhood drive

The Alief neighborhood, which experiences temperatures 10 degrees hotter than the rest of Houston, will greatly benefit from this initiative.

The tree plantation drive is a crucial step toward creating a more sustainable urban environment and combating rising temperatures.

Ration Kits to Cyclone-Hit Families in Tamil Nadu

In collaboration with Kotak Bank Ltd. under their CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiative, Sewa distributed ration kits to families affected by Cyclone Fengal in Chennai, Tamil Nadu on January 10. The kits, carefully prepared with essential items, provided relief and support to those impacted by the devastating floods.



Sewa distributed ration kits to families affected by Cyclone Fengal in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, in collaboration with Kotak Bank Ltd.



Ration kits ready for distribution to the families affected by Cyclone Fengal in Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Each ration kit contained a selection of items, including food staples, spices, cooking essentials, and daily necessities. Sewa distributed these kits to help cyclone victims recover and rebuild their lives.

Pennsylvania Volunteers Meet Governor, Senator

The Sewa Pennsylvania chapter leaders and volunteers met with Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro at a Jewish Relief Agency event, where they participated in the monthly food packing and delivery initiative. Building on this momentum, they also met with PA state senator Amanda Cappelletti during the Martin Luther King's (MLK) Day event at Beth Am Israel.



Students contributed their books to Sewa Pennsylvania's drive, helping collect 3,500 children's books



In response to Beth Am Israel's request for book donations, Sewa Pennsylvania organized a book drive, collecting 3,500 children's books. While some of these books were used during the MLK Day event, the remainder will be donated to other organizations.

Houston Volunteers Run the Marathon



Sewa volunteers and runners brave the cold at the Chevron Houston Marathon

Despite freezing temperatures, over 100 Sewa volunteers and 140 runners participated in the Chevron Houston Marathon on January 19. Volunteers gathered at the Mile 8 Refueling Station, serving over 27,000 runners with water and Gatorade and cleaning up.

"Deep Foods" provided samosas for the volunteers. Meanwhile, Sewa runners braved the chilly conditions, warming up as they ran, and were well-supported by the race crew and cheering crowds.

Post-race celebrations included medals, t-shirts, and refreshments, with friends and family gathering to celebrate their success.

Sewa volunteers set up a food booth near the George R. Brown Convention Center, serving idli-vada and tea to the runners. The event was made possible through partnerships with JVB Preksha Meditation Center, MMNA (Maheshwari Mahasabha of North America), and Umang Mehta of Sewa Houston.



Sewa volunteers cheered on runners at the Chevron Houston Marathon

Sewa Launches Sewa Academy and LMS



Sewa Academy was launched on January 1, 2025. The online classes/instructions are offered via a Learning Management System (LMS). The first course, "Guidelines for Entering Timecards in ADP" for Mission Officers in the USA, was offered through the LMS on the same day.

Akhila Pai and Renu Singh are the first two students to complete the course, marking a significant milestone for Sewa International. Sewa plans to offer more courses this month, with a focus on "Volunteer Development and Empowerment."

The launch of Sewa Academy through the LMS is a result of collaborative efforts from various team members, including Ramesh Rao, Syam Kosigi, Swarup Kurella, Srinivas Tadikonda, Sonal Vyas, Kumar Subham, Akshita Parihar, and the IT team led by Anil Deshpande.

Sewa's National President, Arun Kankani, said, "Congratulations to Ashwani Garg and the team for successfully implementing the first LMS course on 'Sewa Academy'. I look forward to seeing more courses launched soon and greater adoption of this platform within the team."

Sewa Spreads Warmth and Kindness in Downtown Tampa, FL



Volunteers distributed food and essentials in downtown, Tampa, FL

On January 2, Sewa Tampa distributed over 125 sandwiches, 50 care packages, goody bags, and several blankets to those in need in downtown Tampa. The Winter Warmth Drive exceeded expectations, spreading joy and comfort throughout the community. Sewa Tampa volunteers played a crucial role in packaging and distributing items, brightening the holiday season for many.

On the same day, in another event, the Sewa Tampa chapter volunteers joined Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful volunteers for the Rowlett Park cleanup. This initiative was part of a broader effort to preserve the pristine condition of parks across the Tampa Bay area. The volunteers' dedication exemplifies the true spirit of community and environmental care. Together, Sewa Tampa and Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful are making a meaningful impact, ensuring green spaces remain clean and inviting.



Tampa volunteers joined "Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful" team for the Rowlett Park cleanup

Upcoming Events

- February 17, 2024, to 30 Nov 2024: Sewa Houston Year-round LEAD Program - 2024
- February 22, 2025: BEI - Sewa 5k Walk/Run | W. Sam Houston Pkwy South, Houston, TX

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