

Over 550 Attend Sewa Houston's Annual Gala



Volunteers Celebrating a Successful Fundraiser at the Sewa Annual Gala in Houston

Over 550 people participated in the annual gala hosted by Sewa's Houston Chapter at the GSH Event Center on December 4. The gala, themed "HELP 2022 -- Local Presence, Global Impact" showcased the chapter's work and raised funds for various development programs. Sewa received an excellent response to the gala, as it had to close registration within a few days of the invitations being sent out.

Welcoming the gathering, Gitesh Desai, the President of the Chapter, said that the strength of the Houston chapter is its volunteers, who exhibit both amity and unity. He appealed to the community to contribute to the betterment of society through time, talent, and treasure. Sam Merchant, the Outreach Liaison of the Office of Congressman Al Green read the proclamation issued appreciating the work done by the Sewa International.

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Dharmic Organizations Donate 630,000 Pounds of Food through Sewa Diwali

Sewa Diwali, a large food drive organized by Dharmic communities (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, and other Indian origin groups) across the country, donated over 630,000 pounds of food in the U.S. in 2022. Now in its fifth year, the drive benefited over 200 organizations from 32 states, including food pantries, homeless shelters, worship houses, and schools.

Since its inception in 2018, the Sewa Diwali project has donated close to 1.5 million pounds of food nationwide. Aimed at fostering togetherness and promoting the concept of Sewa (selfless giving), Sewa Diwali provides a platform for Dharmic and Indic communities to organize food drives during Diwali.

Starting in October to mark the celebrations of Diwali, the Dharmic Festival of Lights, the food drive runs through the end of November. The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) and Sewa International volunteers enthusiastically coordinated these efforts regionally and nationally.

Pam Bozano, the Site Director of Nobel Prep for the Boys and Girls Club at Stonybrook Middle School, IN, thanked the Sewa Diwali initiative for the generous donation they received: "There is a big food disparity in this community. So, we are very grateful and appreciative that this donation benefits our kids and their families during the holiday season".

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A Kathak Dance Performance at the Sewa Annual Gala in Houston

Some of the beneficiaries of Sewa -- Constance Swift, Dr. Katherine Garcia, Roche Angelique, Kartik Trivedi, Sunita Shahi, Mehzabeen Sayani, Akash Rami, and Siddarth Chauhan -- shared their experiences working with Sewa volunteers. They said Sewa immensely supported them through medical aid, grief counseling, or helping underprivileged school kids in the Alief Independent School District. Nikhil Jain, Dr. Madan Luthra, Carol Juarez, and Nithya Hari spoke at the event seeking support for Sewa's work and outreach.

Raj Salhotra, the co-founder of two educational non-profits, presented the President's Volunteer Service Award (PVSA) to 28 youth volunteers. The PVSA is a prestigious national honor offered to students in recognition of their volunteer work. Sewa also felicitated these students at the gala.

Sewa Houston Chapter's Executive Director, Kavita Tewary, introduced Nithya Hari of Bollywood Dancing Stars, who performed at the gala. The students of the Kathak Beats started the evening with a dance performance dedicated to Lord Ganesh. A video showing Sewa Houston Chapter's contribution to society and its disaster response efforts followed.

Anis Chandani, the flute maestro from Los Angeles, mesmerized the audience with his rendition of many classical tunes and Bollywood songs. Vocalists from Sargam Melodies -- Rashmi Nayar and Sankar, sang Bollywood melodies. The Joint Coordinator of Houston Chapter, Anup Bhasin, thanked the gathering at the event. Madras Pavilion restaurant served a multi-course dinner.

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Explaining the significance of the initiative, Anil Kothari, Sewa Diwali National Coordinator, said the drive continues to bring people together for universal good. All dharmic communities believe in the principle "parōpakārārthaya idam sharīram" (a person lives to serve others selflessly). In all dharmic traditions, Sewa plays a crucial role in an individual's life," he said.

The Plano Texas Police Department appreciated Sewa Diwali in their Facebook posting: "It was a blessing to see the overwhelming participation from all corners of the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) area, with multiple communities and American Hindu organizations participating in this Sewa activity."

The Plano Police Department worked with Sewa Diwali to transport 27,892 lbs of food at the North Texas Food Bank.

Sewa Diwali saw active and spirited participation from Sikh Gurudwaras, Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist temples, yoga organizations, interfaith groups, Indian American cultural and language associations, and thousands of families and individuals all over the US.

Several dharmic organizations such as BAPS, Chinmaya Mission, Arya Samaj, Samskrita Bharati USA, and Sewa International collected food among their supporters.

Sewa Organizes Conferences on Human Trafficking in India



Aditya Pratap, Asst. commander, NDRF, Addressing the Gathering at the Disaster Management Conference.

Sewa conducted conferences on child trafficking, in collaboration with CHETNA; and disaster management, and development work in the Himalayas in collaboration with HIMSamwaad. The two days of the CHETNA conference comprised insightful sessions on human trafficking, organ trafficking, child marriage, online trafficking, trafficking prevention, and COVID-19 rehabilitation.

HIMSamwaad 2022 provides a platform for people in the Himalayan region to discuss development work in the Himalayas and ensure its sustainability. In addition, the conference focused on developing a roadmap for finding local solutions to the region's thorny development issues.



Hon. Governor of Himachal Pradesh Shri Rajendra ji Arlekar with Shyam Parande Secretary, Sewa International, India at the Himsamwad Conference (From left to right).

PM Narendra Modi Recognizes Sewa International's Work



PM Narendra Modi lauded Sewa volunteers in his recent -- Mann ki Baat (Thinking Aloud) program. He specifically mentioned Manoj Benjwal and Champa Devi for their devotion to cleaning up the Kedarnath Valley in Uttarakhand which has been littered by pilgrims making their way up during the Char Dham Yatra.

Prime Minister Modi highlighted the work of Manoj Benjwal from Rudraprayag, who he said had for the past 25 years worked to conserve the environment and making the pilgrimages plastic-free.

Champa Devi from Dewar Village also received praise for her efforts to maintain cleanliness. Mr. Modi said that Champa Devi had created awareness about waste management among women from her village, and that her efforts in planting trees had led to the creation of a small forest.

Mann ki Baat is broadcast on All India Radio once a month. In this conversation with the people of India, Prime Minister Modi discusses innovative work, interesting topics, inspirational life examples, and aspirational messages.

AmazonSmile generates over \$5818 in Donations for Sewa

Sewa International received \$760 through the AmazonSmile program in the third quarter of 2022. This amount marks a significant jump compared to a year ago when Sewa collected less than \$200 in the same quarter.

As per a recent announcement by Amazon, the customer-directed donation program will shut down permanently on February 20, 2023.

Until November 2022, the program contributed \$5,818.47 to Sewa and over \$400 million to all US charities. Since its inception, AmazonSmile has given over \$449 million to charities worldwide. Amazon contributed half a cent to the customer-chosen charity for every dollar spent by the customer for all eligible purchases on its website.

Sewa Milan 2022 -- Volunteer Appreciation & Awards Ceremony



Dr. Inderpal Bhandari, Congressman-elect Thomas Kean Jr., & Sewa's Vice President Syam Kosigi (From left to right)

The Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International organized their fourth annual volunteer appreciation and awards event -- Sewa Milan 2022 -- on December 4. The high school volunteer participants of the LEAD (Leadership, Education, and Development) program and the chapter volunteers collectively put in 40,000 hours of community service in 2022.

Rajesh Sharma, the keynote speaker and the Chapter Coordinator, spoke about the chapter's service activities and outlined the chapter's growth since 2018, when the chapter was started. Dr. Inderpal Bhandari, chief guest at the event, called upon LEAD interns to follow the path less traveled. He asked them to challenge themselves as they embarked on their college journey. Dr. Bhandari is the Global Chief Data Officer of IBM Corporation.

The Guest of Honor at the event, Congressman-elect Thomas Kean Jr., appreciated the work of the volunteers and urged them to continue to serve their local communities. Congressman Kean represents New Jersey's Seventh Congressional District.

LEAD Program Coordinator, Sandesh Kamath, spoke about the variety of service activities by LEAD interns. He also narrated how LEAD members volunteered at a farm, grew crops in their backyards, donated the produce to food pantries, and used the same in meals cooked for the homeless. "This is part of LEAD's focus on humanitarian to environmental sustainability," he said.

Anitha Krishnamurthi, Coordinator, Sponsor a Child (SAC) program, as well as the Sanitation, Hygiene, and Empowerment Project for the Girl Child (SHE), gave an overview of the SAC and SHE programs. Sewa's Vice President for Organization, Syam Kosigi, attended the event as a special guest and spoke about Sewa International's vision of serving people selflessly.

The event recognized the year-long efforts of the chapter's volunteers from the LEAD program, Family Services, Helpline, Disaster Relief teams, and recipients of the President's Volunteer Service Award for 2022. Over 500 attendees, including leaders of partner organizations, Sewa's donors, and parents of LEAD interns, participated in the event.

Volunteer Spotlight



Selvaraj Mudaliar, a volunteer at the Central Jersey Chapter, embodies the spirit and values of Sewa through his selfless service in Sewa's Family Services program. Selvaraj handles the Family Services hotline and is the first to respond to calls or any need within the service area of the Chapter.

Seeing hardships from the tender age of six, Selvaraj has learned to work hard, educate himself, and support his family. It has made him compassionate and generous to those in need. His late father, who was socially active, influenced him to serve people.

Selvaraj works as an HR Manager at the Public Service Electric & Gas Company (PSEG). He lives in Edison with his wife, Saathiya, and two sons. Selvaraj is also the president of his residential community association. In this capacity, he has made it his mission to improve the surroundings. He has been instrumental in building facilities like a toddler park, a volleyball court, and a bike lane in the community. Sewa International salutes Selvaraj's work and commitment to his community and society.

Sewa International

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