

Surya Namaskar Yajna with Sewa Central Jersey Yoga for Health, Health for Humanity

Every year, Hindus across the globe celebrate January 14th as Makar Sankranti, signifying the transition of seasons as the sun enters the zodiac sign of Capricorn or Makar. This auspicious day, known as Makar Sankranti, marks the advent of longer days, symbolizing sunshine in life and is dedicated to the solar deity Surya-Sun. It is a global celebration, observed to herald new beginnings and is considered an auspicious occasion worldwide.

In observance of this occasion, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA (HSS) annually orchestrates a 16-day event starting from January 14th, titled "Surya Namaskar Yajna" - "Yoga for Health, Health for Humanity" Yogathon. The primary aim of this event is to foster awareness regarding the manifold benefits of Yoga in attaining a wholesome body, mind, and spirit. The yogathon invites people of all ages, genders, races, ethnicities, nationalities, and faiths to participate, encouraging them to begin the New Year with a dedicated focus on health awareness and practice.

The Surya Namaskar Yajna is a yogathon that revolves around the practice of Surya Namaskar (Salute), which means "salute to the sun." This flow consists of a series of ten yoga postures that are distinguished by their fluid and flowing movements that are harmonized with a basic breathing technique. Studies have shown that this sun-honoring yoga ritual produces a variety of physiological and psychological benefits when it is regularly practiced.



For the Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International, this initiative provides a golden opportunity to promote the holistic well-being of all its volunteers. The Sewa volunteers found the experience to be fulfilling, and they valued the Pranayama & Yoga warm-up session preceding the Surya Namaskars. This session not only prepared them for the physical practice but also infused a sense of mindfulness and relaxation.

Both Sewa volunteers and the community found the experience positive and enriching, fostering a sense of anticipation for future participation. With the active participation of both adult and youth volunteers, as well as engagement with local communities, the Chapter cultivated a collaborative and inclusive event, fostering a strong sense of community.



Chapter Highlights

- ❖ Sewa Surya Namaskar Yajna
- ❖ Sewa Through the Year:
 - Special Needs Services
 - Biodiversity Conservation
 - Serving Places of Worship
 - Support for the Under Resourced
 - Feeding Program for Hunger Relief
 - Food Distribution Service for the Food Insecure

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.

Special Needs Services

Central Jersey LEADs actively volunteered at the AttachAvi Autism Foundation's New Year's Celebration, in the ongoing support for those on the autism spectrum. AttachAvi specializes in helping kids with autism spectrum disorders and has a long-standing partnership with Sewa.

LEADs ensuring the smooth execution of several aspects of the event. They took charge of coordinating performances by the center's students, showcasing an array of talents through songs, dances, and speeches. Recognizing that a celebration is incomplete without food, the volunteers also played a key role in distributing meals to the guests, contributing to the overall success of the event.

The Chapter received a message of appreciation for the tireless efforts of the LEADs.

Sewa Beneficiary:

AttachAvi Autism Foundation, Edison



A special applause to our dedicated Sewa volunteers, whose tireless efforts and gentle touch created a nurturing environment for our kids. 🙌 A big thanks to Sewa International of Central Jersey for their invaluable support.

Biodiversity Conservation



Beginning in 2024, Central Jersey LEADs continued their volunteer work at the Lower Raritan Watershed Boat House by taking part in boat building. The goal of this project is to promote riverfront environmental preservation and community-based rowing. By participating in this practical cedar boat building project, volunteers with Sewa have the opportunity to acquire new skills and develop a sense of pride in their engagement as well as ownership. The program's ultimate goal is to maintain a healthy river, understanding its importance to the health of the surrounding environment and the communities that depend on it.

Sewa Beneficiaries:

Lower Raritan Watershed, Edison

Serving at Places of Worship

The Sewa LEADs from Central Jersey have been generously dedicating their time to volunteer at the Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple and Cultural Center in Monroe, New Jersey. This chapter's LEADs actively participate in various volunteering activities at the temple. In their recent volunteering session, the LEADs played a key role in tasks such as setting up chairs and tables, as well as packing prasadam for an upcoming temple event. Their meticulous efforts extended to arranging all necessary items in the temple's welcome area and efficiently organizing dining tables, complete with serving plates and water cups. The LEADs also took the initiative to categorize and organize items for an upcoming temple event, demonstrating their dedication in serving the temple.

Sewa Beneficiaries:

Om Sri Sai Balaji temple, Monroe



Support for the Under Resourced

Sewa LEADs dedicated their time to volunteering at Habitat for Humanity, where they assisted in moving and rolling rugs, organizing tiles, and handling paint buckets. Their efforts contributed to enhancing the overall appearance of the space, ensuring that the ReStore was well-maintained and aesthetically pleasing for customers.

Sewa Beneficiaries:

Habitat for Humanity, Maple Shade



Feeding Programs for Hunger Relief



In January, over **500** meals were prepared by Sewa volunteers as part of the Central Jersey SewaMeal program, aiming to address hunger in the community. This volunteering initiative ensures that individuals facing economic challenges have access to meals and offers volunteers valuable insights into the impact of their contributions. By providing nourishment to those in need, the program helps alleviate concerns about where the next meal would come from.

The Sewa volunteers actively engaged in this project approached their tasks with enthusiasm. It was a collaborative team effort where volunteers prepared diverse dishes and delivered them to designated representatives, who then transported the food for distribution to those in need.

Meal Items: Pita bread, Potato Salad, Chickpea Salad, Cheese Quesadillas, Vegetable Pasta, Marinara Pasta, Portuguese rolls, Rajma Kidney Beans, Brownies, Jeera Cumin Rice, Peas Rice, Channa Chickpeas Masala Curry, Coconut Laddu Sweet, Cupcakes, PB&J sandwiches, Cookies, Chips, and Candy.

Meals' Sponsors:

LEAD Sainidi Tekele family, LEAD Siddhartha Kakaraparyhi family
LEAD Riddhi family, LEAD Shriya family
LEAD Yuktha Kallamsetty family, LEAD Krishna Sathvik Malyala family
LEAD Sanjana Anchula family, Arathi & Ganesh Shankarling
Malini & Muralidharan Krishnan, Monika & Shashi Khurana
Nagajothi & Rajesh Ramasamy, Sumitra & Ram Sheeri
Swathi & Vijay Shetty, Shilpa & Mukul Rathi (State Farm)
Swetha & Ravinder Gade, Sewa Family Group of Donors

Meals' Recipients:

Cathedral Kitchen at Camden
Ozanam Family Shelter, Edison,
United Methodist Church, New Brunswick
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Trenton

Food Distribution Service for the Food Insecure

In January Chapter LEADs also enthusiastically participated in the Hands of Hope Food Pantry food drive, aiming to combat food insecurity in the community. Their involvement included tasks such as packing food boxes for distribution, assisting in the pantry, managing the drive-thru, and directly distributing food to those in need. They also helped in the registration process for individuals attending the food drive. The event not only raised awareness about the challenges faced by people in need but also highlighted the positive impact Sewa can have on their lives. Volunteering at the food drive reinforced the organization's dedication to community service, contributing to the overall success of the event. In appreciation for their service, each LEAD received a pot of flowers as a symbolic thanks for their meaningful contributions. This experience served not only to assist those in need but also to foster reflection on actively building a more compassionate and supportive community.

Sewa LEADs also dedicated their time to volunteering at the Franklin Food Bank, where they stocked up on produce, canned goods, and non-perishable items. The LEADs diligently sorted the items based on their expiry dates, ensuring the quality and safety of the provisions.

In another initiative, Sewa volunteers actively participated in the monthly food packing event at the Jewish Relief Agency. Here, they packed nutritious kosher food and essential household items, ensuring the safe delivery of these provisions to senior residents in need.

Sewa Beneficiaries:

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



Newsletter Team

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- ❖ Deepika Sundaram
- ❖ Dhairya Punatar
- ❖ Ishaan Brahma
- ❖ Rachit Surve
- ❖ Sanjana Kamath
- ❖ Shriya Machanpalli
- ❖ Srithan Sai Gade
- ❖ Vindhya Mavuri

Upcoming Events

- ❖ Sewa Boatbuilding for Biodiversity
- ❖ 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

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