

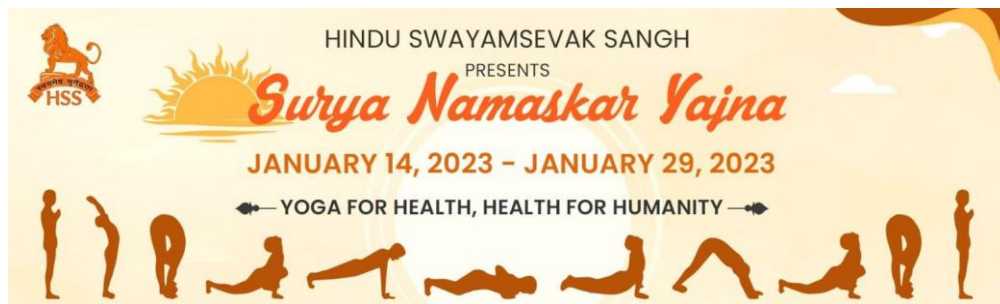
Sewa Surya Namaskar Yajna 'Yoga for Health, Health for Humanity' Yogathon

Hindus worldwide had an auspicious start to 2023 with the celebration of Makar Sankranti on January 14th – a day that marks the change of season as the Sun transitions into the sign of Capricorn or Makar. Makar Sankranti (movement/transition into Capricorn) ushers in longer days; thus, the festival is dedicated to the solar deity Surya/Sun. It is observed to mark a new beginning and is an auspicious occasion that is celebrated all over the world.

To mark this occasion of Makar Sankranti, for the last 15 years, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), USA has organized the “Yoga for Health, Health for Humanity” – an annual Yogathon event where **Surya Namaskars (Sun Salutations)** are performed. Since its inception, around 40 states across the US have actively taken part via various yoga centers, community organizations, schools, and colleges and collectively performed over **4 million** Surya Namaskars.

Community leaders and many elected officials across the nation have appreciated this initiative and encouraged their residents to participate and gain the benefits of an overall healthy lifestyle. This nationwide event has participants across genders, races, ethnicities, nationalities, and faiths making it a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) event.

This year too HSS, USA conducted the 16th annual “Yoga for Health, Health for Humanity Yogathon” or “Surya Namaskar Yajna” a 16-day event aimed to create awareness about Yoga and its advantages in achieving a healthy body, mind and spirit.



Volunteers from the Central Jersey Chapter also participated in the Yajna and additionally volunteered to assist at the events across various centers. They helped to set up the events, to coordinate and also helped with the wrap up after the Yogathon was concluded.



Chapter Highlights

- ❖ Sewa Surya Namaskar Yajna
- ❖ Sewa for Jewish Relief Agency
- ❖ Sewa at Jersey Cares Coat Drive
- ❖ Sewa for Habitat for Humanity
- ❖ Sewa for Autism Foundation
- ❖ Sewa for Senior Center
- ❖ Sewa in support against Gender Based Violence
- ❖ Sewa at Temple
- ❖ Sewa at Food Banks, Pantries & Shelters
- ❖ SewaMeals for those in Need
- ❖ Sewa at SAL Swim Meet
- ❖ Sewa for Boat Building
- ❖ Sewa on Groundhog Day!

Volunteer Spotlight



Padmaja Ji Bhogadi has been part of Sewa International Central Jersey Chapter since 2021 and has been actively leading the SewaMeal program since July 2022. She is very passionate about giving back to the society and promotes programs such as Keep My street green, Cherry Hill trail clean ups, plastic drive & many more. She is a very focused parent volunteer & constantly works on getting new volunteering opportunities in the local area. Apart from Sewa, she also volunteered in teaching young kids their mother tongue, Telugu. Padmaja Ji is residing in Mount Laurel, New Jersey with her husband and two kids.



Surya Namaskar integrates simple Yoga postures in 10-steps that, along with easy breathing technique, can provide immense health benefits to both mind and body.

Posture 1: *Praṇāmāsan* or *centering-pose* relaxes the nervous system & helps in maintaining body balance. It also helps relieve stress & anxiety.

Posture 2: *Urdhvāsan* or the *raised-arms-pose* stretches and tones the abdominal muscles. Beneficial for people suffering from Asthma, lower back pain, and fatigue. It also aids digestion.

Posture 3: *Uttānāsan* or the *Standing-forward-bend-pose* stretches the hamstrings and lower back. Helps in curing insomnia, osteoporosis, headache, anxiety, and stress.

Posture 4: *Ek-Pād-Prasarāsan* or the *lunge-pose* strengthens the spine and increases the lung capacity. Relieves indigestion and constipation.

Posture 5: *Chaturang Danḍāsan* or the *Plank-pose* keeps the mind calm while stretching the arms, chest, shoulders, and spine. This pose also improves posture.

Posture 6: *Sāṣṭāṅg Praṇipātāsan* or the *Eight-limb-pose* increases flexibility and stretches the back and the spine. This pose also strengthens the muscles and relieves stress.

Posture 7: *Urdhwamukh-Shvānāsan* or the *Cobra-pose* stretches the shoulders, back, chest and the spine. It improves flexibility and mood.

Posture 8: *Adhomukha-Shvānāsan* or the *Downward-facing-dog-pose* calms the nerves and increases blood circulation. Relieves stress and strengthens the arms and legs.

Posture 9: *Ek-Pād-Prasarāsan* or the *lunge-pose* strengthens the spine and increases the lung capacity. Relieves indigestion and constipation.

Posture 10: *Uttānāsan* or the *Standing-forward-bend-pose* stretches the hamstrings and lower back. Helps in curing insomnia, osteoporosis, headache, anxiety, and stress.

The Central Jersey Chapter LEADs and adult volunteers appreciated having this opportunity to participate in the Surya Namaskar Yajna.

Sewa at Jewish Relief Agency, Food Banks, Food Pantries, and Food Shelters

In honor of Dr. King's legacy, over 850 volunteers came out to help struggling families in the community by providing food in a caring gesture during January Food Distribution at Jewish Relief Agency. About **25** volunteers from the Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International were part of this amazing effort. The LEAD volunteers helped pack hundreds of food packets & helped in the delivery to **20** households in the local area.

The Sewa Central Jersey Chapter started volunteering at JRA in December 2022, and it has been a wonderful partnership. In the last 3 months, more than **100** volunteers have been part of the efforts & have put close to **500** hours. Kudos to all the LEADs & parents for driving all the way to Philadelphia early Sunday mornings to help JRA.



Central Jersey LEADs volunteered at the Ozanam food shelter to make meals for people in need. In a collaborative effort, LEADs diced vegetables and helped with making meals. LEADs made around **100** meals. They thoroughly enjoyed this experience as it gave those who don't usually cook to pick up new skills and methods and also learn to use the cooking equipment.

The Chapter would like to thank Vimla Ji Sekhar Akkala, the meals sponsor for the month.

LEADs also volunteered at Hands of Hope food pantry where they volunteered to check the expiration dates on the goods donated. They checked each can, box, or packet with caution and stocked them on the shelves. LEADs also helped with bagging items and readying them to be transported. LEADs worked in an orderly fashion and carried out their tasks seamlessly and effectively.



Chapter LEADs volunteered at the Franklin Food Bank in January where they helped sort donated food items, organize and restock shelves, and load produce into bags. They further assisted shoppers at the food bank in their shopping.

SewaMeals for those in Need

The USDA estimates that ~**650,000** people, including ~**175,000** children, in New Jersey are food insecure. That means about **7.4%** of individuals and **9.0%** of children live without reliable access to healthy food. COVID-19 pandemic has only widened the disparity in access to food.

The Central Jersey Chapter which initiated this program in 2020, started hosting multiple events every month where the youth volunteers cook homemade, healthy meals for the homeless, food shelters, and food pantries, in order to provide consistent access to adequate food for the food insecure and thus enabling them to live healthy, active lives.

The Chapter LEADs started the year 2023 also with their monthly service of providing hot home cooked meals. They prepared bread rolls, Caesar salad, chick peas salad, peas pulao rice, cumin pulao rice, chana masala, garlic pitta bread, hummus, Italian roasted vegetables, pasta with marinara sauce, and vegetable pasta. Dessert made was semolina sweet, chocolate chip muffins, and brownies.

The LEADs prepared the meals, packed them, and delivered them to the recipient churches, food pantries, and food shelters and further helped in packaging individual meals and in distributing the meals to the food insecure.

January Meals' Sponsors:

Sumitra & Ram Sheeri
Gayathri & Srinivas Rao
Monika & Shashi Khurana
Shilpa & Mukul Rathi (State Farm)
LEAD Suhas family
LEAD Riddhi family
LEAD Devanshi family
LEAD Sai Siddharth family

January Meals' Recipients:

Ozanam Food Shelter
United Methodist Church in New Brunswick
Westminster Presbyterian Church in Trenton



The Chapter extends thanks to the meal sponsors and the LEADs for their service.



Sewa at 'Jersey Cares' Coat Drive

Central Jersey LEADs also started 2023 by helping to sort and categorize thousands of coats collected by the Jersey Cares Coat Drive, a nonprofit event which mobilized the collection of coats for men, women, and children in need throughout the state of New Jersey. Chapter LEAD volunteers sorted and packaged thousands of coats at their central location where these coats were delivered from the coat drives. The LEADs sorted and packaged coats which were subsequently distributed to those in need.



Sewa for 'Habitat for Humanity'

In the month of January 2023, Central Jersey Sewa LEADs helped Habitat for Humanity in the endeavor to improve living conditions and to provide affordable and safe homes for low-income and historically underserved families from accessing adequate, affordable shelter.

The LEADs volunteered in folding, rolling and organizing large rugs for these homes.



Sewa for Autism Foundation



Central Jersey LEADs through the years have been volunteering at the AttachAvi Autism Foundation, in helping children on the autism spectrum and spreading awareness about their conditions. The LEADs once again stepped in to help the foundation at their opening of a new center building. LEADs helped in engaging the kids at the center, in taking pressure off of the parents and organizers and with ensuring the event ran smoothly.

Sewa at Senior Center

In January, Chapter LEADs were given the privilege of volunteering at the North Brunswick Senior Center during their MLK Day. They plated and handed out snacks, guided guests to their seats, and assisted with tasks around the event and ensured all the senior citizens were well cared for.



Sewa in support against Gender Based Violence



Central Jersey Chapter in their continued support for Manavi – an organization with a mission to end all forms of gender based violence in the South Asian community – helped the organization in the setup and organizing their fundraising event, a musical concert. LEADs worked together to set up the concert hall and have it ready for the event.

Sewa at Temple on New Year's Day

LEADs from the Central Jersey Chapter started the first day of the year volunteering at the Radha Gopinath Temple. The LEADs were tasked with setting up the temple for the event that was taking place on January 1st 2023. LEADs were blessed to be at the temple on this day and subsequently assisted with serving and preparing food for the temple devotees. LEADs also served 'prasadam' to the temple visitors and assisted with clean up at the end of the auspicious day of New Year.



Sewa at SAL Swim Meet



Chapter LEADs played a vital role in running the Championships Swim Meet at Council Rock North High School in Newtown, PA. The swim meet was organized by Suburban Aquatic League, a Pennsylvania non-profit corporation. The LEADs stepped up to take on important responsibilities such as timekeeping and running the concession stands. They worked alongside adults to ensure that the events were conducted safely and efficiently. Their participation in this event is a testament to their commitment to service and making a positive impact in their community.

Sewa for Boat Building for River Transport

This year too Chapter LEADs continued with their collaboration with the Lower Raritan Watershed with building cedar wood boats that are free for public use, encouraging people to get out on the water more and as a mode of transport across the Raritan river. The project requires LEADs to learn about different types of wood and understand the process of designing/constructing the boats.



Sewa on Groundhog Day

Groundhog Day is a superstitious tradition popularly celebrated in North America where people search for groundhog holes in order to make a prediction on whether or not winter will go on for a further six weeks. Watershed Institute, held an event on this day to celebrate this superstitious tradition. The program included a treasure hunt, a nature hike, and fun elements such as meeting the naturalists, and searching for groundhog holes. For this event the LEADs volunteered with helping out with guests check in, helping guests around the various booths and taking care of general logistics, and also helped with cleaning up after the event.



*'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' – The World Is One Family
Together We Serve Better*

Newsletter Team



Abhilash Rayapureddy
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Interests: Music, Track, Weight lifting
Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa for Habitat for Humanity



Advait Nair
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Interests: Distance-Track, Weight Lifting
Favorite Sewa Project: 5k for Cancer, Produce Gardening for Donation



Akshaj Kalepalli
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Favorite Sewa Project: Adopt-A-Highway Cleaning



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Favorite Sewa Project: Boat Building for river transport



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Favorite Sewa Project: Autism Foundation, Hands of Hope Food Pantry



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Favorite Sewa Project: SewaMeals



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Favorite Sewa Project: Hands of Hope Food Pantry



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Srividya Mudaliar
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Favorite Sewa Project: SewaMeals, Produce Gardening for Donation



Sutirth Potluri
Grade: 9
Interests: Volleyball
Favorite Sewa Project: SewaMeals



Vedant Nair
Grade: 12
Interests: Soccer, Sprints-Track
Favorite Sewa Project: Keep My Street Green, 5K for Cancer

Upcoming Events

- ❖ Sewa Free Health Screening Camp
- ❖ Sewa handmade jewelry for fundraising
- ❖ Sewa at Food Bank, Food Pantries & Soup Kitchens
- ❖ SewaMeals for those in Need
- ❖ Sewa in Boat Building

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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