

Gitesh Desai, Sewa Houston, conferred the 2019 Overseas Indian Award

Gitesh Desai, President Sewa Houston Chapter, was conferred with the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman* (Overseas Indian Award) by Ram Nath Kovind, President of India. He was one among 28 eminent overseas Indians who received this prestigious award this year.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is a biennial celebratory event sponsored by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, to recognize the contributions made by overseas Indians to the welfare and development of India. The day commemorates the return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa to Mumbai, India in 1915, after which he took up the fight for the independence of India. This year, the event was held January 21-23 in the holy city of Varanasi (Benares) in India.

We, at Sewa International, are proud of Gitesh Desai's leadership, and we congratulate him on this prestigious award. The Government of India recognized his selfless service in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Despite being forced to vacate his inundated home in the middle of the night, Gitesh continued to lead and mentor the Houston team in the relief and rehabilitation of Hurricane Harvey victims, working from his temporary accommodation in a motel for over a year.



Gitesh Desai, receiving the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman* from the President of India. Looking on is Sushma Swaraj (left), External Affairs Minister of India.

Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Family,

Greetings to everyone! This world is a beautiful creation. We humans are blessed with enormous powers - a thinking faculty (mind) to comprehend the world; an intellect (*buddhi*) for determination and decision making; memory (*chitta*) to remember past experiences; and, above all, we have a spark of divinity in us which shines and activates all these instruments within us. Along with these instruments (*antah-karan*), we are blessed with five powerful senses for acquiring knowledge (faculties of hearing, seeing, touch, taste, and smell) and five equally powerful organs for doing actions (speech, hands, feet, excretory organ, reproduction).

In short we are gifted by Divinity with sophisticated powers to bend the course of rivers, crack mighty mountains, fly faster than sound, change energy from one form to another, and many more. It is up to each one of us how we put to use this stock of power.

We often hear that Divine power sustains this creation by acting with thousands of hands. When you find yourself in the position of helping and serving someone, be happy and feel blessed because Divinity is answering that person's prayer through you. You are the hands through which Divinity acts. Divine power sustains it through Sewa.

Sewa International is a platform that is open to everyone to experience that divinity that dwells inside each of us. There is a wide variety of projects in different spheres of life available -- from supporting child education, healthcare of the underserved and vulnerable populations, disaster relief and rehabilitation, yoga for health, to feeding the hungry. Sewa is now active in 42 cities across the United States. I invite everyone reading this article to please make use of the Sewa platform, join, and contribute to any Sewa project of your choice and experience the joy of giving. Let me challenge you: pick a project and become its ambassador in your local community. Let us make effective and efficient use of the stock of powers we have been blessed with and leave our imprint on society for the good of humanity. Let us become part of this huge sacrifice/objective (*sewa yagna*) and make your offering. Together, we serve better.

Sincerely,

Ashwani Garg

Ashwani Garg
VP Administration

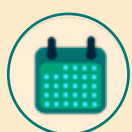


Three hundred doctors mobilized for Kumbh Mela

Kumbh Mela, included in the 'intangible cultural heritage of humanity' list by UNESCO, is a major Hindu pilgrimage of faith -- the world's largest gathering of people. The 49-day Kumbh Mela this year started at Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on January 15 on *Makar Sankranti* and will end on March 4, culminating in the festival of *Maha Shivarathri*. The Kumbh Mela is expected to have a footfall of 120 million pilgrims from around the world. It's a moment of pride for every Indian to be a witness to this grand spectacle, more so when one is engaged as a volunteer during this event.

To provide holistic health services for the attendees, over 2,000 medical practitioners, including 300 doctors, have volunteered to cater to the pilgrims. Doctors for Seva, an initiative of Youth for Seva -- Sewa International's local partner in India, has been onboarded as part of the voluntary platform of 'Kumbh Sevamitra' to engage doctors in delivering essential services -- another step towards ensuring a truly memorable experience for the visitors.

THE SCALE OF KUMBH MELA



49
Day Event



\$ 17 billion
Revenues



4,000+
Tents Setup



155
Miles Roads
Constructed



600,000+
Jobs
Created



22
Pontoon Bridges
Built

Massive arrangements have been made for this event including building the world's largest temporary city with over 4,000 tents, 155 miles of roads, 22 pontoon bridges, and a parking space of 32,000 hectares. Over 180 drivers and staff ply 90 ambulances, including advanced life support ambulances and river ambulances round the clock for the benefit of pilgrims. The event is expected to generate more than 600,000 jobs in addition to promoting tourism in Uttar Pradesh and surrounding states, and lead to \$17 billion in revenues.



Three hundred doctors mobilized for Kumbh Mela

"It is a privilege and honor for Sewa International in sponsoring the cost of basic preventive measures, immediate care facilities for the event, and supporting 300 voluntary experienced doctors, each committing for a ten-day cycle, at the world's largest faith congregation" said Sewa President, Dr.Sree Sreenath.

During the first 17 days of Kumbh, 47 voluntary doctors treated over 35,000 patients, including delivering eight babies. The team of doctors included General Physicians, Cardiologists, E&T specialists, Anesthetists, Surgeons, Dermatologists, Gynecologists, and Orthopedics who were ably supported by nursing staff, technicians, and other support staff.



Dr. Devendra from New Delhi treating a pilgrim at Circle Hospital

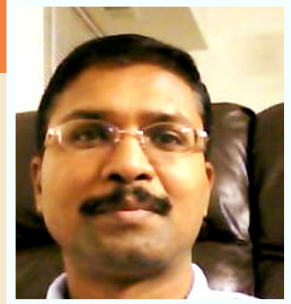


Dr. Prajwal directing a patient for lab investigations

“ It was a lifetime best experience for me at Kumbh Mela, rendering whatever little service I could to those in need. There were lots of learnings from the team of paramedics, doctors, and yes, from the monks (sadhus) at at Kumbh. I'd like to thank Team Sewa wholeheartedly, who have altered the way we look at seva and volunteering. ”

- Dr.Prajwal,
General Practitioner, Bengaluru.

Sewa volunteer Swathi Ram who has been coordinating the efforts of mobilizing the doctors including two doctors from the US said, "It has been a wonderful experience, and I appreciate the commitment of these doctors who have stepped up to the demands of the pilgrims – stretching themselves beyond their call of duty and treating up to 2,300 patients on a single day."



Kannan Sundaramoorthy is our volunteer of the month! Introduced in 2015 to the newly created Washington DC Chapter of Sewa International by Swarup Kurella (Washington DC Chapter Coordinator) and Rohit Deshpande, Kannan has been associated with the DC chapter since then. What drew Kannan initially to Sewa was its international focus, and its ability to come to the relief and aid of people affected by natural disasters around the world. The other aspect of Sewa work that has kept him engaged and involved are the development activities focused on building local communities – from education for the disadvantaged children to family services benefiting people in need or in distress. Kannan is inspired by the dedication of Sewa volunteers, and he loves the thoughtful approach to leadership and team-building that is showcased both at the chapter level as well as at the national level. Thus, volunteering for the social good and contributing to these efforts as part of the Sewa “family” keeps him engaged and deeply involved with Sewa and “sewa”.

As a project coordinator for the Washington DC chapter, Kannan has organized “*Stop Diabetes Movement*” workshops, and he has been involved in community activities like “*Adopt-a-Highway*”, cleaning up roadside debris and contributing to the safety and aesthetics of community roads. He has also been involved in other Sewa activities such as the “*Diwali Food Drive*,” and fund-raising events. As if that were not enough, Kannan also helps with keeping the chapter account books audit friendly and up-to-date.

Kannan was born and brought up in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. He completed his graduate degree in engineering at IIT, Kharagpur and has been working as an Information Technology professional for almost two decades after a few early years in the manufacturing industry. Kannan has been in the United States for more than a decade and is currently an Integrated Identity and Access Management (IAM) architect for a commercial bank in the Washington DC Metro Area. Kannan lives in Fairfax, Virginia with wife Rama. Their daughter, Lavanya, is a senior at Cornell University. Rama works as an Administrative Assistant at a local public school and helps and supports Kannan in his Sewa activities.

Toilet and Hygiene for the Girl Child

Four years into the project, till date, the team has completed installation of 337 toilet units across 12 districts in three Indian states benefiting 15,119 school children and 7,803 families.

The highlights of 2018 are given alongside.

[Click here](#) to read the 2018 Project Annual Report.

Highlights of 2018..

- Sanitation
 - Bio-Toilets - 119 toilet units.
 8,806 school children
 - Repair and renovation of existing toilets - phase I & II.
 3,503 families
 - Potable water supply and Maintenance.
 3 Indian States
- Education - Lead India program & after school centers.
- Healthcare - 3 Major free medical camps & hygiene awareness programs.

Upcoming Events

- Feb **9** & **10**, 2019 : Sewa Atlanta | *Badminton Tournament* | 3975 Lakefield Court, Suwanee, GA 30024
- Feb **22** to Mar **3**, 2019 : Sewa Houston | *Stop Diabetes Movement Yoga Camp* | Sugar Land, Katy, West Oaks Mall
- Mar **2** & **3**, 2019 : Sewa Atlanta | *Spin Masters (Table Tennis) Tournament* | 3975 Lakefield Court, Suwanee, GA 30024
- Mar **2**, 2019 : Sewa Houston | *Sewa Dancing Stars* | Houston Durgabari Society 13944 Schiller Rd., Houston, TX 77082

Sewa International

P.O.Box 820867
Houston, TX 77282-0867

(708) 872-7392
info@sewausea.org
www.sewausea.org



Editorial Team: Prof. Ramesh Rao, Columbus State University, GA; Shyam Byra, Media Entrepreneur, Philanthropist and Businessman, Phoenix, AZ; and, crucially supported by our mission oriented staff -- Aravinda Rajagopal and Kusuma, Sewa Bengaluru Office, India.