

Atlanta Bathed in Colors, Thanks to Sewa!

Sewa International, Atlanta Chapter, organized its 13th annual Holi (Festival of Colors) event on March 3, 2018 at the Riverside Park in Roswell, GA. This year, Holi (pronounced just like "holy"), which is both a celebration of spring as well as rejoicing of the triumph of good over evil, was observed on March 02 in India where it has religious as well as community/cultural significance, especially in North India.



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Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Supporters:

I wish you all a happy new year as we celebrated *Chandramana Yugadi*, which occurred on March 18. Sewa International has been ushering in new years for a while now, and in fact we are in our teens, with lots of growth spurts to showcase! As our president, Prof. Sreenath, mentioned in the January newsletter, Sewa International reached several milestones while wrapping up 2017 and entering 2018. Every year brings changes, new hopes, new goals, and new challenges. Recently, Sewa International reorganized its Executive Committee, added new members to its Board of Directors, added more chapters, received endowment funds, and was awarded several recognitions like the "2018 Platinum Seal of Transparency" from GuideStar, the Hindu American Foundation's "Pride of the Community Award" given to Sewa International's Houston Chapter, and the "2018 Top Rated" recognition by the Great NonProfits organization. These are some of the recognitions Sewa received because of supporters and volunteers like you. Now, to keep up with the challenge of constantly changing technology and to enhance user experience, this year the Sewa team has decided to move on to a new technology platform. It will enable users and volunteers to leverage more power and support. And we will have a much more user-friendly web presence. Keeping all

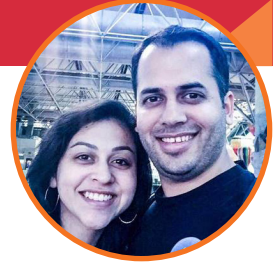
these changes, accomplishments, and achievements going on as part of the growth of our organization what really matters is how many lives we have impacted -- as each of you has been serving in your community and humanity across the globe! You have done so by sharing your time, money or skills to make an impact on the lives of underprivileged people or people in disaster affected areas. By serving the less fortunate we find immediate gratification, which is called a win-win situation. And Sewa is always prepared to provide you such opportunities. As you are already aware, Sewa International has various projects in different areas of your interests: it can be education, woman empowerment, healthcare, family services, child welfare, and disaster relief and rehabilitation. Sewa also organizes several fun events like the annual Holi celebrations (as we have showcased in this newsletter), sports events, youth related activities, and travel opportunities in the United States as well as in several countries around the world. You name it, we have it! There are umpteen opportunities where we can make a difference in our one universal family -- *Vasudhaiva Kutumba*. Let us all keep marching with whatever capacity we have towards a better world.


Anil Deshpande
 Vice President, Technology Services



Donor in Focus

Neha Narkhede and Sachin Kulkarni are software engineers in the San Francisco Bay Area. Born in middle class families in Pune, Maharashtra, the two consider themselves to be blessed and lucky to have access to good education which resulted in opportunities to build satisfying careers in the United States. They want to give back to those in need.



They are ready to donate up to \$71,000 in matching funds so that the total sum of \$142,000 can go toward building a school in the Namsai region of Arunachal Pradesh, and a hostel/dorm in the Gharmura region of Assam. They believe that the Northeast region of India has been neglected by successive Indian governments, and that the tribal communities and refugees in the region need as much support as we can give them.

The Namsai region in Arunachal Pradesh is home to several tribes like the Singpho, Adi, and Galo. The region is economically backward and the tribes have a difficult time earning a decent livelihood. In addition, Buddhist refugees of the Chakma tribe and Hindu refugees of the Hajong tribe also live in the Namsai region. These are refugees from the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, who have had to face religious persecution and oppression in Bangladesh. Similarly, economically backward tribes and refugees consider Gharmura in the Hailakandi region of Assam their home. These communities need our attention and help too.

Building a school in Namsai and a hostel in Gharmura is estimated to cost Rs. 92 lakhs/\$142,000. The school building will be about 3726 sq.ft in size and include four classrooms. The design allows two additional floors to be built on top of the first floor. The hostel in Gharmura would be able to accommodate 30 students.



North East Balwadi Photo

Neha and Sachin chose Sewa to channel their funds into the construction project as they know Sewa has had experience working with tribal communities in the Northeast, that Sewa's administrative expenses are low, and because Sewa does not discriminate based on religion, language, caste, and nationality.

Neha and Sachin have offered us a challenge: every dollar you donate, up to \$71,000 will be matched by them. "We would love for donors to join hands in this effort. Together, we can bring cheer and prosperity to those in need and provide opportunities so they can become self sufficient" they say.

April is National Volunteer Month

Sewa, as we remind ourselves and inform others, is about service, selfless service. It so happens that April is observed as the National Volunteer Month in the United States. It started in 1991 as part of President George H. W. Bush's 1,000 Points of Light campaign.

Volunteering in India, in days past, was different for many of us. There was no organized effort except for the National Service Scheme (NSS) offered in college, and which was started in 1969. But people volunteered in their village temples, community organizations, and, of course, donating time and effort to their large family networks. Mahatma Gandhi was the inspiration for and behind the efforts of modern social service in India.

In the United States, volunteerism is part of the national tradition as Alexis de Tocqueville, the French writer who travelled through America in the 1830s, wrote about: "Americans use associations to give fêtes, to found seminaries, to build inns, to raise churches, to distribute books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they create hospitals, prisons, schools. Finally, if it is a question of bringing to light a truth or developing a sentiment with the support of a great example, they associate".

Volunteerism is instilled at a young age. Many communities weave volunteerism into school programs, and summer vacations include doing some service. Many organizations in our towns, villages, and cities would not be able to function without volunteers, and many rural fire and ambulance departments are majority staffed by volunteers. Benjamin Franklin formed the first volunteer fire department in 1736, and some of the most well-known American charitable organizations, such as the YMCA and the American Red Cross, were founded in the nineteenth century.

In this spirit, and embodying the mission of Sewa, let us contribute to our communities by volunteering. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others".

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Celebrations begin on the evening of the full moon in the '*Phalgun/Phalguna*' lunar month (the eleventh month, which corresponds to February/March in the Gregorian calendar), and carries on to the next day. This year, the full moon rose on March 1, the first of two full moons in March. Gathering around a bonfire on the first day people celebrate the victory of good over evil, and perform rituals and prayers for the well-being of the world. The following day is the official *Holi* festival, joyous, celebratory, and a riot of color. This is when colored powders are thrown, applied lovingly on each other's faces, and colored water is squirted from little water guns and water balloons. On the day of Holi, with colors smeared on everyone's face, there is no bar on participating in the festival, and no discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or sex, and everyone is masked and painted in colors.

Though traditionally the festival finds its roots in Bharat (India) it has steadily increased in popularity around the world, including in the United States, thanks to the Hindu population wishing to share the joyous nature of the festival. In Atlanta, *Holi* has been organized by the Atlanta Chapter of Sewa International for the past dozen years, and this year the organizers expected about 3000 people to turn up. Amazingly, around 6,000 people showed up for what was truly a colorful and joyous event. People from all walks of life, of different religious faiths, and of different nationalities from across the Atlanta Metro area turned up!

Sewa International organizers and volunteers worked with other Indian-American organizations like the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), SiddhiVinayak Mandir, Shiv Mandir, Shiv Yog, Rajasthan Association of Georgia (RAJA), Bihar and Jharkand Association (BAJA), Greater Atlanta Punjabi Society (GAPS), Raksha, Ekal Vidyalaya, Isha Foundation, Art of Living Foundation, Knowledge Momentum, and Aim for Sewa, and media partners like TV Asia, WOWNOW, NRI Pulse, Khabar, Atlanta Duniya, SoS Digital media, and Shweta Dhawan Productions to make the event a grand success. Joining hands and providing support were the administrations of the City of Roswell, GA, the Riverside Park Administration, and the Roswell Police Department.



Sewa International had children and adult volunteers in charge of the food and color counters, and helping direct traffic and parking, and managing the clean-up after the event.

Sewa International had the help of DJ Shaan who choreographed all the magical, melodious dance numbers, and the photography team led by Venkat Kuttua who captured the event in glowing and vibrant colors.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Hetal Nayak is the chapter coordinator for San Antonio, since 2014. She was introduced to Sewa through the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS). What inspires her in volunteering is the commitment of her fellow volunteers, and the vision and mission of Sewa.

Hetal began her journey in Sewa by teaching yoga. Through the “Yoga for Sewa” team in San Antonio she has served hundreds of people in the larger San Antonio community as well as the Hispanic and African American communities which have embraced this path to health and well-being. Hetal organizes an annual yoga conference under the Sewa International umbrella that brings more than 30 organizations together to celebrate International Day of Yoga, and supports other non-profit organizations in San Antonio that bring free yoga classes to the underserved communities.

Hetal and her team also offer courses in Hindi through the Hindi Pathashala, and they have done this successfully in San Antonio for the past three years. This team has more than 15 volunteers working under Sewa as they are passionate about preserving our language and culture.

Hetal Nayak is an anesthesiologist by training. She also has a PhD in yoga earned through the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana (SVYASA), a deemed university in Bengaluru, India. Hetal and her husband, Dr. Devraj Nayak, have two daughters. Dr. Nayak is a cardiologist, and he too is a yoga advocate. Hetal is passionate about the yogic lifestyle and her passion is to introduce as many people as she can to the benefits of yoga. Hetal and her family are actively involved in the San Antonio HSS chapter.

Sewa is proud to have Hetal Nayak and her family as volunteers, and we are proud of their commitment to serving society.



Sewa International awarded the **2018 Guidestar Platinum Seal**; included in the prestigious **2018 GreatNonprofits Top-Rated List**



Sewa has been awarded the 2018 GuideStar Platinum Seal -- the highest level of recognition offered by GuideStar, the world's largest source of information about nonprofit organizations. The platinum level indicates the organization's commitment to transparency and focus on measuring its progress and results. The status elevates Sewa International to the select group of nonprofits that have received this honor.



Sewa makes it to the 2018 Top-rated List of Nonprofits: The GreatNonprofits Top-Rated Awards is the one and only people's choice award where volunteers, donors, and people served by nonprofits are asked to share stories of inspiration, express their appreciation.

Sewa 2018 Annual National Conference

The Sewa International 2018 Annual National Conference is being held April 28-29, at Parsipanny, NJ. The Annual Conference is a great opportunity to network with chapter leaders, the National Team, Board of Directors, and project leaders. Chapters also report and discuss the past year's activities, share best practices, and present future plans seeking invaluable suggestions from the national team and conference attendees.

Upcoming Events

- Apr **08**, 2018 : Sewa Sugarland, Texas – *Raising Emotionally healthy children*
- Apr **12**, 2018 : Sewa Pennsylvania – *Stop Diabetes Yoga Workshop 2018*
- May **12**, 2018 : Sewa Bay Area – *Stop Diabetes Yoga Workshop 2018*
- Jun **10**, 2018 : Sewa Atlanta – *Get Inspired Summer Internship*
- Jun **10**, 2018 : Sewa Chicago – *Get Inspired Summer Internship*
- Sep **14**, 2018 : Sewa West Houston, TX - *Stop Diabetes Movement Camp*

Sewa International

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