

## Successful National Annual Meet Celebrates Year of Challenges, Achievements

Speaking at the just concluded National Annual Conference of Sewa International, Dr. Sree Sreenath said that Sewa has generated \$4.3 million, and disbursed \$1.86 million in 2017. Most of the surplus are restricted funding for ongoing projects for future years, and endowment.



It was not at all difficult herding the active, energetic Sewa International members for this photo shoot. Alas, a couple of them are out of the frame!

Cont. page 3

## Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Supporters,

The young North Jersey Chapter that I am very fortunate to be a part of, hosted a great Sewa National Conference in May 2018. Many volunteers and their families were engaged in the planning, hosting out of towners and, in organizing a successful conference. This did not stop us from simultaneously conducting a *Sewa Day* event as a part of continuing commitment to the local community. The key for the success of this a year-plus old chapter is the involvement of families along with individual volunteers. Entire families, including their middle school and high school age children, are involved in all aspects of Sewa activities. Keeping a can of food aside every week for the soup kitchen donation, collecting and transporting the food stuff to the soup kitchen, conducting a highway cleanup activity, or, preparing all the food for the Sewa National Conference are the kinds of activities that has made the North Jersey Chapter such a vibrant organization.

Children learn from observing parents, and the values and culture across generations is thus transmitted. There are challenges bringing up children in a different culture from the one the parents have grown up in, and conflicting to values outside and inside of the house can

be a tricky path to navigate. It is clear that preaching about the greatness of our culture will not suffice but living up to those values is the only way the values can be transferred to the next generation. Participating in Sewa work as a family transforms the family, enabling family members to identify themselves with other such Sewa families. Working as one team also offers people the experience of being members of the extended Sewa Family. This oneness among volunteers can be conveyed to the beneficiaries of Sewa outreach – whether we are serving at a soup kitchen or when we are dealing with children from inner cities in our *Aspire Tutorials*. This is a sure way of achieving our mission.

In closing, let me call your attention to the new website that has been launched for our *Sponsor a Child* program. I invite you to offer your feedback on this new website: <https://sac.sewaua.org/>, as well as the *Sponsor a Child* Facebook page -- <https://www.facebook.com/sewachild>.

*Vijay Mallampati*  
**Vijay Mallampati**  
 Director of Sponsor a Child (SaC)



## Cause of the Month – Sponsor a Child

Sewa's Sponsor a Child program serves children of low income families through the payment of school fees (tuition), bearing the expense of school uniforms, books, and subject-matter coaching, career guidance and counseling.



To be more transparent to our donors and reach out to a wider community of partner nonprofits, a new website was launched in May 2018 -- a result of more than a year of planning, testing, and implementation. Key enhancements in the new system include real-time program statistics on improved web interface; choice of criteria for child selection -- based on date of birth, age, gender, grade, etc; improved donor dashboard and recurring donation alerts; seamless social media integration facilitating donors to easily share their act of support and encourage their friends and family join the cause; and, a decentralized

management of updating child records – hence faster information reach to donors. Team Sewa is confident that this new website will be a launch pad to expand the program, and we look forward to the full support of donors and well-wishers.

## Phoenix Chapter Receives Major Funding from Intel Corp.

The work of Sewa's Phoenix Chapter in engaging the Bhutanese community and offering them programs to benefit their community has led to some real success and acknowledgement of their work through a \$10,000 grant from the Intel Corporation.

Shambhavi Kulkarni, who works for Intel Corporation, took the initiative to register the Phoenix Chapter for Intel's volunteermatch grant program as Intel is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, and the corporation is urging employees to do their share of community work. So, in early May the Phoenix Sewa Chapter was happily surprised to receive a check for \$10,000 from Intel in support of the chapter's Bhutanese Refugee Empowerment (BRE) programs.



*Picture taken at the Bhutanese Youth Heritage Camp, organized by Sewa International's Phoenix Chapter*

Volunteers of the Phoenix Chapter have worked hard to make the BRE program successful. The activities and programs have included the following:

- Bhutanese Youth Heritage Camp – which was attended by 30 young people
- Offering English language classes; computers installed with Rosetta Software for English learning, through the help of Rupesh Chavan, the chapter's joint coordinator
- Nidhi Gupta, volunteer, arranged a lecture on Bhutanese refugees in her school, and she is now leading the BRE program in Phoenix
- Credit card donations to three families, and three bicycles provided to children
- Donation of 11 blankets to needy families in winter; support to one family with a grant of \$1,000, providing grocery for two months
- Organizing camps/meetings for Bhutanese youth every Sunday, where chapter volunteers offer activities like yoga, lectures, and discussions
- Persuading members of the Indian-American community to offer free coaching for SAT/ACT, sponsoring of a Bhutanese soccer team, and employing Bhutanese youth in Indian-American owned restaurants

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Sewa International spent the funds on a variety of outreach programs and projects to provide support to those in dire need, rescue, and relief operations following Hurricane Harvey, and on local community outreach in cities like Houston, Atlanta, and Cleveland. "This was an eventful year, a demanding year, even a historic year as we rose to the challenge of responding to multiple crises. Our Houston team rolled up their sleeves, went to work, rescued people, gave shelter, and doled out food and supplies as Hurricane Harvey brought Houston to its knees. But, all our other Chapters contributed in multiple ways: handling the 24/7 hotline, managing public relations, physically delivering crucial cleaning supplies and water to Houston, and, fundraising," he said. "We don't want such disasters to strike again, but we showed the world that while our footprint is small our work is high quality, and our spirit universal, and they caught the attention of the world," he told the more than 80 leaders and volunteers from 33 chapters across the United States who gathered April 27-29 for the annual national conference, hosted by the North Jersey Chapter, with support from the Central Jersey Chapter, in Parsippany, New Jersey.

Dr. Sreenath said that Sewa volunteers had logged nearly 140,000 hours working on rescue and relief operations, supporting education for children, conducting health workshops, and offering emergency support services to needy families in cities across the United States. The chapters across the country organized more than 180 events, from major events like celebrating Holi in Atlanta to well-attended fund-raising events in Houston, Boston, Chicago, and the San Francisco Bay Area. "Our 1,400 volunteers put in hard work in Houston in the aftermath of Harvey. We deployed SUVs, trucks, Humvees, and a boat to rescue the stranded, marooned, and the desperate. We also reached out to brethren in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean to serve them as Hurricanes Maria and Irma devastated those areas," he told the attendees to the conference. Sewa International raised over a million dollars for Hurricane Harvey relief and rehabilitation work, with nearly 40 percent of the funds received through a grant from the Greater Houston Community Foundation. "We hired 22 case managers on disaster case management and served more than 1,500 beneficiaries in a short span of four months – two-and-a-half times the number that we were obligated to," Dr. Sreenath said.



*Participants at the Sewa National conference.*

"A major accomplishment was the completion of a 2023 Strategic Plan. With this, Sewa International is set for growth and reach unparalleled heights as a Hindu faith-based charitable organization," he informed the attendees.

Leaders from various chapters shared information about the work they did during the year, their insights on raising funds, training volunteers, and acknowledging the generosity of donors. Gitesh Desai, Houston Chapter President, gave a detailed account of how he and his team worked as Hurricane Harvey hit Houston. A panel discussion of work-life balance for Sewa volunteers drew an enthusiastic crowd.

As is the culture of the organization, the North Jersey Chapter volunteers opened their homes for conference attendees, served home-cooked food, and organized airport pickup and drop-offs by volunteers. Twenty-seven volunteers accommodated the 40 plus out-of-town delegates in their homes. "It is this concern for fellow volunteers, for keeping costs low, that has enabled Sewa to keep administrative costs to just about three percent of the funds raised, and to earn 'Toprated' ranking from the Great Nonprofits organization, and 'Platinum Rating' from Guidestar," said Venkat Santhanraman, Vice President, Finance.

On the eve of the conference, at the event to attract new volunteers to join the North Jersey Chapter, nearly 140 people attended. Assisting the North Jersey Chapter volunteers were the team members of the Central Jersey Chapter.



Nikhil Jain has been serving the Houston community for more than 17 years. He has organized complex community service projects and events in Houston, and he is a staunch advocate of nonviolence and diversity.

Nikhil has been volunteering at the *Jain Vishwa Bharati* (JVB) Preksha Meditation Center since 2006, and served in the capacity of the center's president a few years ago. The JVB Center helps the Houston community in leading a healthy, happy, and peaceful life by teaching the principles of nonviolence and providing training in the system of Preksha Meditation. Nikhil has produced three plays (one in English and two in Hindi) each watched by 1,000+ audience: these plays were staged to raise awareness about JVB and raise funds. Nikhil is also the co-founder of the Madhya Pradesh Mitra Mandal which has been hosting annual picnics in Houston since the past 17 years.

Nikhil began his association with Sewa International in 2014, first when he attended the inaugural Stop Diabetes Movement (SDM) camp organized by the Sewa Houston Chapter and second, when he worked with Sewa Family Services team in taking care of a local graduate student who was involved in a nearly fatal car accident and was in hospital care for nine months.

Nikhil's formal association with Sewa began in January, 2016 and since then he has organized 12 SDM camps in the Greater Houston Area in which more than 200 people have derived immense health benefits. Currently, Nikhil serves as Sewa Houston Chapter's Joint Coordinator. He loves the Houston community as it is vibrant, diverse, and closely knit. Working with like-minded volunteers in Sewa is what keeps him motivated to do social service. "I am an engineer by education, an MBA graduate by design, and an IT Operations Leader by choice", he says.

Nikhil lives in Katy, TX with his wife, Ritu, who has been supporting him in every endeavor. Nikhil and Ritu have two daughters: Suvi Jain, who is an incoming senior in mechanical engineering at the University of Texas, Austin; and Rashu Jain, who is an incoming freshman in the McComb's School of Business, also at UT, Austin.

## Awards and Recognitions Galore For Sewa International

The Houston Chapter of Sewa International received the prestigious Global Seven (G7) Award given by the Houston International Trade Development Council (HITDC) in the category of "Outstanding Nonprofit Organization". The award was given at HITDC's Fifth Annual Gala at the Ballroom at Bayou Place in downtown Houston on Friday, May 25.

Gitesh Desai (Sewa's Houston Chapter President) received the Congratulatory Recognition Note from the White House Initiative on Asian American and Pacific Islanders, commending Sewa International's exemplary work in 2017, including during the initial days as Hurricane Harvey struck, and for the unstinting work in the relief and rehabilitation phases.

HITDC's President and CEO, Val Thompson, said: "The purpose of the award is to honor Houston area international businesses who make Houston City a unique player on the world stage. The 'Outstanding Nonprofit' award is intended for a special Houston area-based nonprofit that supports meaningful causes, directly solving economic challenges impacting the international community (i.e., families, children, women or other special causes). We are most honored by you accepting our 2018 'Outstanding Nonprofit' award which we believe your life and work profoundly exemplify."

"This award is a recognition of the selfless service provided by more than 1,250 volunteers, and the over 40 Indian community organizations that collaborated with Sewa International, large and small donors, supporters and well-wishers in Houston and throughout the country, for their confidence and trust in Sewa International. We could not have served without them," said Gitesh Desai.



Gitesh Desai holding the award received at the Houston gala.

## Upcoming Events

- Jun 10 to Aug 04, 2018 : Sewa Chicago, Naperville, Oak brook, Schaumburg, Buffalo Grove areas – *Get Inspired Summer Internship*.
- Jun 10 to Jul 22, 2018 : Sewa Atlanta, Atlanta – *Get Inspired Summer Internship*.
- Jun 16, 2018 : Sewa Cleveland, 33401 Webber Road, Avon lake (Weiss field), Avon lake, Ohio - *International Yoga Day 2018*.

### Sewa International

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