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Sewa International

Service to Humanity is Service to the Divine

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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SEWA INTERNATIONAL REPORTS A SUCCESSFUL YEAR, ANNOUNCES A CHANGE OF HANDS

Houston, TX (July 18, 2020): Meeting virtually for their annual conference this year, in the context of COVID-19, and with the highest attendance of nearly 300 people, Sewa International reported a record fundraising effort – raising \$8.3 million in 2019, as per initial estimates. It spent \$128,032 in general and administrative expenses, and \$168,354 in fundraising expenses. The general and administrative expenses amount to 1.5 percent of the total funds raised by Sewa International. “A charity of our size would, at a minimum, have 12 to 18 percent of such expenses. We are unique in that regard in the US, may be internationally,” said outgoing president, Prof. Sree Sreenath.

The annual event, which this year was scheduled to be held in Washington, DC, in early May, had to be postponed and held virtually. “We have conducted successful national meetings around the country, but this has been a new experience, and it challenged us to learn how to use technology successfully in this virtual conference,” said Sewa’s Vice President for Technology, Anil Deshpande.

Prof. Sree Sreenath, who served as President of Sewa International for eleven years, from 2009 to 2020, announced that Sewa’s Board of Directors had accepted his resignation and he was handing over the role and responsibilities to Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President, Arun Kankani, whom the Board had selected as the organization’s new president. “It is a bittersweet moment that I share with you all my resignation from the responsibility of President of Sewa International. The relationship with you all has been a long, fruitful, and intimate. Together we solved many problems, fought many battles, took up many intimidating challenges, and in the end, we came out victorious,” he said as he presented the 2019 Annual Report. “I have been asking to be relieved from Sewa President's responsibility for the last five years so that new leadership can take Sewa to further heights. Arun Kankani will take my place effective immediately. He is a terrific organizer and a fabulous leader. His discipline and steadfastness are legendary. I am proud to pass the baton over to

him,” he said as the nearly 300 attendees expressed their admiration of his leadership, and their love and support for him. “It has been a great eleven years serving Sewa working and working alongside with you. Our hard work paid off for Sewa. I feel fortunate for having journeyed together on this quest to serve humanity. I have learned many important lessons from all of you,” he told the Sewa volunteers, executive leadership, advisory board, and staff -- virtual attendees spread across the US, India, Colombia, and other parts of the world. “I am accepting the position of President of Vivekananda Yoga University, VaYU, Los Angeles, CA, but Sewa will still be my first love,” he said separately. VaYU is offering a unique Online 21-month MS (Yoga) program.



(Prof. Sree Sreenath, outgoing Sewa International President; he has now taken on the role of President, Vivekananda Yoga University in Los Angeles, CA)

Arun Kankani, Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President, who will now take charge as the new President of Sewa International, is no stranger to leading large teams and innovative ventures. Accepting his new role as President of Sewa International, he said, “We shall certainly miss the energy and enthusiasm of Prof. Sree Sreenath. He will continue to be part of the executive team as Ex-President and will continue the great tradition of Sewa International where former presidents will continue as members of the Board of Advisors”. In his day job, Arun Kankani is the Director of Inventory Management at Star Pipe Products in Houston, TX. He earned a master’s in computer applications from the University of Mumbai.

Arun Kankani is one of the founding members of Sewa International, which was formed in

2004. He has been involved in Sewa's nationwide expansion as a prominent charitable organization involved in disaster relief and rehabilitation; family services; child, tribal, and refugee welfare; women's empowerment; health and education; and promoting volunteerism. In 2012, Kankani discussed with a multitude of experts the problems faced by families, and the different support models that were available to them in times of crises and trouble. He was involved in formulating and implementing the *Family Services* program at Sewa that now supports and responds to various unexpected family situations such as death, hospitalization, mental health issues, and relationship issues. In 2013, he helped build the foundation for the ASPIRE program in Houston, where he resides. The ASPIRE program provides after-school educational support in collaboration with the local school system in underprivileged neighborhoods to help children learn well and the schools and school districts improve their success rates.



(Arun Kankani, Director of Inventory Management, Star Pipe Products, Houston, TX, has been appointed as Sewa International's new President)

Kankani was chosen to be the head of operations for the largest community reception in Houston for a visiting foreign dignitary – the “Howdy Modi” event in 2019. The event was attended by both Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump. As the Head of Operations for the “Howdy Modi” event, Arun Kankani led a team of over 1,200 volunteers who worked together to organize the event that attracted 50,000 people from around the country. He and his team had to get the work done in three months, and for his successful effort he received a letter of gratitude from the

Ambassador of India to the United States. Earlier in 2015, he was also invited by the Indian External Affairs Ministry to discuss the needs of overseas Indians.

In his report to the attendees at the national conference, Prof. Sree Sreenath said that during his eleven-year tenure Sewa had seen annual revenues increase from \$325,000 in 2009 to \$8.3 million in 2019; the number of chapters increase from five to 43; the number of national team members increase from two to 62; the number of volunteers increase from less than a hundred to 3,000; and the number of volunteer hours recorded per year rise from 100s to 180,000. He said that he and his team were able to show that an untested brand such as a “Hindu faith-based nonprofit organization” can be successful and thrive, and not just survive. “We have also shown that the entire middle and upper management can be volunteers – from Chapter Coordinators, Chapter Presidents, National Directors, Vice Presidents, Executive-VP to the President. We have no designated headquarters. We have made a name for Sewa in ‘Disaster Recovery’, and we helped start Sewa Nepal, Sewa Pakistan & Sewa Bangladesh,” he recounted with pride. “We know we have worked hard and dedicated ourselves to service in the true spirit of volunteerism, and as per our guiding principles of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family), and *Sarve Bhavantu Sukinah* (may all be happy). But it also gives us satisfaction that our work is recognized by agencies that rate and rank nonprofits. We have earned the maximum four-star rating by Charity Navigator; we have earned perfect 100 scores in ‘Accountability & Transparency’ and ‘Financial Health’ categories; we have been ranked in the ‘10 Highly Rated Charities Relying on Private Contributions’; we have been awarded the Platinum rank by Great Nonprofits; earned the Seal of Transparency by GuideStar; and the Better Business Bureau has rated us as an Accredited Charity”.

The day’s events started with traditional prayers and lighting of the lamp. Prof. Subhash Kak, Regents Professor at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, OK, the chief guest, in his address to the attendees spoke about India’s traditions of giving and sharing, and how in these challenging times Sewa is showcasing the best in serving humanity without any discrimination or prejudice. In his concluding remarks, Saumitra Gokhale, Global Coordinator for the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, spoke of the guiding principles of Sewa International and how the good work done is for humanity and not for selfish reasons. “While we do take pride in what we do and what we have accomplished, our true calling is serving the world selflessly,” he said.

About Sewa International

Sewa International, a leading Hindu faith-based Indian American nonprofit organization, has extensive experience in disaster rescue, relief, and rehabilitation operations having responded to 25 disasters in the US and abroad. In 2017, after Hurricane Harvey struck the Houston area, Sewa volunteers helped in the rescue of nearly 700 people, and have served thousands of affected families since then through their case management service. Sewa raised over \$3 million for Hurricane Harvey recovery, Sewa continues to rebuild houses, and, greenhouses that serve as a means of livelihood. Sewa International has also rendered relief in the wake of hurricane Maria in 2018 and Hurricane Imelda in 2019. Sewa teams in the San Francisco Bay Area continue to build and donate tiny homes for those rendered homeless in California Camp Fire of November 2018.

Among its other accolades, Sewa International has been recognized by Charity Navigator – the premier nonprofit rating agency – as the number five among the “10 Highly Rated Charities Relying on Private Contributions.” Sewa has for the last three years continuously scored the topmost-rated 4-star from Charity Navigator, and has earned perfect scores for its Financial Health and Accountability & Transparency.

