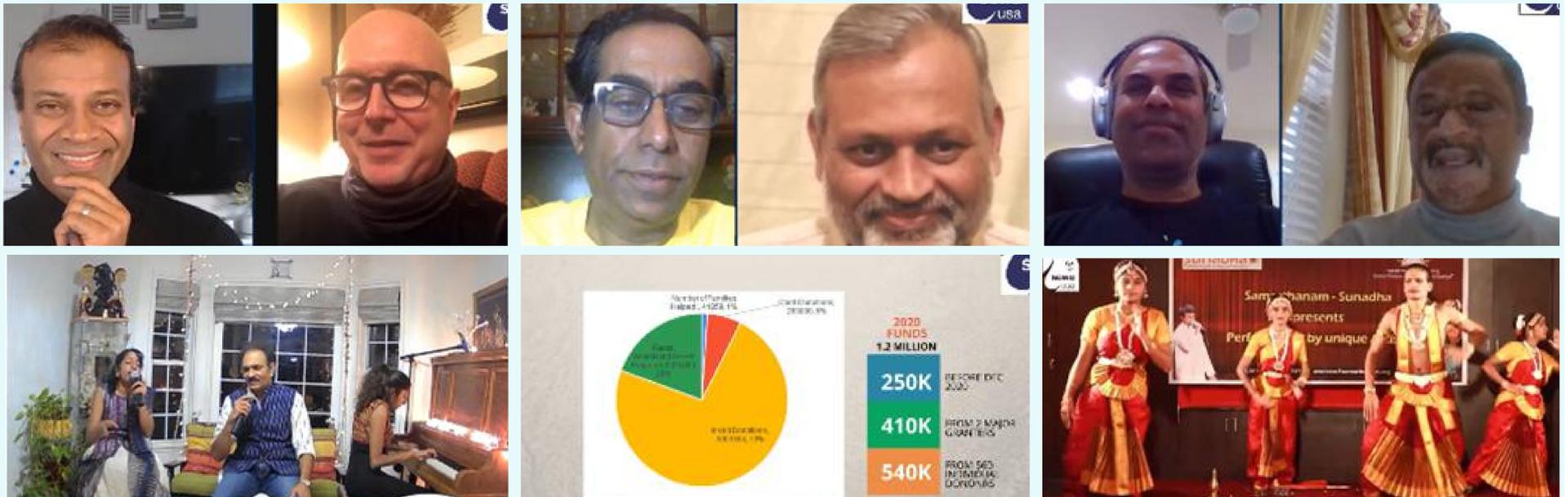


Bay Area Chapter's Annual Giving in 2020 Crosses \$4 Million



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Let us all welcome 2021 with hope; as COVID-19 vaccine is on the horizon

Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Families & Friends,

As we all know 2020 has been the COVID-19 pandemic year. It was an unprecedented global shock "like no other," involving simultaneous disruptions to the economy as well as daily life in an interconnected world. It has impacted productivity, business closures caused, the loss of income, and worsened economic prospects and reduced household consumption. The extreme uncertainty about the path, duration, magnitude, and impact of the pandemic has posed tightened financial conditions worldwide.

The pandemic has impacted the work of Sewa International too. It cut into resources while increasing demand for more services. As we are asked to do more with less money at first, we felt squeezed. We continue to provide support and services to the needy. Donations from traditional fundraising activities have declined. But Sewa karyakartas (volunteers) showed greater commitment, unparalleled courage and "sewa bhaav" (the spirit of service) in serving the community and the needy. Hats off to all our volunteers for their selfless service and the personification of "Sewa hi paramo dharma" (Service is our primary duty).

It will be interesting to talk more about the surge of response that we have seen across the philanthropic space to this disaster. We have seen lots of innovations in terms of our volunteers trying to keep our society inspired and move forward.

We have seen an increase in both grants specified or non-specified for COVID relief compared to the same period last year. In addition, we try to help and support as well as educate our donors. We see the wonderful surge of support and solidarity across our society, and it will be interesting to see if the pandemic provides an opportunity for more people to give, expressing their civic solidarity.

While the pandemic has posed several difficulties for businesses and the society at large, it has also presented us with several unique opportunities. The forced confinement has already reintroduced us to the magic of nature. The air quality improved and life in general has mellowed down. There are positives to be drawn for the world of business also.

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The lockdown has also been a catalyst to rush back to the drawing board and devise new and innovative ways to handle operations. In Sewa we came up with several such innovative programs: "Covid 19 Helpline," "Neighborhood Sewa," "Covid-19 Plasma Donation," "Career4 Sewa," "Sankalpa Patra," and "SewaSELF".

The shutdown has shown us that work-life balance is possible while also ensuring delivery of sewa. People are now more aware of their health and the importance of exercising. Technology assisted collaboration tools are now being used effectively, not just to conduct meetings, but also for creative brainstorming. This is also changing the way we articulate our brand image. Simply put, we have found a smarter way to achieve the same goals we were chasing in the past. We must carry forward these positive lessons from the lockdown to implement effective ways of serving society, because, let us face it, we are at the edge of a tectonic shift, and we have no other choice but to embrace the change with its most positive aspect firmly in sight. With open arms let us welcome 2021!

Sincerely,



Anil Deshpande
Vice President, Technology Services



In Memoriam: Alka Pandey, Sewa International, Boston.



Alka Pandey, founding member of Sewa International's Boston Chapter, passed away on Friday, November 27, after battling serious illness. Alka Pandey epitomized grace and humility. She worked in quiet conviction to help lay the foundation for the Boston Chapter's accomplishments over the years. She brought compassion and dedication to the work of Sewa International and was a pillar of strength for chapter volunteers. Alka Pandey was also an active member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. She taught Hindi to children at the Bala Vihar. Alka Pandey leaves behind her husband Pramod Pandey and two sons -- Akshat and Mannan. Arun Kankani, President, Sewa International, expressed his condolences to the Boston Chapter volunteers and the family of Alka Pandey: "We all pray Shri Bhagwan for sadgati of departed Atman. May He give strength to all near and dear ones to bear this untimely loss".

Houston Chapter Recognized for Support to Texas Schools

Sewa International's Houston Chapter has been recognized by the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) for its work in promoting and supporting education in Texas public schools.

The Houston Chapter received the "Stand Up for Public Schools" award, and Sewa International will be added to the list on the TASB website of organizations "Standing Up for public schools". Stating that the task of educating the young in Texas is of utmost significance and "critically important," the Executive Director of TASB, James Crow, commended the Houston Chapter for the "unselfish willingness to go the extra mile for schools..."

Congratulating the Houston Chapter for its work and for the recognition, Prem Pusuloori, Director of Projects and Programs, Sewa International, said, "This is a wonderful recognition of the work of the Houston team, and this work should inspire other Sewa International chapters in their outreach to local schools and educators".



Bay Area Chapter's Annual Giving in 2020 Crosses \$4 Million

Sewa International's Bay Area Chapter held their Annual Banquet on Saturday, December 19 that was well attended by nearly 270 volunteers, donors, and supporters. The program, a virtual event because of the pandemic, started off with a welcome note by Bay Area Chapter President Dr. Anurag Mairal followed by an invocation song on Lord Ganesha by Vyshnavi, a Sewa volunteer and college freshman. After a short video introduction of Sewa and the work done and goals accomplished this year, Steve Davis, Director for China Country Office delivered the keynote address and applauded the commendable work done by Sewa volunteers this year that demanded courage, persistence, dedication, and will. The three-hour event helped raise \$40,000 through online pledges and donations.



A dance performance to the song "Sewa Hai Yagna Kund" by differently-abled dancers of Samarthanam, a nonprofit organization from Bengaluru, India, touched the hearts of the attendees. Sunnyvale Mayor Larry Klen, and Milpitas Mayor Rich Tan, the chief guests for the evening, recalled the relentless work done by Sewa volunteers throughout the year and especially the work done for alleviating the needs of people – from supplying masks and PPE to frontline workers to delivering food and groceries to the elderly and those in need, and from organizing informational webinars to offering many drive through events to supply food and necessities in communities across the Bay Area because of the effects of COVID-19.

Arun Kankani, President, Sewa International recognized the key donors and Guru Prasad, Bay Area Chapter Coordinator acknowledged the partner organizations that supported Sewa during the year in various forms. The Sewa Excellence Award for 2020 was presented to Larry Klen, CEO of Hunger at Home in recognition of their tireless efforts to minimize food insecurity.

Video reports of key Sewa activities in Bay Area -- Family Services, ASPIRE, COVID-19 Relief work-- were shared with the attendees: 550 donors gave \$554 each with corporate matching; the Chapter received \$410,00 in grants including service fees, including a grant from the City of San Jose; in-kind donations distributed by the Bay Area Chapter totaled \$2.78 million, which included 1.21 million pounds of food distributed; about \$800,000 distributed as rental and financial assistance to prevent homelessness through the Homelessness Prevention Program (CEHPP); and nearly 42,000 families helped over the past twelve months.

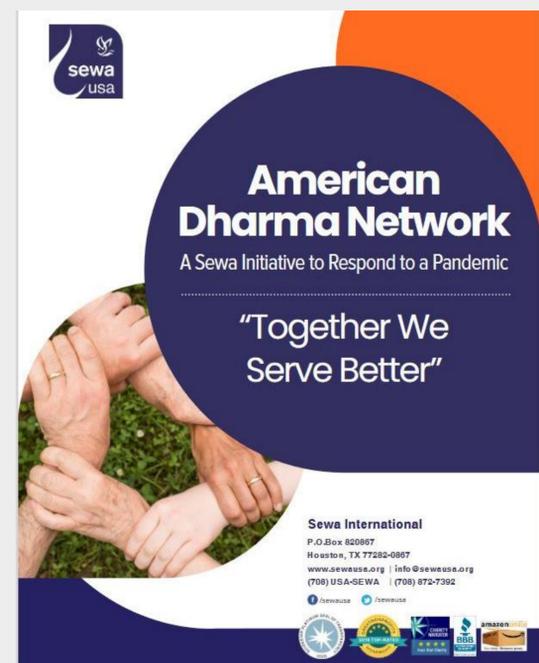
The three-hour virtual program ended with splendid entertainment by Raju Chittambaram and team of AndaaZ Creations, rendering a good mix of English, Hindi and Tamil songs chosen from 1950s till date.



American Dharma Network: A Sewa Initiative to Respond to a Pandemic

Sewa International will soon release a report that showcases its collaborative effort with other Indic/dharmic organizations in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. The more than 160-page report, titled “American Dharma Network: A Sewa Initiative to Respond to a Pandemic,” will feature 125 organizations that collaborated with Sewa International and lists organizations that signed Sewa International’s “Sankalpa Patra” (“Pledge of Service”) and supported financially and materially Sewa International’s work in fighting the pandemic.

- The report offers thumbnail sketches of Indian American and Dharma organizations that have worked and collaborated with Sewa International at the local, regional, national, and international levels, contributing money, time, and energies to respond to COVID-19.
- The report lists and describes 125 organizations offering brief profiles about them, including their work related in serving the public during the pandemic and supporting those on the frontlines fighting the pandemic.
- The report lists 85 signatories of Sewa International’s outreach effort initiated with the “Pledge of Service” (Sankalpa Patra).
- The report lists 55 donors who contributed either financially or in kind or both to Sewa International in fighting the pandemic.



Explaining the term dharma, the compilers of the report say that the Sanskrit word dharma is not easily translatable to English. While some have defined dharma as “law,” “cosmic law,” “order,” “universal order,” etc., etymologically, dharma emerges from the Sanskrit dhri, which means “to hold,” “to maintain,” or “to preserve.” In Hindu/Vedic texts, dharma referred to the cosmic law about the emergence of the universe from chaos. Dharma organizations are those organizations that subscribe to or follow, in one way or another, Hindu/Vedic/Indic traditions. These organizations include Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, and other faith and belief systems originating in India.

As to why Sewa International is publishing this report, Arun Kankani, President, Sewa International, who initiated the writing of the report, said that traditionally, “faith organizations” acknowledged and identified in the United States as serving their local, regional, and national communities were Christian organizations. Later, Jewish, and Muslim organizations, which began to grow in strength and influence, were included, as part of the larger Abrahamic faith traditions that served communities. He said that over the past few decades, and especially after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 brought more Indians to the United States, Indian Americans began to build their own temples, gurudwaras, and monasteries, and they began to reach out to their fellow citizens in their communities in service and in gratitude. Since COVID-19 is a unique, unprecedented event this year it provided an opportunity to members of the dharma organizations to gather and offer support and service to their fellow citizens. The report captures and collates information of the work done by the dharmic organizations.

The report was compiled by a team headed by Ramesh Rao, and which included Nilamani Venisetty, Kaushiki Tewary, Kavita Tewary, Karuna Kankani, Niyati Loyalka, Kusuma Swarup, Ramesh Subramanian, Yashwant Belsare, and Gautam Desai.

A Vibrant and Successful Annual Gala: The Houston Chapter

Marking another successful year in very different times, Sewa International's Houston Chapter held a vibrant, virtual annual gala on December 12, 2020 to both showcase its achievements and to raise money for all the good causes it supports and serves. Titled "H.E.L.P 2020 – Celebrating our Healthcare Heroes," the annual event capped a challenging but highly successful year of work and dedication.

Held virtually in this year of the pandemic, and at a time where there is a spike in the COVID-19 cases, the Houston gala had more than 600 participants. The Chief Guest was Aseem R. Mahajan, Consul General at the Indian Consulate in Houston; the Guest of Honor was Mayor Sylvester Turner, Houston City Mayor, whose message applauding the Houston Chapter for its work and service was not merely congratulatory but uplifting and comprehensive; and the Keynote Speaker was Dr. Mujtaba Ali-Khan, Chief Medical Officer, HCA Healthcare's Gulf Coast Division.

The gala was compered by Nikhil Jain, ably assisted by the Houston team. The event began with a dance performance by students of the Kalaangan School, the premiere institute in North America for learning Odissi dance. Gitesh Desai, President of the Houston Chapter of Sewa International, welcomed the gathering and said that the strength of the Houston Chapter is its volunteers, who exhibit both "amity and unity". He appealed to the community to contribute to the betterment of society through, "Time, Talent and Treasure".



In his address to the gathering, Consul General Aseem Mahajan commended Sewa International for its work, and mentioned the "Vande Bharat" mission that the Indian Government organized to transport stranded passengers back and forth between the US and India (as well as elsewhere in the world). He expressed the hope that with a vaccine being approved recently the world would begin to get a grip on the pandemic and life would return to a new normal.

In his message to the gathering Senator John Cornyn said that Sewa International's work is not going unnoticed, and he urged volunteers to "keep up the good work". Dr. Mujtaba Ali-Khan, the keynote speaker, said that in this year of distress and challenges, Sewa's work was commendable, and that the dedication of Sewa's volunteers is an indication of "the renewal of faith in ourselves".



Texas Secretary of State Ruth Hughs, in her message thanked Sewa International volunteers for their selfless service. President of Sewa International, Arun Kankani, commended the Houston team, and highlighted the work done across the country by all the Sewa chapters. Another highlight of the gala was volunteers delivering 380 packets of delicious dinner to the homes of donors and supporters who had registered for the gala, across the city, within a two-hour window.

Dhruvit Shah's melodious performance offered participants a tuneful break, including his 15-minute "travel through Bollywood music" medley. Others lending their voices at the event were Hemang Thakkar and Akila Mamamdur who capped the evening with more music.

Atlanta Chapter Surpasses Fundraising Goal at Annual Event

In a star-studded and excellently organized virtual annual gala, Sewa International's Atlanta Chapter offered a two-and-a-half-hour program that enabled the chapter to raise more than the evening's fundraising goal of \$151,000. The energetic group of volunteers and chapter leaders were able to assemble political leaders, business and industry leaders, doctors and healthcare professionals, and entertainers to keep the event attendees enthralled and engaged during the December 19 event.



The gifted Geetikka Kulkarni started the evening with an invocation to Lord Ganesha, and Srikanth Gundavarapu, President, Atlanta Chapter offered a thoughtful introduction to the evening's events pointing out that the chapter had partnered with more than thirty organizations this unprecedented year to offer the kind of help and service that the Atlanta and Georgia communities needed, from supplying masks and PPE to doctors and frontline workers, groceries and medicines to the elderly, food for the homeless, and advice and help to stranded students, anxious parents, and laid-off workers. He reiterated Sewa International's guiding principle – “the world is one” (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam) – and what motivates his chapter volunteers to go the extra mile to serve all.

Chief Guest Marcus Glass of the New Season's Church, Albany, Georgia, thanked Sewa International volunteers who made the three-and-a-half-hour one-way road-trip twice, in July and August, to offer food, medicines, PPE, and computers when the pandemic was at its peak, and Albany had become the “epicenter” of COVID-19 in the state. Sewa International is now partnering with the New Season's Church to offer education and career counseling at the newly formed “NextGen Academy”.

At the “Policymakers’ Roundtable” Congressman Kwanza Hall (D), Alfred John, the Indian American Forsyth County Commission Chairman, Angelika Kausche, a Georgia House Representative (D), and Dr. Rich McCormick, who ran as a Republican candidate to represent Georgia's Seventh District in Congress offered their take on what is needed to deal with pandemic and in these strained times. Ajay Houde, CEO TGenTech, who moderated the discussion, was able to get the participants to offer concrete and practical solutions to the challenges Georgians are facing at present.

At the “Fireside chat” Chris Keysor, of Lenbrook Atlanta, which provides housing for the elderly, Padmabhusan Dr. Jagdish Sheth of Emory University and CEO of the Jagdish Sheth Family Foundation, Dr. Raj Radhakrishnan, CEO of E-Ring, shared their expertise and advice to help guide business owners in these times of the pandemic.

Honoring and thanking community members, the Atlanta Chapter recognized Dr. Dhaval Shah, Dr. Subrahmanya, Dr. Annapurna, Dr. Shalini Pande, Dr. Madhavi Devaraju, Dr. Sreeni Gangasani for their yeoman service to the community, and gave away community service awards to Rekha Acharya, Bhavya Choudhary, the Maharashtra Mandal, the Gurung Samaj, and the Shakti Mandir.

Dr. Prasad Garimalla summarized for the attendees the Atlanta Chapter initiated "Know your SELF" program to guide people lead a healthy and safe life when safety concerns have kept most people indoors this year, and sometimes isolated and alone, battling both physical and mental challenges.

Moderators of the event, Pramod Sajja and Madhavi Gunasekaran, kept the evening's program moving seamlessly, and offering the viewers and attendees happy breaks were Geetikka Kulkarni and Shyam Gupta with their melodious singing. Dr. Anil Maheshwari of Toronto, Canada, brought his medical experience and standup comedy hobby together to elicit some laughs with his "Pandemic Comedy," and Sam Patel, CEO, Global Hotel Group, offered a gracious and thoughtful vote of thanks saying that the Atlanta Chapter has the "best of the best" in terms of volunteers, leaders, and ideas.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Ashesh Sharma is a volunteer with the Atlanta Chapter of Sewa International. He and his family moved from Arcadia, California in September 2017 to Georgia because of a job opportunity. Having bought a house in Cumming, a suburb of Atlanta, and finding himself without friends and close acquaintances for the first time, he began scouting for volunteer work, to contribute to his community, and strike up friendships.



Then in January 2018 Ashesh found the contact for the local Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh shakha (chapter) and joined them to be part of the group. He realized that this was a great decision as he and his family met many likeminded families who welcomed them with warmth and firmed up their sense of belonging. Since the volunteers from Sewa International were closely associated with the HSS chapter soon Ashesh met Vikas Arora, Swadesh Katoch, Yashwant Belsare and other who invited him to join and help with organizing the Sewa Holi event at Victory Park in 2018. That was the first time ever Ashesh began working with Sewa and since then he has not looked back.

In February 2019 Ashesh took the initiative and organized the first Sewa badminton sports event called "Shuttle Masters" with collaboration and support from other volunteers. This badminton event also helped in introducing new volunteers to Sewa who were already active in organizing badminton events in the Atlanta area. The big turnaround happened in August 2019 when the Atlanta Chapter asked Ashesh to manage the Sewa 2019 fundraiser event -- one of the key programs organized for the sponsors and volunteers for recognition and appreciation. With this event successfully organized he was given the responsibility for organizing events for the Atlanta chapter and he feels he now has the experience and energy to give his best to help with Sewa International events in the Atlanta area. Ashesh is married to Ruchi, and they have two lovely children -- Varnika (aka Tia) and Sarvagya (Sarvu). They are all now a bright and enthusiastic fixture at all Sewa events.

Sewa International

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