



IAFC banquet honors community's lawmakers

A CORRESPONDENT

The Indian American Friendship Council honored Iowa State Senator Swati Dandekar, Colorado State Representative Dr Janak Joshi, Vermont State Representative Kesha Ram, Connecticut State Representative Dr Prasad Srinivasan and Maryland State Delegate Aruna Miller with its Pride of India Awards at its annual banquet.

Hundreds of people attended the IAFC's eighth annual banquet, hosted at the FunAsia in Richardson, Texas, last week. The theme of the event was 'Peace, Progress and Prosperity through shared vision and cohesiveness among Indian Americans.'

Dandekar invited the community to be more active, socially and politically.

'Advocacy and participation makes a big difference in one's goal,' she said. She gave examples of how the political entry of Asian Americans contributed to Iowa's politics.

She presented Dr Gene Buinger, superintendent, Hurst-Euleless-Bedford Independent School District, with the Community Bridge award for introducing Hindi in the Texas school district. Buinger said he will be heading a delegation to India soon.

Joshi said first-generation Indians have braved many challenges and then decided to stay on the United States. 'Good karma always pays,' he said.

Ram, 23, the youngest state representatives in the US, said, 'Politics for me has been a mix of chance and a mix of choice, requiring knocking on every door and meeting people.'

Ram, whose father migrated from pre-Independence India, whose mother is originally from Israel, and who became a state representative at 21, added: 'Listening and



The IAFC board of directors, standing, from left, Murali Vennam, Dr Niranjan Tripathy, Taiyab Kundawala, Raj Asava, Rao Kalvala, Dr Tarakumar Reddy, Dr C R Rao, Dr Sat Gupta, Piyush Patel, Ramki Chebrolu, Prasad Thotakura; sitting, from left, Colorado State Representative Dr Janak Joshi, Maryland State Delegate Aruna Miller, Iowa State Senator Swati Dandekar, Vermont State Representative Kesha Ram and Connecticut State Representative Dr Prasad Srinivasan

building relationships in the community and learning history is the first thing to be done.'

Srinivasan, the first Indian American and the only physician to serve in the Connecticut assembly, spoke about how he switched from medicine to politics.

'It was by choice and not by chance,' he said. 'Community involvement is extremely rewarding as long as one has the skill set to negotiate the journey.'

Miller said, 'If you are serious to enter politics, make sure you have the support of the family. You need to have champions like community and special interest groups. Make sure you have personal contacts with all the voters.'

Joshi felicitated Dallas-based young entrepreneur Veeral Rathod, co-founder and president of a luxury men's apparel company. Rounok Joardar of Plano West Senior High School was recognized with a Rising Star award by Ram for his academic and non-academic accomplishments since 2007. Srinivasan felicitated Houston-based Koshy Thomas the publisher of the community newspaper *Voice of Asia*, with the Outstanding Journalism award.

The IAFC, founded in 1990, is a nonprofit organization that provides and promotes political education and a common platform to exchange views with local, national and international policy makers. The program was hosted under the leadership of Prasad Thotakura, Texas state coordinator, IAFC, and sponsored by Horizon Travel LLC, ekNazar, FunAsia and VIVA Railings besides a host of other local business entities and community leaders based in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

Thotakura reminded the audience that India has the second-largest number of billionaires. Jim Falk, president and chief executive officer of the nonprofit World Affairs Council, was presented with a check for \$5,000. A representative of the American Heart Association was also presented with a check of \$3,000.

Dr Pavan Dhingra of the Smithsonian Indian American Heritage project *HomeSpun* gave an overview of the project and questioned the audience on 'how will history depict Indian Americans' and requested financial contributions in support of the program.



Sri Sri Ravi Shankar wows New York

ARTHUR J PAIS

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar had a simple request. He wanted the over 2,500 people at the Avery Fischer Hall in New York to meditate for 10 minutes. If anyone wanted to leave for whatever reason — crying children, for example — they should quit before the meditation started, the spiritual guru and Art of Living founder suggested.

Though his recent sojourn was to include other cities in America and Canada, Shankar got the most mainstream media attention in New York — from ABC TV to *The New York Times*, whose reporter walked with Shankar around Times Square.

The Avery Fischer Hall event, organized by Shankar's Art of Living Foundation and sponsored by the Tandon Foundation and others, was the launching pad for I Meditate New York, by which Shankar's foundation wants to 'empower New Yorkers to do more of the things they love by recharging through meditation.'

Before the meditation at the Avery Fischer hall began, the audiences heard devotional music by the band Bhakti and devotional songs by the Grammy-nominated Chandrika Tandon and the choir from the Hindu Temple that she had trained.

As the 10-minute meditation, with rhythmic breathing, was about to begin, Shankar switched off his cell phone. So did hundreds in the auditorium. A woman drank some water, and a man unlocked his hands and kept them on his knees. Many others had a smile on their face. One of them would later quote Shankar as on the way out of the

Over 2,500 people attended the Indian spiritual guru's event at the Lincoln Center