



# Indo American Center

The missions of the Indo-American center is to promote the well-being of South Asian Americans through services that facilitate their adjustment, integration and friendship with the wider society, nurture their sense of community, and foster appreciation for their heritage and culture.

News and Events, Spring 2006

## Message from the President

**O**n behalf of the Directors and Staff of the Indo-American Center, I would like to welcome you to our first newsletter of 2006. While serving as a volunteer at the Center for the past ten years, I watched the Center grow into a highly respected organization both within and beyond our community. We owe this success to our dedicated staff, generous donors and enthusiastic volunteers.

This year I look forward to update our programs and services while we begin improvements of our building in order to support these activities. We look to create a satellite program to reach those that most need our help, as we strengthen our relationship with other South Asian organizations.

We hope for success in the coming years.

Best Regards,  
Vikram Sanghani

## Coming up this summer

### For senior citizens:

Chicago city Millennium Park gathering to enjoy a nice warm day to tour the area and view the international games celebration.

Open book Peace Project - for interactive art exhibits - to create an art project about peace- both in personal life and world around us.

Senior Safety Seminar - once a week.

### Youth program:

Summer fun program for ages 6 to 14.

Art projects and different sports (including Cricket and Soccer), field trips to Navy Pier and museums. (July 10 - August 26)

Millennium Park International Game day.

Youth workshop focusing on substance abuse and

safety, discussions will be led by the staff and volunteers.

IAC participates in story telling, May 2006 at Chicago Children's Museum in Navy Pier. Visit [www.chicchildrensmuseum.org](http://www.chicchildrensmuseum.org) for info.

**For further information, call (773) 973-4444.**



### Earth Day celebration

*Left: IAC staff member with the welcome sign. Also seen in the picture, globe created by the senior and youth participants using recycled paper. Below: IAC staff and participants displaying Earth Day posters.*



### Past events

- Award ceremony for IAC students and IAC volunteers.
- Installation of Board of Directors by Judge Sandra Otaka.
- Legal clinic training seminar.
- NetIP luncheon with Dr. Sudip Bose, sharing his Iraq experience.
- Film Screening - New Generation's story of conflicts and enthusiasm invested in making it in business.
- Rasaka theater screenplay reading of "The day my mother first saw snow."
- Cultural Connection event with Japanese-American community.
- Earth Day celebration by seniors and youth: cleaning up a section of Devon Avenue and creating a papier mache globe.

## IAC 2006 Directors

### President

Vikram Sanghani

### Vice President

Mafat Patel

### Treasurer

Ned Gauri

### Secretary

Ralph Niholas

Bapu Arekapudi

Rajeev Bahri

Prem Balani

Basanti Sen Banerji

Larry D'Souza

Ranjit Ganguly

Anjali Goel

Kamal Hans

Ashref Hashim

Ann Lata Kalayil

Peter Noronha

Sher Rajput

Lisa Samuel

Shobhana Sanghvi

### Executive Director

Chris Zala

### Assistant Director

Susan Patel

### Leadership 21 Board

Binita Choksi

Falguni Doshi

Rakhi Patel

Sheetal Shah

Kirat Doshi

John Benjamin

### Staff Members

G.S. Punia

Gita Chawla

Payal Sud

Loknath Agarwal

Bobby Zaman

Suleman Nathani

Minaxi Shah

Nisar Naimi

Hamid Sayed

Laxman R Rajput

Bharati Shah

Krishnakant Shroff

Zankhana Patel

Chirag Shah

Meetal Dave

Saad Ahmed

Ajay Shah

Ajay Patel

B.S.Subbakrishna

Samson Macwan

Terri Thompson

M.K. Mondul

Jeannette Srivastava

### Message from the Editor

Every day, the Indo-American Center provides numerous services to our community and beyond. In each issue we will focus on some of these activities and their impact on those who utilize the services. It is my pleasure to share with you the news of the Center, an organization that has not limited its boundaries to race, religion or creed.

I sincerely thank everyone for their contributions to this newsletter.

Warm Regards,

Basanti Banerji

*Editor*

## Ongoing programs

### Immigration Services at the Indo-American Center

Since 1990 the Indo-American Center has been a cornerstone in the growing South Asian Community. As the community continues to flourish so do its needs. In keeping with its credo and affording the community the services from which it will most benefit, the Center offers range of U.S. immigration assistance. From application assistance to legal advice, patrons avail of a range of resources that guides them through processes of U.S. residency and citizenship, sponsoring

family members, preparing for their naturalization interview, and voter registration. Heading the immigration department is Mr. G.S. Punia, a long-time veteran at the Center with boundless knowledge of the various intricacies involved in immigration policies. To date, Mr. Punia has assisted in the filing of over 20,000 citizenship applications. Since January of this year the Center has already filed an additional 50 naturalization applications, with the numbers racking up with each passing day. Mr. Suleman Nathani also assists the immigration programs at every step. On April 1, the Center hosted an event titled "Empowering Ourselves:

Strengthening Our South Asian Voice," which was geared towards educating various non-profit organizations about voter registration, and lobbying issues that affect the community. The Center is open to the public everyday, except Tuesdays, from 10 am - 5 pm.

**Kathak Dance class - every Sunday, 3 - 4 p.m. at IAC. Contact number (847) 985-9142. [www.Asfkathak.com](http://www.Asfkathak.com)**

### Adult education

This program helps adults to achieve basic literacy and computer skills. They learn English as a second lan-

guage in the classroom here where pictures and charts also provide tools for learning. The New Americans Initiative program coordinated under the leadership of Mr. Bobby Zaman is an ideal complement to the immigration services. In the Civics and Citizenship classes, future citizens of America prepare themselves with knowledge of basic facts about U.S. government required for U.S. citizenship. The courses are usually individualized. Program coordinator Mr. Loknath Agarwal encourages students to use educational cassettes. The students look forward to meet the challenges of the

upcoming Citizenship test. Classes are offered twice a day from 10 am - 12 noon and 2 pm - 4 pm.

### **Cyriac D. Kappil legal clinic (Monthly)**

Monthly Pro-bono legal clinic was launched on March 11. In collaboration with the Indian American Bar Association, the Center initiated this program to further aid clients with special needs. The clinic is held at the Center once a month from 1 pm - 4 pm. For more information call 773.973.4444

### **Public Benefits Assistance**

Whether it is about Kid care program, Medicaid, food stamps, Supplemental Social Security issue, or arranging transportation to aid a disabled person, to mention a few, Ms. Minaxi Shah works at the center to assist people for their individual needs. Sometime it requires filing an application, to interpret or translate the text, other times, making follow-up calls to various organization or agency offices regarding referrals.

She works very closely with the caseworkers of Illinois State and Federal office Open daily except Tuesdays

### **Ethnic Dialog**

Our Cultural Heritage Education Committee welcomes visitors to Asian Indian neighborhood orientation sessions. During presentations both school children and adults learn about the linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity of Asian Indian immigrants, their arrival in Chicago, and the development of the ethnic commer-

cial area on Devon. Contact Dorothe Shah at dorothe.shah@sbcglobal.net or call 847-475-6853.

### **With the seniors**

Ongoing Senior Citizen Program, co-coordinated by Ms. Gita Chawla includes weekly programs of Yoga, games, crafts and learning about other cultures. The center also provides lunch. All programs are well attended. Other activities include field trips like trips to DuSable museum and Chinese museum. Mammogram screening and Health Fair were conducted in April.

### **After-school tutoring program (part of SAYEP-South Asian Youth Empowerment Project)**

The Youth program at the center offers after-school tutoring, workshops, discussions and some special activities. Currently five interns tutor the neighborhood kids from several different ethnic backgrounds. The program co-coordinator, Mr. Nisar Naimi, says the children enjoy the affection, individual attention and companionship of each other. Mr. Naimi and other volunteers find their involvement very rewarding when they see a kid smile, give them a hug at the end of the day and note improving school performance.

"Often these kids don't have opportunities to interact with others at home. The parents are busy with their own work and many don't have English-speaking skills to appreciate what their child is experiencing in the class," states Nisar. "I wish there

would be an English class for the parents here," he adds, "That'd improve the parent-child communication."

The parents-youth group discussions here reveal intergenerational gaps, family relationship problems, differences and commonalities. An interesting fact Nisar notices is the westernization of culture in the current Indian American immigrant population as seen

in their ways of dressing, social customs etc., due to the influence of such things as Bollywood movies, media and video games.

The youth program observed public school holidays such as President's day, Valentine's day, and Martin Luther King's day, to name a few.

Earth day celebration in April included supervised mural painting, games etc.

## Some recent events

- Circuit Court Judge Sandra Otaka administered the oath to the newly elected members of IAC Board of Directors. Several State and County Officials along with two other Judges also graced the event.
- IAC students who excelled in their programs received their certificates. Certificates were also awarded to ten volunteers to honor and appreciate their commitment to the community.
- "The Day My Mother First Saw Snow," a film script was brought to life by actors from Rasaka, Chicago's South Asian Theatre Company, at IAC, depicting the burdens faced by young ambitious immigrant parents.
- Cultural Connections 2006 Explores "Language of Looks": A collaboration of Chicago Japanese American Historical Society and the Indo-American Center entitled "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall... How Am I Perceived By All?" was both entertaining and educational for over 200 participants in the Spring 2006 FIELD MUSEUM'S Cultural Connections program at IAC. The program addressed "messages about ourselves that we send and receive through appearance" and explored the impact of history, immigration, economics, and politics on choices regarding ethnic attire. The relevance of the sari and its adaptations or variations in the Asian Indian community were contrasted with the role of the Kimono among Japanese Americans. Chicago Public School teachers earned professional development credit for participation.  
View this event on CAN TV 21 Saturday, April 29th @ 9:30 p.m. or CAN TV 19 Thursday, May 4th @ 8:00 AM
- The Center and NetIP-Chicago co-hosted a luncheon featuring a keynote address from Major Sudip Bose; M.D. Dr. Bose, a physician in U.S.Army shared his experiences in Iraq where he also provided medical care to Saddam Hussein. (NetIP: Network of Indian Professionals)

**Indo American Center**  
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## **DO YOU KNOW**

1. No. of new referrals to Federal and State Benefits program: 112 in since Jan 2006.
2. Monthly Referrals to WIC (Women, Infant and Children) program: 5.
3. No. of IAC-assisted applications submitted to ALL KIDS (upcoming health insurance program for age below 19 yrs): 50
4. Average no. of students attending homework labs daily: 35
5. No. of IAC students passed Citizenship test in March, 2005: 15
6. Usual time taken to complete IAC Citizenship course: 3 mos
7. The visitors assisted in the Center are: Asian Indian, Polish, Pakistani and of various other origin.

**Indo-American Center**

**Open daily 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Closed Tuesday**

## **About our people**

Our staff and volunteers are multi lingual, educated, friendly and eager to help. They are committed to make the Center function properly. While engaging themselves in their activities to make the projects fruitful, they often come up with useful ideas. The volunteers at the Center come after their full-time work or school. Our interns are University students who dedicate their time and energy to build strong relationship here with the visitors.

Because of limited space, we are not able to portray their individual efforts and skills more elaborately.

### **Contributors:**

Mr.Chris Zala, Ms.Susan Patel, Ms.Dorothie Shah, Mr.Nisar Naimi, Mr.Loknath Agarwal, Mr. Bobby Zaman, Ms.Gita Chawla, Ms.Minaxi Shah, Mr. B. S. Subbakrishna, Ms. Payal Sud.

Graphics and layout by Ms. Bhairavi Shah.

*We invite your comments and questions  
about our Center. 773-973-4444.*