

## ***The Milestones of The Hindu Temple and Heritage Hall: 2013 Update***

*Om Sharma, Chairman Archive and History Committee*

Indian families started to settle in Northwest Ohio in early 1960's. India Association of Toledo (IAT) was established in 1964. We actively participated in local International festivals in the next decade. With growth of our community the concept of constructing an Indian Cultural Center was visualized in 1970's. From time to time in social events, there were discussions about making a Hindu Temple locally for our needs. In one of our meetings in Dr. Raj Bhatia's House in late 1980 many of our friends showed keen interest towards creating a temple. However, many other community members were still envisioning for a cultural center. In 1981, IAT President Dr. Kewal Mahajan appointed a 5 member steering committee (with me as chairman) to do feasibility study for Indian Cultural Center. On Diwali day while returning from inauguration of Bharatiya Temple in Greater Detroit, we (Rajni & me) thought to do something urgently for starting the temple instead the cultural center. We devised a plan with Dr. Mahajan to get the temple concept approved instead of the cultural center.

I called for a secret meeting of 5 families (Ajit Jaggi, Raj Bhatia, Nalin Chari, Surrender Matani and us) on December 4, 1981 at Jaggi's residence. On that auspicious day we *established Hindu Temple of Toledo* (as the non-negotiable name). Next day, in our home IAT President dissolved the steering committee as majority (3 of 5 members, I against, I abstained) favored Hindu Temple project. He advised us to form another separate body to build the temple (as IAT is secular). Money raised for the cultural center was later returned to the donors.

More like minded families were invited to Hindu Temple meeting at Dr. Raju Shah's residence on December 6, 1981. We grew from 5 to 17 families, selected an executive committee with Dr. Nalan Chari as its first President. We committed to a democratic broad based general body and pledged not to take "any bank loans" at any time to guard against financial restrains and remote possibility of insolvency in future.

It was difficult task for me as first fund raising chairman raising \$25,000 in a fund raising event held in United Methodist Church in Sylvania in May 1982 where Swami Dayanand Saraswati was the invited speaker. It was a challenging assignment made easier with inspirational speeches for funds by Dr. Raj Bhatia and others. Later that year we started holding Diwali function in conjunction with IAT.

We purchased of 15 acre prime land, our present site in Sylvania in 1983. We will always be indebted to Dr. Lall Singh for his help in finding, negotiating and securing this deal for \$67,000 (cash). The old existing building west of Panditji's present residence temporarily served as our temple (and later as Panditji's residence). First function at our temple was '*Vedic Havan*

*Yajna*' performed by Rajni Sharma and Ajit Jaggi on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1984. We started publishing our monthly newsletter 'Jagriti' in 1984. Since 1985 temple started opening every Sunday for Puja with one big Puja function once a month. Many Pujas were led by Dr. Lakshman Bhandaru.

Writing of our *Constitution* was organized by our first secretary Ajit Jaggi who studied constitution of few other Hindu temples (Troy, Michigan and others) and drafted the first constitution in consultation with other committee members: Raj Bhatia, Nalan Chari, Raju Shah and Om Sharma. As secretary Ajit Jaggi signed the constitution and his home address remained as an official address (of temple) for correspondence for the next few years. Dr. Kewal Mahajan became our first chairman of board of trustees in 1983. Board was responsible for overall welfare, expansion and preservation of temple; while executive committee was entrusted the job to manage day to day functioning of the temple. It became evident that we need a Heritage hall in addition to temple for growing community needs and wider support and acceptance 'The Hindu temple and Heritage Hall' became a reality in 1985. That year we were blessed with divine visit of Swami Chinmayananda who gave a discourse on Gita in a south Toledo location.

Dr. Raju Shah successfully got temple zoning approval in 1984. We erroneously thought to build the temple for about \$300,000 plus in 1985. We had only a fraction of cash money in hand. We took a major challenge to raise money. Few of us (Ajit Jaggi [president], Dr. Lachu Chibhani [fund raising chairman], Raj Bhatia, Raju Shah, Om Sharma and others) went unannounced to every potential donors almost every evening. Every disappointment was blessed with successful pledges. We raised \$150,000 in next 6 weeks. We had "Bhoomi Puja" celebration in 1985. To our disappointment, initial bid for 12,000 sq. feet facility ranged from \$1.0 to 1.2 million. We scaled down our dreams, went for 8,200 feet facility, and hired an architect for \$25,000. We were again disappointed when cost estimate was \$750,000 (3 bids, only \$5000 apart). We did more adjustments by downsizing.

On Feb. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1988, Board authorized Building Committee (Om Sharma as Chairman) to act as general contractor and hired Dr. Jiwan Gupta as construction manager. On auspicious new year Visakhi day on April 13 1988 we did 'ground breaking ceremony'. 'Time capsule' containing our 4 Vedas, Bhagwad Gita, and names of our community members was made. This honor to bury the auspicious 'time capsule' capsule deep in the foundation under proposed the altar for deities was given to the families of Dr. Raju Shah and Dr. Haridas Dasani'. With blessings of God; devotion, financial support and hard work of our community, the building committee started temple in 1988 (Om Sharma as chairman) and finished the project in 16 months in 1989 (Raju Shah as chairman).

Six central deities (murtis) were selected with consensus of secret ballot in 1985. This was harmonious decision without any conflict. Later Ganesha and Mahvir were selected. Our gala inauguration ceremonies were celebrated the week August 15 to 20 1989 with “pratishta” on auspicious day August 19<sup>th</sup>. The honor of Pratishta of Sri Laksmi-Naryana, Sri Radha Krishna, Sri Ram-Sita and Lord Mahavira were bestowed to Kulbhushan & Manju Gupta family, Raju & Rama Shah family, Manhar and Sandhiya Tejura family and Jain Community respectively. Six central main deities were donated by G.D. Birla group from India through Shri D. P. Mandelia and arranged by Pitamber and Kamlesh Sumani. Sri Mahavira deity was made possible by Jain community of Toledo. Lord Ganesha pratishta honor was bestowed to Supriya and Jyoti Chakarvarty in 1990 with deity donated by Rajni and Om Sharma. Thanks to hard work and persistent effort of Ila Mehta, we got distinction of Historical marker (in 2003) for being the first Hindu Jain Temple in state of Ohio.

Through the following years, The Hindu Temple and Heritage Hall have been blessed with dedicated, hardworking officers and community members. Our temple has prospered in all dimensions enriching everyone with philosophy and practice of Hinduism, and our customs and heritage blending with stream of Americanism. Our **annual festivals** always portray our commitment and zeal and draws big crowds. There are religious and cultural events with mouthwatering delicious ethnic food.

### **Brief History of Temple Construction:**

Phase

1: 1988-89 as illustrated above. BC Chairmen Raju shah & Om Sharma

Construction Manager: Jiwan Gupta

Phase 2: 1999-2000, Expansion of hall, stage and Panditji's residence

Building Committee Chairman: Raju Shah

Construction Manager: Arvind Shah

Phase 3: 2007-08: Construction of new kitchen, class room and bath rooms

Building Committee Chairman: Om Sharma

Construction Manager: Pradeep Vij

2013: Presently we are constructing the aesthetically beautiful front fence.

Phase 4: 2013-2014 Construction of parikarma with beatification of temple area and pratishta of 3 new deities: Lord Vainkashera, Lord Shiva and Goddess

Durga. Ajith Pai is the present building committee chairman.

***Krishna and Arjuna Chariot (Geetupdesh)*** displayed in 2009 is breathtaking. This magnificent artistically painted canvas is by local artist Paul Geiger whose famous

murals are enriching the walls of historical Valentine theatre. This original was researched by Rajni Sharma. Hopefully it will be preserved for new generations to appreciate and get inspired.

Uma Vora needs special mention for her vision adding to the beautiful décor of our temple and heritage hall on all important religious and cultural occasions. Arun Agrawal and his team take central stage in helping artistic display of our heritage during festival times and other cultural events.

**Pujas and Priestly duties:** 1982-July 1989: Pujas were conducted in the old temple building and subsequently in the new temple premises. One of the most valuable reliable assets has been our community member Pundit Madhao Kharche who started conducting pujas regularly in the new temple since 1989 and fills in when our Punditji is on vacation. Dr. Laksmanrao Bhandaru has been performing pujas on other occasions. Rajni Sharma and Ajit Jaggi have been performing Vedic Yajnas 2 to 4 times a year since 1982.

Our **first priest** was '**Pundit Gopinath Galagali**' who was with us from 1994 to 1996. His melodious command of Shlokas still reverberates in our memory. We are lucky to have one the most learned priest '**Pundit Anant Dixit**' since 1998. His devotion to our community is not describable, his spiritual knowledge, enthusiasm, willingness to teach and participation in all aspects of community affairs is well beyond call of duty. He is our anchor for multifaith activities, blood drive for Red Cross and teaching our religion and heritage. He visits many schools and churches for introduction of Hindu philosophy and always keeps the temple open for such activities. Under his guidance our temple attendance has increased. Pundit ji, his wife Dipiti and their family are integral part of our community. Pundit dixit is in constant demand for participation in pujas in many parts of USA and in Toronto.

**Maha Yagnas:** Under Punditji's vision and guidance we had six *Maha Yagnas* at our temple in the last decade. These were conducted as most ambitious, spiritual and festive undertakings with prayers by over 11 priests from all over the continent joining our entire community.

*Shree Ganesh Yagna* (2004): Chair -Ashok Salvi

*Shree Devi Yagna* (2006): Chair-Charulata Trivedi

*Shree Vishnu Yagna* (2008): Chair-Sukeshini Raghuv eer

*Shree Maha Rudra Yagna* (2010): Chair-Mukesh & Asha Pitroda, Vivek & Charulata Trivedi

*Shree Navchandhi Yagna* (2011): Chair- Pundit Anant Dixit

*Shree Suriya Yagna* (2012): Chair-Shraddha Gupta, Atul Agnihotri & Minnie Singh

2010: Special *Bhagavat Saptah* was conducted with recitation of Srimad Bhagvatam for seven days by Shree Pratyagbodnandan Sararswati from Arshividya Gurukulam, PA

**Financial Milestones:** We had \$ 25,000 in 1982, \$123,000 in 1985 and \$372,000 in 1986. All the development projects were paid in cash. We never took any loan at any time. Presently we have over \$600,000 in endowment funds. Our accounts have grown, being constantly watched under scrutinizing eyes our present and past custodians, finance committees and fund-raising chairpersons that include: Raj Bhatia, Ajit Pai, Rajni Sharma, Manju Gupta, Sujata Hegde, Raju Shah and others. Our team of hard working treasurers keeps a close tab in collections, deposits and expenses. *We are grateful to each and every one of them.* Minnie Singh and her colleagues upgraded our financial data to maintain sound financial records.

**Constitution** writing, submission and amendments are a dynamic process of forward thinking and adaptation to changing times. Many of us have been involved in this tedious time consuming process since inception. After submission in 1982, it was amended in 1992. Major amendment changes were done in 2012. The temple is grateful to present and past chairpersons of constitution committee and their members that include: Ajit Jaggi, Raju Shah, Jagdish Jhunjhunwala, Lachman Chibhani, Kuhala Hegde, Usha Mohan, Sujata Hegde, Bindu Mistry, Arvind Shah, Subba Rao, Ajith Pai and others.

**All other Committees** including Long-Range Committee, HR Committee and others have brought vision, exposure and stability for our cause. We are grateful to Supriya Chakarvarty, Kewal Mahajan, Raj Bhatia, Bhawna Bhatia, Arvind Mistry, Vivek Trivedi, Sudershan Pasupuleti, Sadarshan Jetley and others. Two annual scholarships for Sylvania Schools were established in 2004 and in 2012 extended to Toledo School district.

**Sanatan Dharma School for Children:** Pundit Dixit started religious teachings every Sunday to children as our priest for 7 years. Since 2006 formal spiritual and religious teaching is held weekly in the temple class room. Our community is indebted to tirelessly dedicated teachers like Ravindera Joshi, Sanjay Khare, Sunita Khare, Monideepa Tarafdar and others, who are truly committed to preservation of Hinduism for our future generations. Our average attendance is 15 to 25. The teaching is done at 3 levels: 4 to 7, 8 to 12 and 13 years of age and over.

**Unconditional Community Support:** There are so many other people involved in various temple activities, projects and mile stones. Temple is grateful to each and every one of them. There are innumerable volunteers who cook food for Sunday lunches, work every day for different functions and maintenance. ***Bhajan group*** work hard to sing melodious bhajans at least once a month, They include; Manorama Rao, Ajit Jaggi, Abha Sinha, Vandita Prasad, Gulshan Malhotra, Susheela Pasupuleti and others. Ila and Gunwant Mehta who have moved partially to LA have left their footprints on many facets of our temple. Under Ila's and Bindu

Mistri's endeavors we got Gandhi's tapestry (by famous artist John Nava) from Corpus Christie Church, University of Toledo in 2007 and started annual ***Mahatma Gandhi lecture*** (at UT) around *Gandhi Jyanti* (birth anniversary) each October since 2007.

We are uploading important general and confidential data on internet with help of my Architect and History Committee. I am grateful to all members of my Committee and particularly my co-chairman Sudershan Jetley and to Sumit Mukherjee and Bupesh Saini for developing programs for data collection, uploading and later on internet access by community members. As of August 2013, our archived temple festival booklets can be accessed by our members from our temple internet site.

I have omitted so many important names that helped make this temple. I owe a personal apology to each and everyone them for inadvertent omission. Their names are proudly displayed in the festival book, tree of life and on the walls of our temple. My humble attempt is to capture important milestones in the making of the temple from rudimentary dream that started from Raj and Bhawna Bhatia's home in 1980 to the present day. I am sure I missed some important landmarks for which I apologize.