

# THE LOTUS

A Quarterly Publication of the Federation of India Community Associations (FICA)



April 2025 - September 2025

Since 1967

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# India Independence Day Celebrations at India Cultural Gardens

Independence Day marks the birth of the world's largest democracy and honors the sacrifices of countless freedom fighters who gave us the gift of liberty. For those of us living far from our homeland, this day is especially meaningful. It's a reminder of our roots, our rich heritage, and the values of unity, resilience, and peace that India stands for. It's also a celebration of the vibrant Indian-American community here in Northeast Ohio, which continues to enrich the cultural fabric of this great nation. We are proud to host this event in the Cleveland Cultural Gardens, a historic landmark that began in 1916 and now features over 30 gardens representing different ethnic groups. These gardens are a living symbol of peace and multicultural harmony—values that resonate deeply with India's ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, meaning "the world is one family." The India Cultural Garden joined the Cleveland Cultural Gardens in 2005. Since then, there have been various additions enhancing the natural beauty of these gardens, including the stone walkway, the flagpole, the stupa, the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, and more. This garden features six granite pillars that allude to key aspects of Indian culture.

These pillars are: Universal Brotherhood represents how all people are connected, Legacy highlighting the rich history and traditions of India, Artistic Traditions showcasing India's vibrant arts - music, dance, literature, and visual arts, Leadership recognizes significant leaders who have had an impact on India's history and development, Modern India

reflects India's progress and achievements, and Connections emphasizing the links and shared values between India and other global cultures.

The India Cultural Garden is more than just a collection of pillars; it's a place where visitors can learn about and



By Mrs. Ramya Ramaduri  
experience the depth and breadth of Indian culture. Mr. Sudarshan Sathe, Mr. Shekhar Ganore, President of FICA, and Mr Hira Rane, Chair of ICG hosted the flag, and everyone sang the Indian and the US national anthems.

Mr. Sudarshan Sathe shared a few words on the significance of this day. Mr. Sudarshan Sathe is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Federation of

India's Community Associations, FICA.

Sudarshanji's philanthropic activities extend to Ekal, the One Teacher Schools, Akshaya Patra, the inexhaustible food bowl-lunch program in schools to end world hunger, Medical Yatra, humanitarian healthcare missions, Project Love Values-in-Action, among others. In 2024, he was inducted into the Cleveland International Hall of Fame, which permanently recognizes those individuals who have made a valuable and a lasting contribution to the multicultural city of Cleveland and inspires a new generation of leaders.

Up next, we had a special performance by the students of the Sanatana Dharma classes, who talked to us about various patriotic topics. Baany Patel, Bhakti Patel, Swara Jayesh Mendpara, Vedant Upadhyay, Tilak Patel, Aanya Sakwadia, and Akshat Patel.

Lastly, Madhu Gargasha and Paddy Raghunathan joined me on the stage, as we continued the celebration with a medley of patriotic songs.



## Indian Associations/Organizations in the Greater Cleveland Area

Agarwal Samaj of North America (ASONA)  
Vibhav Agarwalla  
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Palak Shroff - 7164744836

Association of Asian Indian Women in Ohio (AAIWO)  
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Bengali Cultural Society  
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Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA Cleveland)  
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ICAGA (Indian Community of Akron)  
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## India Cultural Garden at One World Day & the Parade of Flags



One World Day has been the official event of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens Federation since 1946. The Indian community participated in the Parade of Flags, which had 1500 people from over 53 countries. The specialty of this year was the presence of Dhol Tasha, which raised the energy and enthusiasm during the parade and in the India Cultural Garden. Thanks to all community leaders who joined the OWD parade on a fine Sunday morning. Talented performers exhibited talent in the shows. Singers and dancers performed in the India Cultural Gardens. Performances from students of Natyanjali School of Odissi, Medina- Priyanshi Parida, Adyasha Adviti Misra, Muktida Bisoyi, Ritkriti Sahoo, Medha Lait Iyer, Pooja Narayanan, Devam Sandhu, Laya Viswanth, Kedar Viswanth, and Maitri Radhesh filled the India Cultural Gardens with audiences mesmerized by the rhythm and beats of Indian Music and dance. Bollywood Dhamaka -Michael Shresta and his team started with both national anthems of the USA and India. They also sang a few patriotic songs. Dhol Tasha performed in between the cultural performances, which brought in more crowds to enjoy the energetic music. Cultural performances lasted for about two



hours. Outside of the India Cultural Garden were stalls from various states of India, and Saffron Patch was there to cater to Indian Food.

## FICA Anand Mela

This year, Anand Mela was held at Independence Middle School. We had 45 vendors. It was a combination of home vendors and commercial vendors. People came in large numbers to taste different state delicacies and buy Indian jewelry and fabrics perfect to welcome the festive season. The Mela started at 11.00 AM and ended at 5 PM. There were diverse varieties of products ranging from food to dresses. About 400 people came in and out of the Independence Middle School from 11.00 A.M to 5:00 P.M.



## FICA & ICAGA Holi

FICA and ICAGA Holi 2025 was celebrated on Sunday, April 13, at the May Pavilion at Hudson Springs Park. It was a beautiful park with a lake overlooking the shelter where we all played with colors and danced to the tunes of DJ, Food, and tea was served, and the park was filled with colors and songs of Holi. FICA and ICAGA are grateful to everyone who came out in such large numbers to celebrate the festival of colors, HOLI. The energy, joy, and spirit made the event unforgettable.





## News From FICA

**Indian Community at Asia Heritage Day at Cleveland City Hall**

The City of Cleveland, under the leadership of Asian Community Liaison Chia-Min Chen, hosted the first Asian Heritage Day in the Rotunda of Cleveland City Hall on May 30, 2025. About 15 Asian heritages were represented with tables showcasing the flags, clothing, and other items of their heritage, including India. India showcased the Taj Mahal, the Saree, and a few artifacts depicting the rich culture and heritage of India.



2025 Asian Interfaith Celebration at City Hall Rotunda, Cleveland, on Friday, 4/11, at 6:00 pm, organized by the Asian Liaison Chia-Min Chen and Tariq Islam.

**2025 Class of the Cleveland International Hall of Fame**

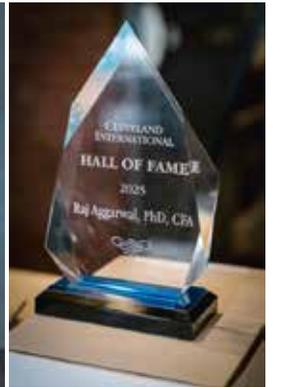
The 2025 Class of the Cleveland International Hall of Fame induction dinner ceremony was held on Tuesday, April 22, 2025, at Windows on the River.

Since 2010, the Cleveland International Hall of Fame (CIHF) has inducted people who have made significant and lasting contributions to our multicultural society. Cleveland is home to people representing about 120

different ethnic groups. The CIHF exists not only to honor those special people but also to inspire a new generation of leaders to follow in their footsteps.

Over 100 worthy candidates were nominated for the 2025 Class of the

Cleveland International Hall of Fame. The selection committee was advised by previously inducted members of the Cleveland International Hall of Fame. Raj Aggarwal was inducted into the Cleveland International Hall of Fame.



Raj Aggarwal, PhD, CFA, was a distinguished academic, executive, and board member with extensive experience and global recognition. He was an active civic leader. Raj could not attend the ceremony, so he was inducted by Values-in-Action President Stuart Muszynski, who then accepted on his behalf. Raj Agrawwal passed away on August 17th, 2025.

**FICA tennis tournament 2025**

The FICA Tennis Tournament was more than a game — it was a celebration of healthy living, community connection, and engagement. This game attracted players and families from across the Cleveland region, which promotes physical wellness, mental well-being, and inclusive fun through the sport of tennis. This was held on July 13th, 2025, at 8 am at Western Reserve Racquet Club, Streetsboro, OH (indoor tennis)

**India Fest USA Independence Day Parade 2025**

## WFSOM Spring Dinner 2025 Celebrates Women Faculty Achievements and Milestones



**Subhead:** Annual gathering spotlights achievements, community impact, and a vision for continued growth at the School of Medicine.

The Women Faculty School of Medicine (WFSOM) hosted its annual Spring Dinner in May 2025, drawing more than 200 faculty, leaders, and colleagues from Case Western Reserve

University and its affiliates.

WFSOM President, Dr. Mona Gupta, opened the evening by welcoming attendees, emphasizing the organization's mission to foster networking, advocacy, & professional development. "Tonight is a celebration of connection, accomplishment, & continued momentum for women faculty at the School of Medicine," she said. "We're here to reflect on our journey, recognize excellence, reimagine what we can achieve together, & spark inspiration for the future."

The inspirational keynote address was delivered by Dr. Eileen Barrett, President of the American Medical Women's Association, a nationally recognized leader in physician well-being, health equity, and authentic leadership- values that align with WFSOM's mission. Dr. Gupta also recognized the support of Dean Stan Gerson and the Office for Faculty, noting their roles in creating space for academic faculty voices and

leadership to thrive.

The dinner spotlighted several major achievements from the past year:

- Fall Mixer and Fundraiser: Brought together 60+ attendees, with proceeds supporting Laura's Home, which serves women and children in crisis.
- The launch of WFSOM's Peer Coaching Program, a historic collaboration between the School of Medicine & Weatherhead School of Management. This pioneering initiative paired 45 women faculty across institutions to foster reflection, resilience, & professional growth.
- Northeastern Ohio Science & Engineering Fair (NEOSEF): WFSOM recognized outstanding young scientists in health, medicine, and environmental research.

Attendees celebrated faculty promotions, tenure, and Career Development Awards across early, mid, and senior career stages, celebrating individual excellence alongside collective progress.

Looking ahead, Dr. Gupta outlined a vision for 2025–2026 focused on "deepened connectedness, amplified leadership, and expanded opportunities for women faculty." She reaffirmed WFSOM's commitment to sustaining impact and building on its strong foundation.

"Tonight is not just a dinner," Dr. Gupta said. "It's a reflection of who we are when we come together with purpose and joy." The Spring Dinner underscored WFSOM's role as a vibrant community dedicated to ensuring that women faculty at Case Western Reserve University feel seen, supported, and empowered—today and for generations to come.



### Gujarati Samaj News

#### Quarter 1: January – March 2025

##### Event 1: Gujarati Natak – Friday, March 14, 2025

We kicked off the year with a vibrant Gujarati Natak performance, attended by over 400 members of our community. The event was a wonderful opportunity to reconnect, celebrate our heritage, and enjoy an evening of laughter and entertainment. It served as a great reminder of the joy and unity our culture brings.

##### Event 2: MedWish Volunteer Opportunity – Sat, March 22, 2025

A group of 20 dedicated high school students volunteered at MedWish in Cleveland, where they sorted and packaged medical supplies for communities in need. This service opportunity not only allowed students to earn community service hours but also helped them build leadership skills and a sense of civic responsibility. It was



giving back and supporting our greater community.

#### Quarter 2: April – June 2025

##### Event 1: Greater Cleveland Food Bank Volunteer Day – Sat, May 3, 2025

Members of our Samaj came together once again for a volunteer



giving back and supporting our greater community.



By Mrs.Yogita Patel day at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. Together, we prepared and packed food for families in need, continuing our mission of community service and compassion. This event, much like MedWish, reinforced the importance of

## Bengali Cultural Society, Cleveland: Celebrating Heritage, Building Community

Founded in 1972 with the vision of preserving and promoting the rich traditions of Bengal, the Bengali Cultural Society (BCS) of Cleveland, Ohio, has grown into one of the most vibrant cultural organizations in the Northeast Ohio. Rooted in a mission to foster unity through culture, community service, and creativity, BCS continues to bring together not only Bengalis but also the wider Cleveland community to celebrate the shared spirit of diversity.

BCS's journey began with a simple idea: to create a home away from home where traditions could thrive. Over the years, the society has organized festivals, social gatherings, and service initiatives that showcase the beauty of Bengali heritage while strengthening community bonds.

The centerpiece of the BCS calendar is its annual Durga Puja, now in its 48th year, took place this year on September 26–28. Widely regarded as one of the oldest Durga Puja celebrations not only in Ohio but in the continental United States, this grand festival continues to be the society's proudest tradition—drawing families and well-wishers from across the Midwest for days of devotion, cultural performances, and joyous togetherness.

Alongside Durga Puja, BCS organized a wide array of cultural, social and religious programs. Events such as Baishakhi Utsav, Theatre Festival, Holiday Party, and annual sports tournaments showcase creativity and artistry while the Saraswati Puja and Lakshmi Puja celebrate tradition and camaraderie.

Beyond celebrations, BCS is also deeply committed to giving back. Partnerships with organizations like the Akron-Canton Food Bank,

Summit United Way, and local school districts such as Revere and others in Cuyahoga County have made school-supply drives and food drives an annual tradition. Initiatives like the “Desi Bites” Food Festival have blended cultural celebration with philanthropy.

As an affiliate of FICA Cleveland, BCS has worked hand-in-hand with the wider Indian community, most recently participated and co-hosted Anand Mela and actively participated in Cleveland’s iconic One World Day, showcasing India’s cultural pride on a global stage.

BCS continues to raise the cultural bar with its upcoming signature musical series, “Rhythm Divine” on September 20, featuring renowned artists such as Anwesshaa and Surojit o Bondhura. These programs not only highlight the connection between Bollywood and folk fusion but also bring world-class talent to the Cleveland stage.

Through more than five decades of devotion, creativity, and service, the Bengali Cultural Society of Cleveland stands as a shining example of how culture builds bridges, enriches lives, and inspires generations.

#### BCS Cleveland – Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow.

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### 16th Annual IFUSA



16th Annual IFUSA was held on Sat. Sep. 13, 2025, at Brecksville-Broadview Heights High School campus. The festival was visited by over 2000+ visitors from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Among many attractions and activities in the Exhibition Plaza, You’ve Got Talent hosted the show where over 200+ participants competed for Judges’ Choice Awards & People’s Choice Awards. The

National Anthem was performed by the BBHHS choir team. The BBHHS string quartet performed Bollywood hits that stole the hearts of the sold-out auditorium audience.

Half-tone show featured winners of Miss India Ohio 2024 & Miss Teen India Ohio 2024. A special recognition went to hometown hero Nandish Patel - aka known as „ThankYouDish“ - 67th Grammy 2025 winner for producing the best R&B Album “11:11” for Chris Brown.



## Kerala Association of Ohio Celebrates Onam with Record Attendance



KAO Onam event held on September 6th at Dan Calabrese Performing Arts Center brought together 450+ visitors in a joyous celebration of cultural diversity, marking it a resounding success.

Onam, the vibrant and cherished festival of Kerala, is a grand celebration that unites the Malayali community in a joyous expression of culture, tradition, and togetherness. Celebrated with immense enthusiasm, Onam is the state's most significant festival, marking the homecoming of the mythical King Mahabali, whose reign is believed to be a golden era of prosperity and harmony. Typically observed in the Malayalam month of Chingam (August–September), Onam spans ten days, culminating in the grand finale known as Thiruvonam. For the Kerala community, both within the state and across the globe, Onam is a time to revel in shared heritage, indulge in festivities, and strengthen familial and social bonds. The essence of Onam lies in its rich blend of rituals, art, music, dance, and cuisine, all of which reflect Kerala's cultural diversity and vibrancy. It is a time for the Kerala community to honor values of equality, humility, and generosity, inspired by the legend of Mahabali, who was known for his just rule. The festival transcends religious and social boundaries, bringing together people from all walks of life in a shared celebration of Kerala's cultural identity. For the global Malayali diaspora, Onam is a way to stay connected to their roots.

KAO executive committee members -Vishin Joe, Josy Velliamparambil, Arul Mathew, Megha Kaitharath, Vishal Panicker and Tarun Somnath were the chief organizers of the Ponnonam 2025 event. This event showcased the rich tapestry of Kerala's heritage through music, dance, food, and art, fostering unity and cultural appreciation. The event was inaugurated by Ms. Malini Menon with a traditional lamp lighting ceremony.

KAO President Vishin Joe expressed gratitude and pride in celebrating Onam with the KAO family known for its unity and strength. She said " We are thrilled to see our community come together to celebrate

our shared heritage and their enthusiasm shows how much Onam means to every Malayali". She wished the community a happy and prosperous Onam.

In accordance with tradition, "Mahabali" the king of Kerala was welcomed with a beautiful procession with young girls carrying flowers and lamps "Thalappoli " and " Chendamelam" the authentic , vibrant Kerala drum beats .

This year's festival drew an estimated 450 + attendees, a record high, who enjoyed a vibrant lineup of performances, including traditional dance forms, Western-Indian fusion performances, bollywood dances, soulful music and mesmerizing skit by Avon Kalasamithy. The event also featured various competitions -Malayali Mannan, Malayali Manka and Onappayasam , which showcased local talents and their creativity. Prizes and awards were distributed to winners of various cultural and sports competitions.

A highlight of the Onam festival was the delicious feast "Onasadhya" where attendees savored 20 + authentic dishes from Kerala served on a banana leaf. Local vendors and artisans also showcased their crafts, boosting small businesses and highlighting our creative spirit. The event was supported by Annapoorna Reastaurant & Grocers, Dream Catcher Event Planning , Smart gain LLC -Financial planning and a number of Individual sponsors, whose contributions ensured a seamless and memorable experience. Sustainability efforts, including KAO Food drive , low-waste food stalls and recycling stations underscored KAO's commitment to community and environmental responsibility.

KAO's Ponnonam 2025 event has solidified its place as a cornerstone of Cleveland's cultural calendar.

For more information, photos, or to get involved, visit kaoh.org or follow Kerala Association of Ohio on Instagram.

## Community Voices Ahead of November 2025- Mr. Sandeep Dixit

As part of the My Cleveland Agenda Listening Project, Clevelanders are being interviewed to share their priorities, questions, and hopes ahead of the November 2025 election. Supported by Tri-C, Signal Cleveland, and community media outlets, the project aims to amplify community voices and foster a collective agenda that can be shared with both residents and candidates for local office. Lotus has been an active partner in this effort. The following is one such interview with Sandeep Dixit, who has been working with the community for decades.

The following Q&A highlights one community member's vision and reflections on leadership, civic engagement, and the future of Cleveland. The views and opinions expressed in this interview are those of the individual Mr.Sandeep Dixit, community member, and do not necessarily

reflect the views of the Cleveland Listening Fellowship, The FICA, The Lotus, Tri-C, Signal Cleveland, or partner organizations.

### About Mr.Sandeep Dixit

After graduating as a Mechanical Engineer in 1989, Sandeep arrived at North Carolina State University in Raleigh for his higher education, earning a Master's degree in Integrated Manufacturing Systems Engineering in 1992. He began working as an automation engineer and moved to the greater Cleveland region in 1994. While working, he completed his MBA at Cleveland



State University, taking evening and weekend courses. With a passion for innovation, Sandeep started a software development and consulting firm in 1996, alongside his wife Tanmayee. He experienced many ups and downs, including the market crashes of 2000 and 2007. Through these challenging times, Sandeep truly learned the importance of understanding customers' needs and meeting their expectations through successful delivery. He is a living testament to the fact that small businesses in America fuel the world's best innovations. Sandeep has been part of the greater Cleveland region since 1994 and is actively involved in community initiatives, such as being a member of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), a board member of the Mayfield Village Parks and Recreation Department, and the organizer of the Yoga Festival since 2018. He was also the president of local community organizations and the president of a national-level Indian-American association representing over 500,000 members across 60 communities in the USA. As president, Sandeep implemented much-needed reforms and programs such as weekend schools for children, a community engagement platform for professionals and entrepreneurs, and essential services for senior citizens.

**Q. As a community leader, what do you expect from elected officials as their first act?**

**A:** As an elected official, my first act will be to seek blessings from the almighty god and the elderly members of our community, and launch social media communication channels where every community member can directly contact me 24/7. I also want to launch social media channels where community members can sign up for volunteering for our government.

.....Cntd on Pg 7



## Community Voices Ahead of November 2025- Mr. Sandeep Dixit

...Cntd from Pg 6

**Q. Are you planning to vote in November 2025? Why or why not?**

A: Yes. As an American citizen, voting is the most precious right bestowed upon us by the Constitution of the United States of America. This is how I contribute to shaping our shared future!

**Q. Do you have any questions about voting or about Cleveland's new wards and polling locations? Do you have any questions about what's on the ballot?**

A: No.

**Q. Anything you'd like to know from the candidates who are running to represent you in Cleveland?**

A: No.

**Q. What do you want elected leaders to know about your community?**

A: Our community needs leaders who can bring calm, ease, and certainty in these uncertain times. We also want leadership that is forward-looking and focused on creating opportunities for all through free markets and policies that protect everyone.

**Q. Where do you currently get information you trust about things that are happening in your community?**

A: Being a part of a small, close-knit community, I often find out about what is happening in our community through my social network of friends as well as community newsletters such as Lotus, Jyoti, Mayfield Village Newsletter, etc.

**Q: What do you expect from someone similar who is an active citizen and a community leader like you ?**

A: I came to this country in 1989 as a young person with a bag full of dreams! I have been in the Cleveland region for more than three decades and have experienced nothing but warmth, kindness, and generosity from the amazing people of this great nation! America has led the world in innovation, free markets, and democracy. In doing so, it has uplifted the standard of living for all of humanity. My priorities are the same for Cleveland - the land of refineries, manufacturing, and steel bridges. I want the Cleveland region to lead the nation in the new era of space tourism, autonomous vehicles, digital currency, and artificial intelligence, and I am going to do my part in making this vision a reality!

## Tradition in Tandem: The Harmonious Path of Shoba and Narayan

By Mahima Rao

In a world ruled by instant gratification and fleeting trends, the enduring beauty of Indian classical arts still offers a deeper, more lasting connection for those who dare to seek it. At the center of this quiet, powerful revolution are two remarkable torchbearers: Shoba, a Bharatanatyam exponent, and Narayan, a multi-faceted musician rooted in both Carnatic and Hindustani traditions. Together, this duo has redefined the teaching of classical arts not as a mere skill, but as a soulful journey of discipline, character, and expression.

Their individual journeys began long before their paths crossed, each nurtured by tradition and guided by extraordinary mentors.

For Shoba, the journey started at just four years old in Mumbai, initiated not by personal ambition, but by her parents' hope to introduce her to the cultural richness of Indian art. Her father, initially uncertain, became her biggest supporter after witnessing her commitment to the craft. That early encouragement led her to a lifelong bond with her guru, Kalaivani Natyathilakam Smt. Rajee Narayan, founder of Nrithya Geetanjali.

"She was more than a teacher," Shoba reflects. "She was like a second mother. She taught me everything—from Bharatanatyam to music, natyashastra, abhinaya, and nattuvangam." Rajee Narayan's influence was both profound and progressive. She wrote lyrics, composed music, choreographed, danced, and sang—an artist who breathed creation. Her inclusive teaching embraced stylistic variations, emphasizing correctness in technique and depth in emotional expression. Today, Shobaji continues her guru's legacy with equal dedication. Her classes focus not just on steps or rhythms but on developing presence, discipline, and internal growth. "You can teach rhythm, melody, and lyrics," she says, "but bhava or emotion must be felt. That's the difference between a performance and a transformative experience."

For Narayan, music was less a choice and more an inheritance. His mother, Srimathi Meenakshi Vishwanathan, was one of Bombay's pioneering Carnatic violinists. She never forced music on him—but he grew up surrounded by it. "Before I even began formal training, I could identify ragas and reproduce compositions," he recalls. His life took a significant turn after college, when a chance encounter with Ustad Abdul Hafiz Hamid Khan in a recording studio sparked a new path in Hindustani music. "My guru could anticipate my musical expressions before I uttered a word. He taught me not to imitate, but to discover and create," Narayan shares. That ethos continues in his own teaching. Whether instructing on sitar, tabla, or voice, he emphasizes originality rooted in discipline. "Art isn't about mimicry. It's about understanding the soul of the piece and responding



with your own truth."

But what truly sets Shoba and Narayan apart is the synergy they've built through collaboration at Nrithya Gitanjali School of Dance and Music. Narayan's intricate compositions find life through Shoba's choreographic dialogue between sound and movement, intention and interpretation. Their creative respect for each other allows them to retain individual identities while co-creating pieces that transcend tradition.

"There are four pillars in dance—lyrics, melody, rhythm, and emotion," says Shoba. "The first three can be taught, but the fourth must emerge from within." This philosophy permeates their teaching spaces, where students are encouraged to see classical arts not just as extracurricular activities, but as life tools.

"I don't expect every student to become a professional dancer," she says. "But I want them to carry the values the art teaches: focus, time management, and grace under pressure. These are life skills, not just stage skills."

Narayan agrees. "Learning art is like progressing through an education system. You start at kindergarten and

progress through the postdoctoral level. You can't judge its impact after six months. It takes years to even begin to understand what the art demands and gives." Both mentors are candid about the challenges of teaching in a digital age. Students often arrive distracted by academics and seduced by social media's quick validations. "Making a reel is easy," Narayan says. "Understanding a raga or mastering abhinaya takes time, reflection, and silence."

And yet, they persist—with patience, vision, and deep love for their students. "Teaching is not just about passing on knowledge," says Narayan. "It's about planting seeds and watching students bloom in their own time." They also stress the importance of humility as a cornerstone in their classrooms. "Approach the art with respect," Shoba tells her students. "Don't treat it as a checkbox or a hobby. Treat it like a relationship. It needs time, patience, and most importantly, heart."

One of the most distinctive elements of their teaching is the incorporation of live music in dance class, a rare, enriching experience in today's world. Inspired by her own guru, Shoba continues this tradition, creating a learning environment where rhythm and movement are born in real-time synergy.

Their artistic journey has also been a deeply personal one, a shared path built on love, respect, and mutual admiration. Married for over 41 years, Shoba and Narayan have not only built a life devoted to the arts but also to family. Together, they have raised two accomplished sons, balancing the

Cntd on Pg 8...



## Tradition in Tandem: The Harmonious Path of Shoba and Narayan

By Mahima Rao

...Cntd from Pg 7

demands of teaching, performing, and parenting with quiet grace. Their marriage is a reflection of the same values they bring to their art: commitment, harmony, and deep understanding. As life partners and creative collaborators, their relationship remains a foundation from which both family and artistry have flourished.

But their contribution extends far beyond the classroom. Through performances, cultural programs, and years of unwavering mentorship, Shoba and Narayan have become vital contributors to society. They serve as cultural ambassadors, preserving the authenticity of Indian classical arts while making them accessible to newer generations.



Their dedication has inspired countless individuals and families to stay connected to their roots through music and dance, strengthening the cultural fabric of the communities they serve.

Their message to young artists is timeless and simple: "Take your time. Discover yourself. Respect the tradition. And above all, find joy in the journey." In the hands of teachers like Shoba and Narayan, Indian classical arts not only endure—they flourish.

As pillars of grace, knowledge, and compassion, their work continues to ripple through generations. We honor their unwavering service to the arts and to society, and wish them many more years of creativity, inspiration, and success.

## Shanthi Ragahavan

By Mrs. Shanthi Ragahavan



I grew up in Delhi, raised in a home steeped in tradition, discipline, and quiet strength. My father, the Director General of the Indian Standards Institution, was charismatic, hardworking, and a visionary leader whose commitment to excellence shaped everything around him. My mother was

an intelligent, kind, pious, affectionate, and prayerful person. Their complementary energies created an environment rooted in values that continue to guide me today.

Music was the heartbeat of my childhood, largely because of my mother. A passionate violinist and ardent Carnatic music enthusiast, she never missed a concert, often taking me along. I imbibed the music while waiting for the Ghatam artist's dramatic toss at the end of the concert. Determined to give quality music training, my mother found an excellent vocal teacher for my sister, Shri Jayaram Iyer. While she learned, I listened to her and absorbed intuitively.

Our neighbor, an AIR artiste and disciple of Veena Vidwan Shri Kalyana Krishna Bhagavata, became a quiet mentor. Though her practice sessions were private, she allowed me in, and I would sit transfixed for hours. At seven, I formally began learning veena under Shri Vishwanathan, a disciple of the legendary Karaikudi Sambasiva Iyer. His style was both complex and soulful, and I absorbed it effortlessly. My mother would listen through the door and innocently remark that she couldn't tell whether it was me or my teacher playing.

Music quickly became more than a skill -it was the language of my heart. The Karaikudi style deepened my spiritual connection to music, a bond I treasure to this day. Through adolescence, I explored Western pop, Bollywood, classical, and Latin American genres, while living in Ecuador and Brazil. Argentine tangos became my favorite. I also became fluent in

Spanish and Portuguese.

Years later, I settled in Cleveland with my husband Raghavan, whose love for music matched mine. Music was central to our home. My daughter Shruti started singing early, as soon as she could talk and showing remarkable command of raga, sruti, and layam even as a toddler. She participated in the Cleveland Thyagaraja Festival at just four years old. I was her first and primary guru, and she also trained under revered artists like Smt. Jayalakshmi Santhanam, Shri T.K. Govinda Rao, and Shri T.N. Bala. Her violin studies continued under Shri Sivaganesan and Shri Narasimha Murthy, disciple of MS Gopalakrishna. Over the years, Shruti earned top honors in both vocal and violin categories at the Aradhana competitions. After high school, Shruti traveled to Chennai for advanced vocal training under Sri Vaigal Gananaskandan, a disciple of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. Within six months, she mastered Alapana, Kalpana swarams, and Neraval in over 60 ragas, culminating in her vocal Arangetram. She was awarded the title Sangeetha Bhaskara by the Gnanaskandan Trust for this exceptional achievement. Since then, she has performed across India and the USA, including appearances at the Cincinnati and Cleveland Thyagaraja festivals. She later pursued further training with Shri Chitraveena N. Ravikiran.

Our frequent performances in local events resulted in parents approaching me to teach their children—something I had never considered. But once I started, I never looked back. I discovered a deep love for working with children and introducing Indian culture to the next generation in the U.S. Since 2003, Shruti has nurtured students in Carnatic vocal and violin, gaining early acclaim when her pupils shone at Cleveland's first Annamayya program. Shri Surya Babu's praise of her teaching marked a proud milestone in our family's musical journey.

Her mastery of Manodharma and dedication as a guru were especially evident during her student's recent violin Arangetram, a performance that affirmed her role as an inspiring and imaginative teacher.

In 2008, Shruti and I co-founded Ragapriya School of Carnatic Music with a clear mission: to offer high-quality, structured instruction grounded in tradition and joy. More than technique, we aim to cultivate confident individuals rooted in spiritual and cultural identity. Classes range from Vocal, Violin, Veena, Bhajan, Sloka, to music appreciation and performance opportunities.

## Rakshabandhan Utsav Celebrated at Solon Fire Station

On August 27th, the Solon Fire Station became the heart of a meaningful cultural celebration as community members gathered to observe Rakshabandhan—a festival symbolizing the bond of protection and gratitude. The event was organized by the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), Cleveland, and welcomed city officials, including the Mayor, Vice Mayor, Police Chief, Fire Chief, and several dedicated service personnel.



The celebration began with a thoughtful address by Falak, a local high school student, who shared the significance of Rakshabandhan and how HSS embraces it as a Universal Day of Oneness. Children from the community tied rakhis—sacred threads of protection—on the wrists of first

responders, offering prayers for their health and safety. HSS Cleveland chapter coordinator Sachin Deshpande talked about HSS efforts.

The Mayor expressed heartfelt appreciation to HSS and the Hindu community for sharing their traditions, noting that this annual event is a cherished occasion that fosters unity and mutual respect. He also mentioned that, "this is the beauty of this effort that our men and women are here to protect, and you are here to protect them". The gathering served as a beautiful reminder of the deep connections between cultural heritage and community service.



**Miles for Meals” Youth Ambassadors Surpass The Fundraising Goal**



Thanks to your amazing support & the inspiring dedication of our Youth Ambassadors, especially Krivam Rastogi & Nikhil Yalavarthy, they surpassed their \$6,000 goal.

They raised more than \$8,000 for Akshaya Patra (including online donations and checks)! That means 400 + children in India will now

receive a nutritious meal. This milestone reflects the power of community, compassion, and possibility. Let’s keep building on this momentum because together, we’re nourishing futures.

Akshaya Patra pushed us out of our comfort zone and changed our lives with a simple question: “Did you know that \$20 can change a child’s life?”

Akshaya Patra provides hot, nutritious lunches to underprivileged children in India. \$20 is enough to feed a child for an entire school year! We were amazed that such a small amount could make such a big difference to a child just like us, covering their basic needs so they could focus on education and a bright future, just like we could. We felt an urge to help but had no idea how and where to start. Our parents suggested a fundraiser, and we were pretty overwhelmed at first. We had no prior experience and doubted our ability to pull it off successfully. However, we thought of the insightful adage, “You never know what you can do until you try,” which inspired us to be part of this glorious cause.

Motivated, we planned a 1-mile walk/run fundraiser in 2023. Driven by our enthusiasm and parents’ guidance, we launched our initiative, charging \$20 per entry so each participant could directly feed a child. Planning wasn’t easy- many people didn’t take us seriously, and we often struggled to convince them. But we stayed determined, sharing how the cost of just one meal in the US could feed a child in India for a year. To

my surprise, the community rallied behind us. The feeling of raising over \$3,500 and providing meals for more than 175 kids in India for an entire year during our inaugural event was indescribable, one that was far beyond satisfactory. Taking information into action through inspiration helped us stand out as proud youth ambassadors for Akshaya Patra. It taught us a life lesson that true growth and impact happen outside our comfort zones.

Later that year, we witnessed the firsthand impact of our efforts. We visited Akshaya Patra kitchens and schools and quickly jumped in to serve meals to children. Seeing the children smile and the volunteers’ dedication inspired us to make the second event even more successful. We needed to.

In 2024, we expanded the “Miles for Meals” fundraiser to include a 5 K run and challenged ourselves by setting a goal of raising over \$4,000. We knew it was ambitious, but without a vision to do better, the initiative would not progress. Deciding on a venue was particularly challenging because we wanted to level up from last year, but ultimately chose the same venue as in 2023. Initially dejected, I realized there were other ways to enhance the event. We were especially convinced we would do better this time because of our fresh marketing tactics, like online donations for the ease of those unable to attend in person, and a raffle and snacks to make the get-together more enjoyable. We felt accomplished as we planned, organized, and prioritized activities. Our hard work paid off. We had raised over \$5,500, smashing our goal by more than \$1500. The extraordinary feedback and support from friends, families, and the community who believed in Akshaya Patra’s cause truly motivated us to make this an annual event that brings people together and supports children in India to lead the lives they deserve.

Stepping out of our comfort zone to support Akshaya Patra resulted in a series of events that changed the lives of many children in India and, surprisingly, transformed ours equally.



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## Nitya Rekha

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**WFSOM Annual Spring Dinner & Award Night**

Women Faculty School of Medicine (WFSOM) Annual Spring Dinner - Keynote speaker was Dr. Eileen Barrett (President of American Women’s Association), May 21st 2025, at Case Western Reserve University



**The Art of Strategy Gala 2025**



The Art of Strategy Gala 2025 was held on June 20, at DoubleTree by Hilton/Akron - a chess gala event and evening of entertainment! Kala Kanapathy-Bagley and team once again had a fundraising chess gala event to support the Women’s Chess



Initiatives and also raise awareness of women’s gynecological needs through the Cleveland Clinic.



# UTSAV LAL

1. Tell me something about yourself and your childhood.

My childhood years spent in New Delhi, India, from the age of 7, were a constant blend of music education and public performance. I gave my first solo concert performance at the age of 9 and from then onwards had an extensive performing career which started with smaller local events/ venues, gradually moving into overseas concert tours/ festivals and collaborative performances. In India, I studied European classical with one of the few great teachers in the country, John Raphael, to build a strong piano technique and foundation. I also learnt Indian film music by ear from a really unique self-taught pianist called Brian Silas.

My family moved to Dublin, Ireland, when I was 13, and during my high school years, my thirst for improvisation led me to start jazz studies alongside Indian and European classical music. It was also great to explore a ton of Celtic music while I was living there, something that has become a part of my musical explorations. All of this exposure opened new doors, and my musical world widened significantly, seeing the links between all the different traditions. Subsequently, I went on to do my bachelor's degree in jazz at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and a Master's in Contemporary Improvisation at New England Conservatory, Boston.

2. What made you think about the concept of Ragas on Piano?

I got interested in Indian Classical music through Indian film songs, particularly those that were raga-based from the 60s and 70s. I was also learning European Classical music at the same time, and the thing about raga music that drew me in initially was its improvisational nature. Subsequently, as I learnt more about the rules and boundaries of each raga, it drew me in a lot deeper. The biggest grounding force for me in my musical journey is my guru, Ustad Wasifuddin Dagar, and the incredible Dhrupad tradition, through which I got way more interested in the long forms. I love the patience of the music and the way each note in a raga has so much personality and feels alive.

The relationship between the piano and Indian classical music is complex. Deciding to play this music on the piano is like an asymptote—the closer you get, the further away you realise you are. With every step forward, I realize how many more steps there are to go. There are so many facets of Indian music that are almost physically impossible on this instrument, but the further I explore, the more I'm filled with curiosity. There is a mystery, wonder, and relief in knowing the goal cannot ever be achieved, and the physical limitations are there. The joy is in finding ways to create the illusion of meend and do things like re-tune a few notes on the piano to get the just intoned peaceful Gandhar of Raga Yaman. Putting in the rigour to do the impossible on the piano makes me push the instrument in a very different direction from the way other pianists have chosen to go. I want to make my own personal kind of virtuosity, the direction of which comes from getting



closer to the fluidity of the voice.

3. Mention few of your achievements.

Achievements are always a bit of a strange word; it sometimes makes music feel like sports. I think for me, just diving deeper and deeper into my personal musical journey is the most gratifying part of it. But a few things that I'm grateful to have the opportunity to have accomplished are:

- I have released 9 critically acclaimed albums presenting Indian Classical Music on the piano. My debut album, Piano Moods of Indian Ragas, released by leading Indian label Times Music in 2008, marked

a major early recognition of my work and helped establish the piano as a serious medium for raga interpretation. Since then, my several released recordings have explored both traditional and cross-cultural forms. It's interesting to see how the journey has developed over the last two decades with these records as snapshots of a long process.

- I was honored with the designation of Young Steinway Artist in 2010, becoming the first to be recognized by Steinway & Sons specifically for work rooted in Indian Classical music. This milestone not only acknowledged my contributions to expanding the expressive range of the piano but also marked the genre's debut within Steinway's prestigious international roster of artists.

- In 2012, I became the first musician ever to perform on the piano at the Harivallabh Sangeet Sammelan—the world's oldest Hindustani classical music festival, held since 1875. Traditionally rooted in vocal, Dhrupad, shehnai, tabla, and sarod, the festival had never featured a piano in its 137-year history. My performance marked a transformative moment, broadcast live on Indian national television, and was a proud milestone—not only as the first pianist to appear on that stage, but also as a step toward broadening the festival's embrace of global musical expression within a deeply traditional context.

- In 2015, I collaborated with inventor Geoff Smith to become the first musician to make a record on his revolutionary creation, the Fluid Piano - a prototype acoustic piano that can bend strings. The Fluid Piano Album was released in July 2016, and it was incredible to be able to play authentic microtonal meend (glides) on this instrument as well as play the music in Just Intonation as intended.

- Over the last two decades, the opportunity to headline and perform at world-famous venues like The John F Kennedy Centre (DC), Carnegie Hall (NY), Southbank Centre (London), Asia Society (Hong Kong), Arts Center (Melbourne), and NCPA (Mumbai) has been a very proud and memorable moment.

- The incredible and diverse group of artists and ensembles that I've collaborated with over my journey is definitely a highlight for me. From artists like Martin Hayes, L Shankar, Selvaganesh, George Brooks, Talvin Singh, and Rajna Swaminathan to ensembles such as CIRCA Contemporary

Circus and commissions from several Silent Film Festivals. I also recently scored the music for a really beautiful feature film, "Olivia" by Animitas, due to be released this year. All of these experiences have become an integral part of my musical conscience as I move onward.

4. Any message to the younger generation who wants to pursue the same dream?

Whilst growing up, something that I'm always grateful for was the freedom and opportunity to spend a long time exploring my own personal voice on my instrument. I always encourage all my students to make sure to spend time writing, composing, and improvising outside of the lesson material, and really think about making things that truly are their own. For me, the most special music comes when musicians can really engage with themselves on a deep level, and that, like anything, is a skill that needs to be practiced right from the start. Having a music career is incredibly challenging, but without that emotional and personal connection, it's very difficult to persevere through the obstacles.

## Youth Cultural Ambassadors of Cleveland

*Congratulations to all the artists who have performed Rangamanch/Arangetram this summer in Kathak, Bharatanatyam and Carnatic Violin.*

**Shakthi Prabhakaran**



Freshman at University of Pittsburgh major in Neuroscience  
Guru- Smt. Antara Datta  
School- Anga Kala Kathak Academy

**Laya Raghav**



Sophomore at OSU major in Neuroscience  
Guru- Smt. Sujatha Srinivasan  
School- Shri Kala Mandir

**Nagaisha Nagajothi**



Freshman at Harvard University  
Guru- Smt. Antara Datta  
School- Anga Kala Kathak Academy

**Satyarpita Parmeswaran**



Freshman at CWRU, major in Biology for Pre-med Track  
Guru- Smt. Shruthi Aring  
School- Ragapriya School of Music

## Rhythms and Rounds: A Fusion of Art and Sport- Nikitha's unique path!

By Mahima Rao



In a world where youth are often encouraged to specialize early, 15-year-old Nikitha Suresh is charting her own course, one that embraces both the classic rhythm of Bharatanatyam and the modern precision of competitive golf. A sophomore from Central Ohio, Nikitha has become a shining example of dedication, discipline, and the power of pursuing passion with purpose.

Nikitha's journey into the arts began at a tender age of five, when the sparkle of Bharatanatyam jewelry and costumes first caught her eye. "Originally, I was drawn

in by the jewelry and costumes," she laughs, "but I stayed because of my guru, Sujatha Srinivasan of Shri KalaMandir, and my mom Priya, who is also a dancer." Over the last decade, her connection to Bharatanatyam has deepened through storytelling rooted in Hindu spirituality. Her recent dance accolades include 1st place at the Natya Idol Regionals, qualifying her for nationals, as well as podium finishes at the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana and Vindhya competitions.

While Bharatanatyam grounds her in heritage, golf gives Nikitha wings. Introduced to the sport by her father Suresh, at age seven, her passion ignited after watching the Netflix documentary *The Short Game*. "I wanted to be on that stage at the U.S. Kids Golf World Championships," she says. And she did just that, qualifying in her very first competitive season and continuing every year since.

Her golf resume is packed with elite accomplishments. In April 2024, she became a Drive, Chip, and Putt National Finalist, placing 2nd in chipping and 7th overall nationwide feat broadcast live on NBC Golf Channel. She has qualified for the Junior World Championships in California for 2024 and has placed as high as 21st globally in the U.S. Kids Golf World Championships. She is also the second youngest ever inductee into the Golf Week Junior Tour Hall of Fame, with six career wins, 11 top-3 finishes, and 7 victories on the Southern Ohio PGA Junior Tour.

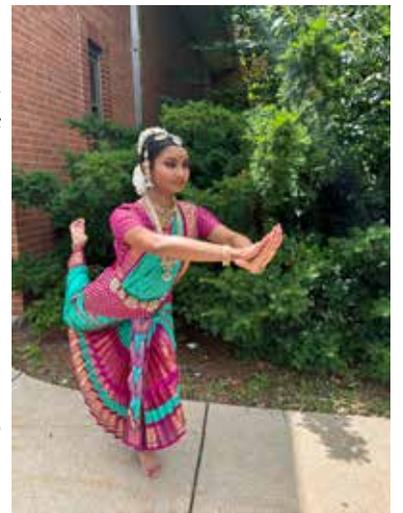
Over her career, Nikitha has notched nearly 100 top-5 finishes on the USKids Local Tour and claimed back-to-back Central Ohio individual and team championships. Her current scoring average hovers around 75, an impressive benchmark for any junior golfer, especially one balancing multiple disciplines.

Balancing school, dance, and elite-level golf is no small feat. "I prioritize either golf or dance each week and allocate time daily to both," she says. Visualization, rest, and structured time management keep her grounded. "After difficult rounds or performances, I rest to avoid burnout. Mental endurance is key."

A student with a love for chemistry and biology, Nikitha has her eyes set on a healthcare career. "I'm leaning toward pre-med," she shares, while affirming that golf and dance will always remain close to her heart. "I don't want to turn them into careers, I want to continue enjoying them." Her parents, who don't play golf themselves, have been her biggest cheerleaders, driving her to tournaments, watching hours of practice, and helping her navigate a rigorous schedule. "They're always there, helping me plan and supporting me through it all," she says.

Nikitha's story is not just one of early success; it's a testament to balance, cultural identity, and resilience. Whether she's performing the Omkara Varnam on stage or sinking a 20-foot putt under pressure, she brings the same grace and grit to every arena she steps into.

With unwavering support, a brilliant work ethic, and a heart full of dreams, the future looks incredibly bright for Nikitha. As she continues to grow in both sport and art, we wish her many more milestones, medals, and moments of joy on and off the stage and the green.



## Leading Today, Shaping Tomorrow - My Journey as a Junior Mayor

By Yuvha Karthikeyan

When I first applied for the Junior Mayor's Association (JMA) under the City of Cleveland, I was excited but unsure of what to expect. I was honored to be selected and, looking back, the experience exceeded anything I could have imagined. The program gave me a rare opportunity to not only step into the role of a city leader but also to hear from my peers, connect with city officials, and develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within our community.

The JMA program was divided into seven focus groups: General Leadership, Arts & Culture, Public Health, Economic Development, Community Development, Public Safety, and Planning. I was placed in the General Leadership group, which provided a broad overview of many important topics. Each time we met, we focused on one of these themes, allowing all of us to explore different aspects of city leadership and service.

One of the sessions that stood out to me the most was Public Health. I've always been interested in health, and hearing from Dr. David Margolius from the Cleveland Department of Public Health was incredibly eye-opening. For example, we learned about different determinants of health – factors like environment, access to grocery stores, transportation, and safe housing and how they can directly impact the health of individuals and entire communities. For example, some of my peers shared that in their neighborhoods, access to fresh food is limited because there aren't any nearby grocery stores. These discussions helped me understand that while medical care is important, many other factors also have a major influence on a person's health.

Together, we talked about real problems facing Cleveland, what they mean to us, and brainstormed ways we, even as young people, could help address them. We proposed ideas such as creating community gardens, expanding volunteer efforts, and finding ways to make healthy food more accessible



to everyone.

Throughout the program, we also had the chance to visit important landmarks and institutions, including the Great Lakes Science Center, Cleveland Foundation, Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland State University, and the Cleveland Public Auditorium. Each visit helped me better understand the many organizations that contribute to the well-being and growth of our city.

One of the most meaningful moments was being sworn in as Junior Mayors on May 14th! Standing alongside my peers, I felt a strong sense of pride and responsibility. This program not only gave me the chance to express my ideas directly to city officials but also taught me that leadership is about listening, learning, and working together to create positive change.

The Junior Mayor's Association has left a lasting impact on me. I've gained valuable skills, met incredible people, and learned so much about Cleveland and the difference I can make. I am grateful for the opportunity and excited to continue being involved in my community in meaningful ways.

Yuvha Karthikeyan is a rising senior at Solon High School, deeply passionate about science and music. She has been singing since the age of four and learning Bharatanatyam, a classical Indian dance form, since the age of five. Additionally, she is a skilled violinist, combining her artistic talents with her academic interests. She serves as the Chapter Director of the Cleveland Grey Matter Project, the Vice President of Women in STEM, and the President and Co-Founder of her school's Neurovation Initiative. Through these leadership roles, she actively promotes STEM education, research, and advocacy. Yuvha strives to explore how music and medicine can inform, enrich, and inspire one another.



## Community Voices Ahead of November 2025- Mrs. Swati Sathe

By Mahima Rao



**Q. What's your name?**

A: Swati Sathe

**Q. What's your zip code?**

A: 44022

**Q. As a community leader, what do you expect from elected officials as their first act?**

A: The first responsibility of any elected official is:

Safety: safe schools, safe streets, safe places of worship, safe public sphere.

**Q. Are you planning to vote in the November 2025 election? Why or why not?**

A: Yes. It is very important that each voice is heard. Our voices will hopefully be heard through our elected officials.

**Q. Do you have any questions about voting or about Cleveland's new wards and polling locations? Do you have any questions about what's on the ballot?**

A: No

**Q. Anything you'd like to know from the candidates who are running to represent you in Cleveland?**

A: We expect our elected leaders to be well-informed about the Indian community and its contribution to the larger American community.

**Q. What do you want elected leaders to know about your community?**

A: Indians are a peace-loving community, diverse, very well educated, and entrepreneurial. We value education and family units, and we would like to continuously add value, unobtrusively, like sugar in milk.

**Q. Where do you currently get information you trust about things that are happening in your community?**

A: Lotus, FICA website, Community leaders WhatsApp group, Moms4Moms WhatsApp group, word of mouth from trusted friends.

**Q. What do you expect from someone similar who is an active citizen and a community leader like you?**

A: As a community, we should be involved in the political process so that our voices are heard and heeded by our elected officials. Every effort should be undertaken to stop misinformation about India and the people of Indian origin, and the besmirching of the peace-loving and highly cultured Indian community. Every Indian is a brand ambassador of India in his or her chosen field in this society. We should support leaders who are supportive and accepting of legal immigrants. As ambassadors, we should also support leaders who believe in a strong US-India Friendship.

## Celebrating Earth Day with Community Spirit and Environmental Action

### Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh – Cleveland, Ohio

On Sunday, April 20, 2025, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) brought the Cleveland community together in a meaningful celebration of Earth Day. With nearly 65 participants in attendance—along with the gracious presence of Solon Mayor Mr. Edward Kraus—the event offered an inspiring blend of education, hands-on workshop, and environmental stewardship.

### Inspiring Talks Youth Environmental Leaders

The spotlight of the event belonged to the elementary, middle, and high school children, who delivered thoughtful presentations on a range of ecological topics. From tree planting, biodiversity, producing green hydrogen energy, to reducing plastic usage, and understanding environmental metrics, these young environmentalists shared powerful messages on how small actions can lead to big changes. Their passion and insight were both informative and uplifting. Solon High School youth leader Ms. Falak Dahiya highlighted the environmentally friendly initiatives led by Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh to reduce the community's carbon footprint. Over 100 families in Solon have made a lifelong commitment to avoid using plasticware, both at home and during large gatherings. A new movement has emerged in Solon, encouraging families to bring their own utensils to community events to minimize plastic waste. Additionally, several Solon schoolchildren have stopped using plastic water bottles and straws, opting instead for reusable steel bottles and straws. These small but consistent efforts are driving significant change, inspiring more community members to join this environmentally friendly campaign. Solon Middle School Kids, Mr. Sankalp Khandelwal and Anurag Shahi recited the verses from the Bhagwat Geeta in ancient Sanskrit language, emphasizing the importance of respecting and protecting our environment and living in harmony with nature.



### Sapling Planting

In a hands-on workshop, children planted saplings they could take home—symbolizing not just growth, but a personal commitment to care for the environment. This interactive session was a favorite among participants and encouraged a lasting connection with nature.

### A Visit from Mayor Edward Kraus

Mayor Kraus's presence brought a special energy to the celebration. His support emphasized the role of local leadership in fostering sustainable communities and demonstrated a shared commitment between citizens and city officials to protect the planet. Mayor Kraus shared Solon's city development plans, emphasizing environmental sustainability by expanding walking trails, developing footpaths, and creating bike-friendly lanes to help reduce the city's carbon footprint.

### Earth and Power

This year's Earth Day theme, "Earth and Power," draws attention to the complex relationship between energy production and environmental sustainability. Dr. Utsawa K. Chaturvedi, a nuclear physicist and renowned environmentalist, emphasized the broader context in a message shared on Earth Day: "No matter how much green energy we produce, if we don't reduce population growth and consumption, humanity cannot be sustained." His statement underscores a growing concern among scientists and environmentalists: that technological advancements alone may not be enough to avert ecological crises without deeper systemic changes in how we live and consume resources. Dr. Chaturvedi also shared the glimpses of his poetry dedicated to generating environmental awareness within the community.

### Sustainability in Every Detail

The event wrapped up with eco-conscious refreshments, served using reusable utensils and with zero plastic waste. This attention to detail reinforced the event's central message: sustainability begins with thoughtful choices in our everyday lives.

### A Day to Remember

The Earth Day celebration hosted by HSS was more than just an event, said the event coordinator, Dr. Alaka Srivastava. It was a community-driven movement to educate, engage, and empower the youth leaders to become champions of environment sustenance and protection. By giving children the platform to lead and by involving community leaders like Mr. Kraus, environmental advocate Dr. Chaturvedi, the day left a lasting impression on everyone present and inspired hope for a greener, more responsible future.



# The Mohicans Trip

By Anika Rao



One wonderful Thursday, my family and I were packing to go to the Mohicans Tree House with the Kim's. All of us were excited. Thursday night, we put all the luggage in the car. Friday morning, I got up at 9 am. It took 1 hr. and 30 minutes to get to Mohican State Park. I was really bored. But we finally got there. I saw Norah and Tyler. They were excited too. The view was beautiful. We all sat there, and the kids had Nutella sandwiches and the adults had cucumber sandwiches. Enough of the state

park, let's get to the most exciting part ... The Kokosing cabin. It took 30 minutes from the park to get there. When we reached the Kokosing Cabin, we were excited. We looked all around the cabin. We choose our bedrooms

and, of course, unpacked.

One hour later, Norah and I went for a walk. We saw other treehouses and cabins. One was like a castle. Then Norah and I were hungry. We had a cheese quesadilla. A few hours later, we had pizza for dinner. Then we played a little and sat outside. Tyler, Norah, and I had roasted Marshmallows. We also made S'mores. We had a campfire and sat around it. Then we went back inside to sleep. I could not sleep. I finally slept at 1.00 am.

In the morning, Norah woke me up at 7.30 am. That was very early for me. I got up and we sat outside. We had breakfast. We had omelets and waffles. Then we packed everything. My grandma was still taking a shower. We accidentally locked the door. We waited till she finished her shower outside, enjoying nature and listening to the chirping songs of the birds and the calm wilderness. My grandma, after her shower, opened the door Norah, Tyler, and I finally closed the door, and it got locked automatically.

# BAPS Charities Walk-Run 2025 Unites Greater Cleveland

On June 1, 2025, in Brecksville, OH, over 350 participants joined the BAPS Charities "Spirit of Service: Walk-Run," uniting Greater Cleveland in community, compassion, and celebration while supporting the City of Brunswick Police and Fire Department.

Held in the heart of Brecksville, this vibrant event brought together families, youth, seniors, and civic leaders from across the Greater Cleveland area. From the first steps to the final strides, the energy was electric as walkers and runners joined forces to honor the everyday heroes who keep our city safe.

In a heartfelt address, Police Chief Robert Safran reflected on three decades of friendship and support from BAPS Charities – "For over 30 years, BAPS Charities has stood with our community. This Walk-Run is yet another



reminder of their enduring commitment to service and unity."

But the event was more than a walk — it was a celebration of community spirit. Following the main event, over 600 guests gathered for a lively outdoor picnic hosted by the volunteers of BAPS Charities. With delicious food, engaging games, and joyful activities, the day wrapped up in true family-style celebration.

This walk was one of over 100 BAPS Charities Walk-Runs across North America this year—part of a continent-wide movement supporting local causes and inspiring giving. Since inception, BAPS Charities has organized 1,100+ Walk-Runs, raising millions to uplift communities and build a culture of service. To every walker, sponsor, and volunteer—thank you for making this year's event a success. Together, we walk toward a brighter, safer, and more united future.



# Hindi Diwas 2025 Celebtration in Cleveland

The 76th Anniversary of the Hindi Diwas was celebrated on the 14th of September, 2025, in the Shiva Vishnu Temple Hall of Cleveland by the North East Ohio Chapter of the International Hindi Association (NEOIHA) with great enthusiasm. The Hindi Diwas is celebrated annually on the 14th of September to commemorate this day in 1949, when the Constituent Assembly of India accepted Hindi in Devnagri script as the first official language of India. This was made possible through a compromise known as the Munshi-Ayyangar formula, after the Drafting Committee members Kanaiyalal M. Munshi and Narasimha G. Ayyangar could be brought to the negotiation table after three years of debate between the two opposing camps. Hindi, which is the most-spoken language of India, is also the 4th most-spoken language of the world after Mandarin, Spanish, and English in that order. The theme for the Hindi Diwas 2025 is "Hindi: Rashtriya Ekta aur Vaiswik Pehchan Ki Takat."

The two-hour-long program started at 5:00 pm with the traditional ritual of lighting the lamp (Deep Prajwalan) by the IHA National President Dr. Shail Jain, NEOIHA Chapter President Mr. Ashwani Bhardwaj, Dr. Sanjay Chaudhury, Mrs. Renu Chadda, Mr. Sunit Jain, Dr. Adit Aditya, and SV Temple President Mr. Manhar Shah. The program was beautifully hosted by a pair of co-hosts:

Dr. Somnath Roy & Dr. Sunita Dwivedi, who introduced the speakers & performers and kept the event flowing smoothly. The Deep Prajwalan was followed by the welcome speech by the North East Ohio Chapter of IHA (NEOIHA) President, Mr. Ashwani Bhardwaj, who informed the audience about the different activities being performed by the IHA local chapter. Then Dr. Shai Jain, IHA National President, addressed the audience and explained all activities being performed throughout the year by the IHA nationwide, and requested to join the IHA membership to help spread the teachings of the Hindi language among the younger generation. This was followed by fifteen different cultural programs, including dance, singing & poem recitals, and the audience liked them all. At the end of the cultural programs, the American & Indian National anthems were sung, and everyone took part in singing. This was followed by a "Thank you note" being presented by Dr. Rakesh Ranjan, current vice-president of the NEOIHA chapter. Dr. Ranjan thanked all the volunteers who made this Hindi Diwas celebration so successful, the SV Temple management for providing the space and the food committee members, Mrs. Kiran Khaitan & Mrs. Nisha Roy, for arranging the delicious dinner. During this program, about eleven new members joined the Life Membership of IHA. The program was attended by about two hundred people, and dinner was served to everyone at the end of the program.



Report by Dr. Somnath Roy, Secretary of the North East Ohio Chapter of IHA (International Hindi Association)



## Empowering Tale of Thyagaraja Festival!

By Mahima Rao

In the unlikely setting of Cleveland, Ohio—far from the sunlit courtyards of Carnatic sabhas and the temple-lined streets of South India—a quiet revolution in classical arts has taken root. Here in the heart of America's Midwest, Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam found not just an audience but a deeply devoted community. At the helm of this cultural renaissance stand two visionary founders: V.V. Sundaram and V.V. Ravi.

Their journey began in 1978, not with grand plans, but with a simple desire

to preserve what felt most like home—the soulful cadence of Tyagaraja's kritis, the rhythm of the mridangam, and the quiet dignity of devotional art. What started as a modest gathering of Indian immigrants—the Cleveland Bhajan Group—has blossomed into the Cleveland Thyagaraja Festival, now the largest Indian classical music and dance festival outside India.

In those early years, tradition had to be rebuilt from memory and heart. Suburban basements became sabhas. Kitchens doubled as canteens. Songs were passed down through storytelling and spiritual memory. Volunteers printed flyers, cooked meals, and set up stages. The goal was never just replication but reinvention. Could this art take root in American soil? Could children raised thousands of miles away not only inherit it but also fall in love with it? The answer has been a resounding yes!

A major reason lies in the support of Indian maestros who saw something sacred in this endeavor. Mridangam legend Ramnad Raghavan, who had settled in Cleveland in the 1970s, became an early champion. Soon, icons like Lalgudi Jayaraman, Nithyasree Mahadevan, and Sanjay Subrahmanyan lent their presence—not for fame or fortune, but to nurture a cultural movement. Their commitment brought not only legitimacy but magnetism,



attracting donors, audiences, and eager young learners.

As word spread, so did ambition. With tireless volunteers like R. "Cleveland Balu" Balasubramaniam and Gomathy Balasubramaniam, the festival expanded into a multi-day celebration hosted at Cleveland State University, featuring concerts, competitions, and original productions. What began with potlucks and passion evolved into an institution backed by corporate sponsors and international acclaim.

Perhaps the most visionary leap came in 2007 with the launch of Sustaining

Sampradaya, an educational initiative that connected North American students with master teachers in India. Long before virtual learning became widespread, this program offered notation packets, recordings, and structured online instruction. The result? Large ensemble performances that exemplify how tradition can adapt without losing its soul.

Thousands of young artists have passed through this program, some renowned artists, some performers and teachers, others simply carrying a lifelong bond to their heritage. Either way, it is a thread binding generations, continents, and identities.

Looking ahead, the team envisions expanding this model across global diaspora communities and launching hybrid academies in India to enable two-way artistic dialogue. In this vision, diaspora children are not just students; they are stewards of a living tradition.

Cleveland has become more than a host city. It is a beacon. A sacred space where melody, memory, and identity converge and where culture, when nurtured with love, doesn't just survive, it soars, blossoms, and shines as a beacon of legacy and cultural identity!

## My First Trip to India

By Kanitha Mannar

THUD! The airplane landed and sped down the runway. Seatbelts started unclicking, conversation rose, and everyone started pushing each other to get their bags. Amma and I exited the plane, our bags in our hands.

"Are you excited for India, Parvati?" Amma suddenly asked me.

"Yes!", I exclaimed. But inside, I knew it was a lie.

I don't know much about India. I didn't know what was there, where we were going, or anything. I was anxious.

Suddenly Amma screamed in delight, as she spotted her mom in the waiting lounge.

"Amma!! Oh my, it's been ages since I've seen you...."

I looked intently at my Paati, as she happily chattered with Amma.

"Oh, Parvati!" she gasped, finally looking past Amma's shoulder. "I saw you last when you were two, you know? You were so tiny. Now you're grown up!" Paati exclaimed, touching my face slightly.

"Hello Paati!", I said.

We headed to the baggage claim. Soon, we piled into Paati's car with our heavy suitcases and started towards Paati's home.

The city was bustling with the evening traffic. Black and yellow autos sped across the road as the airport faded in the distance. The echoes of vehicle motors and excessive honking filled my ears.

"So Parvati! You're going into 8th standard, no? When does break end? You know, kids barely get breaks here! But you get many more breaks, right? Something like Thanksgiving and President's Day?"

Suddenly, she noticed my exhausted face. She smiled and told me to go to sleep.

.....I woke up an hour later.

I looked out the window again. I gasped in awe. Massive mountains loomed up towards the dusk sky and tall coconut trees swayed in the air. Women walked by with pots of water on their head, their hands gracefully steadying their steps. Nearby, I could hear the bleating of goats, as goatkeepers guided them towards their pen. Chickens and their little chicks squawked, as they roamed in front of large farmhouses.

Soon, we pulled up to a big farm house. We freshened up and went to eat. The buttermilk was so cool, the warmth of the sambar filled my mouth, and the okra curry was so chewy and flavorful. Paati stood nearby, chuckling at our satisfaction.

After eating, I ventured out to get my bag from the car. As I opened the front door again, I gasped in delight.

Up above, the night sky shone, twinkling with diamond-like stars.

I'd never seen the stars so clearly. It was beautiful.

It was then that I realized...it would all be fine. I was anxious about coming to India. But those stars...they were promising me something. That India did have more beauties to see. Even though I had no clue where we were, I had loving people around me. I could finally relax and enjoy myself.

My eyes fluttered close, sleep overtaking me once again. I leaned on Paati's shoulders, settling in, as I dreamt about the adventures for the next day.

## From Cloud to Clarity: The Power of Writing Down Your Goals

By Sachin Deshpande

"Your brain is a cloud. Paper is the download button. Write. Your. Goals."

This simple metaphor captures a big truth: most people keep their goals floating in their head. The problem? That's where they stay—unclear, uncommitted, and easy to forget. Writing them down changes everything.

### Clarity:

When your goals are just in your head, they're vague and fuzzy. Putting

them on paper forces you to define what you really want. Suddenly, you move from cluttered thoughts to a clear direction. Clarity is the first step toward action.

### Conviction:

A written goal carries weight. It's no longer a passing thought—it's a statement of belief. Writing down your goals reinforces conviction: "Yes, I

Cntd on pg 15..

## Personal Growth Series

By Sravanthi Vallampati



### Episode 6 (Jul 2025) – The Audience

**The Effective Communicator**  
Tips, tricks, and techniques to deliver memorable messages that inform, persuade, entertain, and inspire audiences.

In this episode, we shift focus from ourselves to our audience. In any interpersonal or public speaking setting, the audience isn't just a passive group of listeners—they are the reason we speak. Understanding our audience, of one or one thousand, shapes everything: our tone, language, content, and delivery. When we tailor our message to their interests, needs, and level of understanding, we create the pulse that keeps the heart of a good conversation beating - a winning combination of connection, clarity, and impact.

A speaker who considers their audience is more likely to:  
Engage attention by addressing relevant needs, concerns, or aspirations.  
Build trust by showing empathy and respect for diverse perspectives.  
Inspire action by aligning the message with the audience's values and motivations.

Great communicators don't just speak to their audience—they speak with them. The more we know about who they are, the more powerful and meaningful our message becomes.

Let's consider the following scenarios and how we might tailor our messages for maximum impact:

- 1-1 or Small Group Conversations:
  - **Audience Traits:** Conversational ease, familiarity and trust, expectation of a two-way communication.
  - **Speaker Adjustments:** Listen, give others ample opportunities to speak/contribute, wait your turn to speak, do not interrupt, understand needs and values, know that they are emotionally invested, be genuinely interested in what they are saying.
- Business Presentation to Executives
  - **Audience Traits:** Time-constrained, results-oriented, strategic thinkers.
  - **Speaker Adjustments:** Focus on high-level insights and Return on Investment (ROI), use concise slides with data visualizations, avoid technical jargon unless it's relevant to decision-making.
- Motivational Talk to High School Students
  - **Audience Traits:** Young, diverse interests, short attention spans.
  - **Speaker Adjustments:** Use relatable stories, employ humor where

appropriate, incorporate visuals, videos, or interactive elements, keep the tone energetic and inspiring.

- Technical Talk at a Conference
  - **Audience Traits:** Technically savvy, detail-oriented, curious, future-ready.
  - **Speaker Adjustments:** Dive deep into technical content, use diagrams, code snippets, and demos, prepare for questions, discussion, or challenges.
- Community / Non-profit / Town Hall type setting
  - **Audience Traits:** Mixed backgrounds, emotionally invested in local issues, needing change or advocacy.
  - **Speaker Adjustments:** Use plain language, avoid jargon, acknowledge concerns, show empathy, provide clear action steps or ways to get involved, inspire hope and possibility.
- Social Speeches
  - **Audience Traits:** Diverse age groups, backgrounds, interests, and expectations, variable settings and occasions.
  - **Speaker Adjustments:** Adjust your tone and formality to suit the occasion - ex: wedding toast vs award reception vs retirement speech, understand nuance, balance light heartedness with meaningful messaging.

Crafting tailored, meaningful messages and engaging our audiences are just the beginning; it's critical to continually 'read the room' and pivot as situations demand.

"Reading the room" in interpersonal communication and public speaking involves keenly observing and interpreting an audience's reactions to gauge their engagement and understanding of the message. It's about understanding the audience's mood, energy, and receptiveness to tailor the delivery and content for a more impactful and engaging experience, or change direction if the intended purpose is not being achieved as expected.

In the next episode, we will explore common misconceptions speakers make about their audience, and treat ourselves to the trifecta of the art of persuasion - ethos, pathos, and logos. Stay tuned... Happy Speaking!

Contributed By Sravanthi Vallampati  
Distinguished Toastmaster

Want to learn more or join a Toastmasters club?  
Contact [svallampati@gmail.com](mailto:svallampati@gmail.com)

Visit <http://www.toastmasters.org> for resources and more!



## From Cloud to Clarity: The Power of Writing Down Your Goals

By Sachin Deshpande  
...Cntd from pg 14

believe in this. Yes, I can make this happen."  
That shift builds confidence in your own ability to follow through.

### Commitment:

Finally, writing goals builds commitment. On paper, a goal becomes more than an idea—it's a personal contract. You can see it, revisit it, track it. It pushes you to act, because you've now made a promise to yourself.

In short, writing goals pulls them down from the cloud of your mind into the real world. They become clear, believable, and actionable. Try it today: write down your top three goals. Don't just think about them—see them on paper, and watch how it changes the way you show up.

### About the Author:



Sachin Deshpande is a certified Business and Executive Coach with ActionCOACH and founder of Sach-Insights Coaching & Consulting. With over 27 years of global leadership experience at Philips, Salesforce, and Johnson & Johnson, he now helps entrepreneurs and leaders in Northeast Ohio achieve clarity, growth, and balance in business and life.

## Bollywood Dance Show

Imagine the ripple effect of one healthy meal, keeping a child in school, fueling their aspirations, and lighting the path toward a brighter future. We are delighted to invite you and your loved ones to join us on Sunday,

October 12, 2025, for a mesmerizing Bollywood Dance Show, featuring Omi Vaidya (actor & comedian) as Emcee, benefiting Akshaya Patra.

Your sponsorship pledge or event ticket will help ensure that no child has to choose between hunger and education. Your presence will make the evening unforgettable and, more importantly, it will bring hope, nourishment, and opportunity to thousands of children.

Together, let's create an evening of joy, gratitude, and generosity, giving the gift of a healthy meal and a brighter tomorrow.



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**Omi Vaidya**  
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## AAIWO Celebrates Culture, Inclusion, and the Unlimited Talent of Children

By Mahima Rao



The Asian American Indian Women of Ohio (AAIWO), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to empowering women, promoting cultural outreach, and supporting families, has long believed in celebrating children for who they are and what they can achieve. This year, the organization hosted two powerful programs that highlighted the variety of youth talent in the community, while also shining a light on the incredible abilities of differently abled children.

### Children’s Day Celebrations on September 6, 2025

Held at Parma’s Sari Friedman Auditorium, AAIWO’s annual Children’s Day celebration brought families together for an afternoon overflowing with culture and creativity. Emceed by youth volunteer Ameyaa Gargasha, the program allowed young performers to shine on stage in front of an encouraging audience.

The performances reflected both tradition and modernity. Audiences were treated to graceful Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi dances, energetic Bollywood and folk pieces, and soulful music that captured the spirit of the day. Every child who performed embodied the confidence, joy, and creativity that AAIWO hopes to inspire through this annual event.

The celebration also recognized community leaders. Mrs. Shoba Narayan, founder of the Nritya Gitanjali School of Dance, received the AAIWO Award 2025 for her decades of dedication to the arts. Vineeta Jayaram was honored with the AAIWO Service Award 2025 for her leadership in global supply chain innovation and her remarkable service to the community. In her closing remarks, Ameyaa summed up the event beautifully: “Every child is a different kind of flower, and together we make this world a beautiful garden.”

### Differently Abled Youth Showcase on August 10, 2025

Just weeks earlier, AAIWO hosted another moving event at the Sari Friedman

Auditorium, this time dedicated to highlighting the extraordinary abilities of differently abled children. The program blended culture with advocacy, emphasizing inclusion and the power of opportunity.

The afternoon opened with a heartfelt invocation by 15-year-old Rahul Prasad, whose voice filled the room with warmth. Later, Rahul returned to the stage with a spirited solo performance that drew loud applause. Sarah Rintamaki, Executive Director of Connecting for Kids, shared valuable resources for families of children with special needs, furthering AAIWO’s mission to expand its outreach and support.

The stage then transformed into a place of devotion with a soulful bhajan by 20-year-old Kripesh Narayanan, whose passion for spiritual music touched the hearts of all present. The highlight of the day came with 10-year-old Devam Sandhu, a child who discovered dance as his true form of expression. His Bollywood medley, brimming with humor, rhythm, and storytelling, captivated the audience and earned a standing ovation.

Chief Guest for the afternoon was Mrs. Laura Gabel, School Psychologist. Laura Gabel completed 35 years as a school psychologist in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. She is the former president of the Cleveland Association of School Psychologists and a former executive board member of the Ohio Psychological Association. She is also an adjunct professor in the psychology department at CSU. She has earned several awards, including Ohio School Psychologist of the Year, Cleveland School Psychologist of the Year, and Cleveland State Psychology adjunct professor of the year. She resides on the east side with her husband and two boys.

One Mission, Many Celebrations Together, these two programs exemplify AAIWO’s commitment to uplifting children—whether by nurturing cultural heritage, honoring community leaders, or celebrating the unique brilliance of differently abled youth. With every song, dance, and award, the message was clear: when children are given a stage, they don’t just perform—they inspire.

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## Laya Viswanath

Laya Viswanath is an 8th grader at Beachwood Middle School. Laya launched her very own business – Fur U, with LoVe, making handmade lotion bars and lip balms.

Laya was inspired to start this business because her mom told her about Euclid Pet Pals, the shelter where her family rescued their pet Ginger. Euclid Pet Pals had a large parvovirus outbreak spreading through their shelter earlier in the summer, resulting in unmanageable costs over \$5000. Laya was moved and decided that she would help in any way she could



to raise funds for her beloved pet shelter. She had received a lotion-making kit from her uncle as a gift and decided to combine her love for making handmade gifts with a noble cause to continue fundraising for pet shelters. Thus, she founded Fur U, with LoVe

Laya learned a lot through the process, including product

development, branding, marketing, packaging, and more. In less than two months, she raised over \$200 and donated all the proceeds to Euclid Pet Pals.

Laya also participated in the Young Entrepreneur Institute Pitch Challenge and won the Grand Prize in the national competition for the grades 5-8 level. An ardent supporter of the pet shelter, Laya had previously raised funds for Euclid Pet Pals by soliciting supplies on their wishlist instead of gifts for her 9th birthday. Here she is delivering her presents to the shelter during the pandemic.

Laya has always been an observer of the needs of the community. During the first wave of COVID-19 in 2020, 7-year-old Laya hosted an art and plant sale in her driveway and raised over \$500 to help healthcare organizations obtain life-saving PPE and to the ACLU in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

When she is not tackling community challenges, Laya can be seen playing Carnatic and western violin or singing Carnatic vocals (or watching K-pop Demon Hunters on Netflix)!

## Cognitive Connections: A Student's Mission for Brain Health: An Interview with Nandita Shrikumar

By Mahima Rao



At an age when most are still discovering their paths, Nandita Shrikumar has already begun paving hers—one that could change the future of brain health across the world. At just 17, most high school seniors are busy preparing for college, enjoying time with friends, and planning their next chapter. But for Nandita, a senior at Solon High School, her days are filled not only with academics but also with groundbreaking work in brain health advocacy. As the founder of Cognitive Connections, she has transformed her passion into a growing

movement for Alzheimer's and dementia prevention. When asked about her initial inspiration, Nandita recalled a powerful moment at the Walk to End Alzheimer's.

"They explained the symbolism behind the flowers participants carried—each representing different connections to the disease. But the white flower, meant for an Alzheimer's survivor, had never been carried by anyone. That struck me deeply," she said. "It was heartbreaking, and it encouraged me to start Cognitive Connections, an organization focused on preventing dementia and Alzheimer's disease." That seed of inspiration became reality when she founded Cognitive Connections in September 2024.

**From Idea to Impact : The early days of her initiative were not easy.**

"I would be emailing a lot of individuals for workshops and often wouldn't get responses back," Nandita explained. "It was disheartening to see that at the beginning. But I still remember the first response I got—from an elementary school. That became the catalyst and pushed me forward." What began as small efforts soon grew into something larger. Today, Cognitive Connections has reached thousands across Ohio, the United States, and even internationally through in-person and virtual workshops. Nandita credits supportive partners and collaborators for helping her expand the impact. "I've learned that your organization doesn't have to be perfect to start. You just have to launch yourself outside and take the first step," she said.

**A Vision Beyond Borders :** Looking ahead, Nandita has ambitious goals for her initiative.

"My vision for Cognitive Connections in the future is to keep growing and to open chapters across the United States and the world. I want to encourage other like-minded peers and students to join the mission

by starting brain health initiatives at a younger age," she said. "I also hope to expand the number of workshops we conduct, not just in Ohio but internationally as well."

**Passion for Problem-Solving :** Nandita's path toward leadership began years earlier.

"I recognized my passion for problem solving back in seventh grade when I joined Future Problem Solvers at my school," she recalled. "We would analyze futuristic challenges, identify the main problem, and then think of innovative solutions. I loved that process, and it showed me how I could make an impact." That drive translated into Cognitive Connections. "I didn't want to just confine problem solving to competitions or scenarios. I wanted to apply it to my community and beyond," she said.

Her motivation also comes from observing challenges around her. "When I see problems in my community—like the struggles of dementia patients and caregivers—it motivates me to act. Society itself inspires me."

**Thoughts on Social Impact :** For Nandita, social impact is central to everything she does.

"When we see a problem in society, I believe it's important to solve it. For my generation and the rising generation, it's critical that we take initiative, because we are the ones who will shape the future," she explained. "It's important for us to start early and become innovators."

**Building a Better World :** Asked to describe her ideal world, Nandita shared a simple but powerful vision.

"In my ideal world, if people see a problem, they don't stay silent. Instead, they take action—either by starting initiatives or joining existing organizations to help fill the gaps. There are so many gaps in this world we haven't yet filled, and I think in an ideal world we'd all be working together to close them."

Despite her busy schedule, Nandita makes time to relax.

"I love playing board games—Mexican Train, Set, and even Exploding Kittens," she said with a smile. "They're fun, but they also exercise my mind." She also enjoys crafting with her younger sister.



## Richfield Interfaith Coalition to Host Interfaith Tour of Worship Spaces

The Richfield Interfaith Coalition is excited to invite the public to its upcoming Interfaith Tour of Worship Spaces, a unique opportunity to explore and learn about the diverse religious communities that call the greater Richfield area home. The tour will take place on Saturday, October 18, beginning at 9:00 a.m. at St. Victor Catholic Church.

This day-long event will include visits to six houses of worship, each offering a 20-minute guided experience introducing attendees to the beliefs, traditions, and sacred spaces of various faiths. The tour is designed to foster greater understanding, respect, and connection among people of all backgrounds.

**Tour Stops Include:**

1. St. Victor Catholic Church Check in begins at 8:30 am, Start Time is 9:00 a.m.) we will have a presentation by St Victor's, the Bethel Lutheran Church and the United Church of Christ
2. \*Richfield Sikh Gurdwara - Arrive by: 10:30
3. \*Palyul Ohio – Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist Temple - Arrive by: 11:00
4. \*Jain Society of Greater Cleveland - Arrive by: 11:30
5. \*Chinmaya Mission - Arrive by: 12:00
6. \*Sree Venkateswara Temple of Cleveland (Final stop – includes a complimentary lunch) - Arrive by 12:30. Lunch to follow.

Each stop will last approximately 20 minutes, with 10 minutes allotted for travel between locations. Attendees will experience the unique spiritual atmosphere of each space and learn directly from community leaders about their respective faiths.

"This tour is a powerful reminder of the beauty found in our religious and cultural differences," said Michael Wheeler, representative of the Richfield Interfaith Coalition. "By visiting each other's sacred spaces, we open doors to deeper understanding, respect, and unity."

Participants are encouraged to dress modestly and respectfully. Some sites may ask visitors to remove shoes or follow additional customs. Transportation is self-guided, attendees may drive individually or carpool. Carpooling is highly encouraged.

**\* -No shoes are permitted, socks are fine. No short pants for men. Head scarves are required. They will supply you one or you can bring your own.**

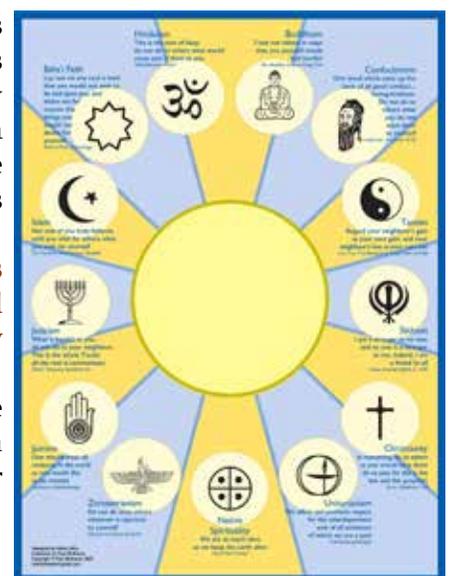
The tour will conclude with a free vegetarian lunch at Sree Venkateswara Temple of Cleveland, offering time for fellowship and reflection.

**Registration & More Information**

The event is free and open to the public.

RSVPs are appreciated to help plan for lunch.

**Please RSVP to [mwheeler@richfieldvillageohio.org](mailto:mwheeler@richfieldvillageohio.org)**



To register or learn more, please contact [mwheeler@richfieldvillageohio.org](mailto:mwheeler@richfieldvillageohio.org) or visit [richfieldvillageohio.org](http://richfieldvillageohio.org). You may also visit our Facebook page @ Village of Richfield.

**About the Richfield Interfaith Coalition**

The Richfield Interfaith Coalition is a partnership of local faith communities working together to build bridges of mutual understanding, celebrate spiritual diversity, and foster a more inclusive and compassionate community.



## Dr. Raj Aggarwal



By Dan Hanson, Cleveland International Hall of Fame Co-Founder and Board Chair

For 15 years, the Cleveland International Hall of Fame has inducted a group of individuals to permanently recognize their significant and lasting contributions to our multicultural city and to inspire a new generation of leaders.

The Indian community has been well represented over the years, beginning with the induction of Paramjit Singh in the inaugural class in 2010. He was followed by Vijaya Emani, Dr. Jaya Shah, Ratanjit Sondhe, Monte

Ahuja, Shiv K. Aggarwal, Mohan Bafna, Mona Alag, Dr. Atul Mehta, Sree Sreenath, Ramesh Shah, and Sudarshan Sathe.

The 2025 Class was decided from about 100 worthy nominees, and Raj Aggarwal, PhD, was the unanimous choice to be one of the select 6 in the 2025 class. Dr. Aggarwal has been a leader in the Indian community for years and has supported the India Cultural Garden, scholarships for Indian students, and many other philanthropic endeavors.

Raj Aggarwal, PhD, CFA, holds a mechanical engineering degree from the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, an MBA and PhD in Business from Kent State, and the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation. A graduate of Leadership Cleveland, Raj has been honored with awards like the Notable Immigrant Leader Awards by Crain's and the Distinguished Alumni Award from Kent State.

Raj has served on business boards for Manco/Henkel DIY Inc., Ancora Trust Mutual Funds/Maxxus Investments, ERC, and the Flood Company. He has also been a principal in three startups and held leadership roles in many professional organizations. His executive experience includes roles at Dana Corporation and Owens-Illinois Inc., along with consulting for the UN, World Bank, Fortune 100 companies, and commercial banks.

His nonprofit volunteer and board service spans organizations like Ideastream Public Media, Kent State University Foundation, Goodwill Industries, Values in Action, Hawken School, and the Cleveland Council on World Affairs. In addition, he gives philanthropic support to these and other area organizations, such as the Food Bank, JCU, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

With over 11,000 citations, according to a Stanford University study, Raj is among the top 2% of scientists globally. Raj has served as a visiting scholar

at the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, the SEC, and the Comptroller of the Currency.

Raj has been the business dean at the University of Akron and held Professor and endowed chair titles at John Carroll, Kent State, and the University of Akron. He has taught or held visiting professor roles at Harvard, the University of Michigan, the University of South Carolina, the University of Hawaii, and internationally in Sweden, Japan, Ireland, Australia, and Singapore.

Dr. Aggarwal and the rest of the Class were inducted at a ceremony at Windows on the River on April 22, 2025. News anchor Russ Mitchell from WKYC-TV was the Master of Ceremonies

Joining Raj in the 2025 class were:

- David Gilbert (Destination Cleveland and Greater Cleveland Sports Commission)
- Frank G. Jackson (56th Mayor of Cleveland)
- Beverley Kerecman (Japanese community)
- Branka Malinar (Croatian community)
- Svetlana Stolyarova (Russian community)

The room was full of leaders from the business, education, ethnic, civic, non-profit, political, and media communities, and FICA was well represented.

Raj could not attend the ceremony, so he was inducted by Values-in-Action President Stuart Muszynski, who then accepted him. Mr. Raj Aggarwal passed away on August 17th, 2025.

See more about Raj and a video of the induction speech at <https://clevelandinternationalhalloffame.com/raj-aggarwal/>



By Dan Hanson, Cleveland International Hall of Fame Co-Founder and Board Chair

## Mr. Ramesh Shah

By Dr. Palak Shroff



Born in a small village in Gujarat, India, Ramesh lost his father and mother at the age of seven. He took a loan to come to the US to take advantage of the unique work opportunities. Mr. Shah's humanitarian work in health and education illustrates what happens when someone is passionate and focused on lifting others.

Over the last 25 years, he has organized teams of physicians and volunteers for medical missions in underdeveloped countries around the world. Under the Association of Indian Physicians of Northern Ohio (AIPNO), Mr. Shah formed the Medical Yatra. Under this organization, they have served the people in need in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Mexico, Ecuador, Guyana, Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, and mainly India. Ramesh has raised funds for countless life-changing surgeries and prosthetic limbs for people who would otherwise not be able to access them. He has also raised funds for medical vans for work in rural areas. He has dedicated efforts to ensure those with visual impairments receive the glasses they need. He has worked with teams to

prevent and cure cervical cancer and establish a women-run business to provide sanitary pads for women in rural India. All this work is a joint effort with his wife, Dr. Jaya Shah, a pediatrician. Mr. Shah was inducted into the Cleveland Hall of Fame in 2011.

Mr. Shah's work goes beyond short-term relief. He has focused on health education, hygiene awareness and training local health workers to ensure lasting impact. Over the years, his efforts have touched thousands of lives. Mr. Ramesh Shah may not seek the spotlight, but in the eyes of those he serves, he is nothing short of a hero.



# International Hindi Association's 22nd Biennial Convention 2025

By Dr. Somnath Roy

The 22nd Biennial International Hindi Association (IHA) Convention 2025 was held in Cleveland on May 2nd & May 3rd, 2025 and was hosted by the Northeast Ohio Chapter of IHA, Cleveland, Ohio. The theme of the Convention was "New Generation, Hindi & Culture in the Digital Age". IHA members & non-members, leaders of distinction from across the globe attended the Convention. Although the Convention emphasized and encouraged youth participation, the poets, writers and artists of all ages participated in the Convention.



The Convention had three sessions: First Session was held in the Highland High School Auditorium, Medina, Ohio on May 2nd in between 5:00 pm & 10:00 pm, which featured wonderful cultural programs including music, dance, poem recitation, short drama & speeches by the local artists. The Mayor of the city of Medina, Mr. Dennis Hanwell also watched the cultural programs and addressed the audience. Mayor Hanwell also took part in the Deep Prajwalan ceremony of the program. The cultural programs were conducted by two MC's, Dr. Sunita Dwivedi & Dr. Rashmi Chopra. Dinner was served to all the guests and artists prior to starting of the cultural program. The Second & Third Sessions were held in the Quality Inn & Suites hotel in Richfield, Ohio.

The Second Session was held between 10:00 am & 4:00 pm on May 3rd, 2025 and had six Educational Seminars: 1. New Generation, Hindi & Culture in the Digital Age by Dr. Bhanu Sisodia, 2. Hindi Literature and Indian Culture: Role of a Teacher by Dr. Astha Naval, 3. Let's learn Hindi with new technologies & Fun by Mrs. Archana Panda, 4. Honoring your identity & Seal of Biliteracy by Mrs. Sadhna Kumar, 5. The Artificial Intelligence Revolution: Transforming Hindi Education in the United States by Dr. Rakesh Kumar and 6. Digitalization of Teaching / Learning Materials: Open Educational Resources (OER) for Hindi by Dr. Rajiv Ranjan. There was a lunch break for the audience & Session Presenters between 12:00 pm & 1:00 pm.

The Third Session was the Grand Kavi Sammelan between 5:00 pm & 10:30 pm on May 3rd, 2025 which showcased a team of three very talented poets of various styles & genres who were able to captivate the audience during the entire session. The first poet was Mr. Abhinav Shukla from Seattle, USA, who is a young & extremely talented poet participating in national level Hasya Kavi Sammelans from a young age and has made a name for himself as an intelligent and melodious Hasya Kavi. The second poet was Mrs. Archana Panda of Bay-Area California is a native of Odisha & a software engineer by profession. She is one of the most popular &

leading Hindi poets in the USA. Her creative writings and compositions have touched the hearts of poetry lovers all across the globe via social media. Mrs. Archana Panda is well known for her melodious voice & songs of love. She is also an anchor & anchors an one-hour radio show on Radio Zindagi which airs each Sunday. The third poet was Mr. Indra Awasthi, a computer engineer from NIT Prayagraj, who moved to

Portland, USA in 1995 with his family. He is a founding member of Hindi Sangam, Portland, dedicated to promoting Hindi language & literature in the USA. His humorous writing & ability to weave satire into poetry have made his works widely appreciated. Dinner was served to the audience, guests & poets before starting the program. The Grand Kavi Sammelan was attended by a large audience and everyone appreciated the presentations by all the three poets. The Mayor of Richfield, Mr. Michael Wheeler also watched the program for some time and gave a very short speech thanking the organizers & the audience prior to the start of the program. He also took part in the Deep Prajwalan ceremony of May 3rd, 2025.

The Convention was attended by many members of the IHA National Executive Team and past Presidents of the IHA and most of them joined the concluding meeting of the Convention on May 4th, 2025 in the Quality Inn seminar room along with the members of the executive committee of the Northeast Ohio Chapter of IHA, Cleveland. The members present in the meeting includes the following: Mr. Tarun N. Surti, IHA Trustees Chair, Mr. Alok Mishra, IHA National Treasurer, Mr. Sher Bahadur Singh from New York & Past President of IHA, Dr. Indrajit Sharma from New York, Trustee of IHA, Dr. Shail Jain, current IHA National President, Mrs. Kiran Khaitan, coordinator of Educational Seminars, Mrs. Kiran Goyal, coordinator of food services for the Convention, Dr. Rakesh Ranjan, Convenor of the Convention, Mr. Ashwani Bhardwaj, Co-convenor of the Convention, Dr. Prakash Chand, Co-convenor of the Convention, Dr. Somnath Roy, Secretary of the Convention and Dr. Rakesh Kumar from Indianapolis & past president of Indiana chapter of IHA.



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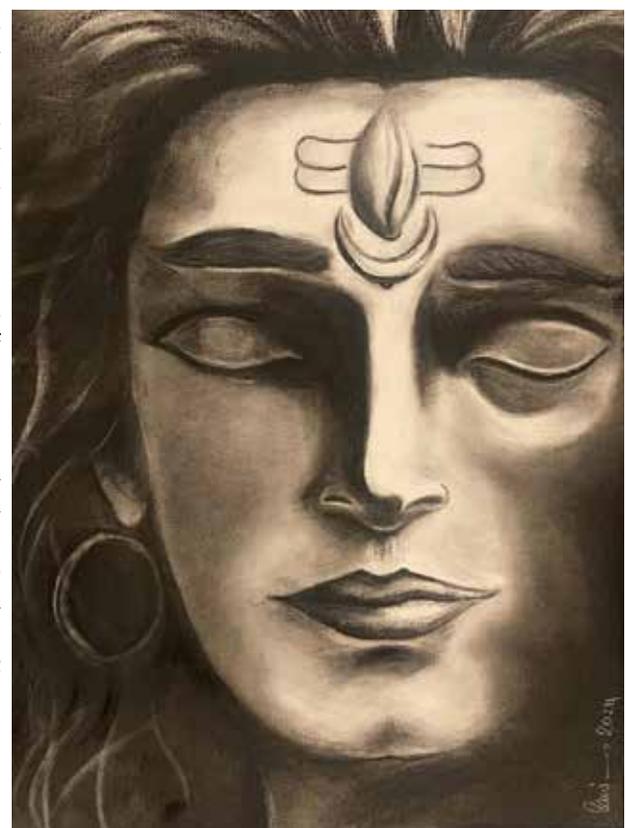
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## Art Corner

This charcoal painting portrays the meditative stillness of Lord Shiva along Strong contrasts and subtle shading.

While the closed eyes evoke a sense of transcendence beyond the physical realm, the composition balances strength with serenity, inviting viewers into quiet reflection and spiritual calm in today's chaotic world.



Lord Shiva  
Charcoal on paper by Santosh Bhandari



Mosaic Healthcare Advisors



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Suggest insurance plan options to clients based on a thorough assessment that meets both their healthcare and financial goals.



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Continue being an ongoing resource for information regarding Medicare changes, doing Annual Reviews of Insurance plans, or help answer client questions throughout the year.



## ABOUT ME

*Hello, my name is Sejal Patel. As a Medicare Health Advisor, my goal is to advocate for seniors in their healthcare journey. This role has allowed me to rediscover my passion for helping others and making a difference in the lives of my clients.*

## CONTACT ME



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