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Glitz & Glamour At GIACC Gala Banquet

BY JYOTHSNA HEGDE

Atlanta: Georgia Indo American Chamber of Commerce (GIACC) laid out the red carpet for all its guests at the North Perimeter Westin Hotel this November 21st to celebrate its 10th year of commencement. The gala featured 'Taste of India', food from four of Atlanta's Indian restaurants; 'Spirit of India', Bollywood style dance performances by local student groups, 'Colors of India', an exhibition of art work from various artists from Georgia and India; and 'Rise of India', addresses by industry leaders on the growth of India.

The 'Oscar inspired' event was emceed by Tushar Singh, the comedian and Suchita Vadlamani, FOX 5 Morning News and 'Good Day Atlanta' co-host (The podium was molded out of ice, with GIACC engraved on it!). The festivities started with National Anthem of USA and India rendered by Arti Pandya. A foot tapping Bhangra by Karma Bhangra added vibrancy to the room. The Consul General of India Houston, Sanjiv Arora could not make it the event but the Vice consul stepped in. He talked briefly about the importance of biracial trade and added that India U.S trade had doubled in recent years. He congratulated the surge of Indian investments in U.S and vice versa.

Keynote speaker for the night, Benjamin De Costa, the Aviation General Manager of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport presented a glimpse into the current facilities and future projects offered to travelers at the airport.

Providing world class customer service and security at the world's busiest airport he emphasized was on top of his priority list. One of the most interesting features of the airport, the ATL SkyTrain, a new elevated train that connects passenger terminal to the rental car center, he added was all set to open on December 8th 2009. The ATL SkyTrain will take customers on a scenic, five-minute ride to the rental car center, where they will sign rental agency contracts

and pick up cars, he said.

"The ATL SkyTrain will also connect the Airport and the rental car center to the Georgia International Convention Center (GICC). Meeting and event attendees at the GICC will have unprecedented access to the world's busiest airport, the state's second-largest convention center and the state-of-the-art rental car center" he added.

He also said that the Airport has 12 ATL SkyTrain cars which will operate in pairs to shuttle customers from the terminal to the GICC/Gateway Center station and then to the rental car center. The wait time between trains during the day is expected to be about three minutes and ten minutes during off-peak hours and overnight.

The rental car center % a 67.5-acre site across I-85 from the Airport % is expected to house all Airport rental car companies and their associated operations, including customer service, administrative offices, car pickup and return, fueling and maintenance facilities. Talking

about the future projects at the airport, especially to accommodate international passenger volume expected to exceed 13 million by 2015 as per the FAA, he said that the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) planners have designed a new global gateway for the city of Atlanta. Construction on the Maynard H. Jackson Jr. International Terminal (MHJIT) began in the summer of 2008 and is set for completion in April 2012 he added.

"Currently, the estimated cost of the project is \$1.35 billion. The new 12-gate facility will connect via the Automated People Mover System to the existing 28-gate international concourse E, creating a 40-gate international air travel complex at Hartsfield-Jackson" he added. He also mentioned that no taxpayers dollars were included in planning or constructing the MHJIT.

The audience applauded when he mentioned that the cumbersome baggage recheck process for Atlanta-



bound international travelers will be eliminated at this terminal. He believes that MHJIT investment is an investment in Atlanta's future since thousands of contracting and trade services jobs will be created during construction and thousands will be employed post construction. He also added that MHJIT brings new domestic and international business opportunity. Some of features projected for MHJIT include a 1.2 million square-foot terminal and concourse complex, 12 wide-body capable international gates, In-line baggage screening system, 9 security checkpoint lanes for international departing passengers, 6 security recheck lanes for domestic connecting passengers and 1,100 short-term parking spaces in close proximity to the terminal. He also added that one the main features he likes to implement at the airport at all times was for his team to serve customers with a smile.

GIACC president Ritesh Desai, in his welcome address, said the chamber was founded with a handful of members and very little money. It was due to the sheer persistence of the founding President and those who came after him that the GIACC has reached its present level. He said, there was no better time to be president of GIACC.

The President-elect of GIACC Stan Sthanunathan, in his address, said he appreciates his enthusiastic team. He said, the GIACC is focused on specific areas and on re-motivating Indian companies to set up business in Atlanta. "Wipro for example currently has 400 employees and is expected to employ close to 1000 people in three years" he added. "The good thing about Atlanta is the weather" he smiled. He also added that the GIACC would facilitate the growth of Indian entrepreneurship in Georgia and also American investment in India such as Coco Cola. He concluded that the best was yet to come.

The show stopper of the evening was the dance performance from a truly inspiring artist flown in from India, Kamlesh Patel. Kamlesh Patel set the stage on fire to the song Hindustani with his unique form of dancing called the "Dance on Hands". Physically handicapped from the waist down, Kamlesh's performance captivated the audience. He received a standing ovation. Kamlesh auditioned for a reality show Dance India Dance in February of this year where he moved the judges, producers and all of India with his tremendous gusto and determination.

GIACC truly offered an evening of glitz and glamour showcasing the style, spirit, color and taste of India.

