

Spirit Of Diwali Celebrated At CAB Mega Mela

Atlanta: Over 10,000 people attended the Indian Festival of Lights- Grand Diwali Mela 2009 at the North Atlanta Trade Center on Oct 3.

The free admission mega event was organized by Cultures Across Borders (CAB), an Atlanta based non-profit. CAB founders Apurva Shrivastava, Amitabh Sharma and Sandeep Savla were very ably assisted by prime promoter Mani Krishnaswamy in putting together this stellar event.

The reception area had young smiling volunteers greeting visitors with traditional Tilak (Chandan) and fascinating tricolored "Celebrate India" lapel pins (made by youth volunteers). The entrance to the event made a bold statement with an exhibition on the Holocaust museum followed by a Ram Mandir. A very vibrant and colorful floral painting "rangoli" with diyas and flowers prompted cameras to click instantly and almost everyone shot pictures. As one moved along, kids were overjoyed with clowns doing face painting, balloon figures. Clay art was next fun activity for kids where kids made diyas for Diwali. A few steps forward opened up a big shopping lane with bazaar full of goodies. There were clothes, jewelry, henna, massage, a whole slew of tantalizing items to fall for. The pathway then led to the food court serving sumptuous mouth-watering food of international flavor. The multi-ethnic crowd kept coming incessantly and relishing even the information booths that displayed and shared vital financial, real estate, educational, healthcare, internet, mobile and other information. The non-profit organizations presented themselves articulately with visitors bedazzled in amazement how

all of this presented itself in intriguing union. An unprecedented record number of 78 booths featured their products and services at this hugely successful fair with a confluence of something for "everyone".



The event kicked off at 12 noon with Hare Krishna Dhun echoing in the beautifully anointed hall. The huge stage with state of the art music system was filled with color and pageantry when one after the other it spontaneously displayed artists and participants from Chinese community presented by Eve Hao, Korean community presented by Kinna Sayanam, Latin community presented by Lupita Sosa, Irish and mainstream American group led by David Richardson (GSMST) and Indian community presented by Kumud Savla, Sunny Molu, Prem & Aadithya of Nritya Natya Kala Bharati. These colorful dances brought glamour and true fusion to life over four hours. It all culminated in a never-before witnessed grand finale medley of Vande-mataram and Jai-Ho

reverberating the hall while each participant waved India's flag proudly.

Towards evening people danced to the Ram-Dhun when a tastefully decorated open cart carried real life Ram-Sita and Laxman in a ceremonial procession right through the event. The second one even carted outside the hall where in a symbolic gesture real life Ram aimed a bow and arrow at a 25 ft tall Ravana effigy making it go up in flames and thousands of spectators clapped and rejoiced. The backdrop looked stunning with 9 full size amusement park rides including euro-bungy, ferris wheel, merry-go-round etc. Children also had a ton of fun all day long with real pony and camel rides besides the park rides and games.

The felicitation ceremony between 6.30 and 7 pm took time to commend and honor four outstanding community champions in fields of Health care - A.B. Short, Education- J Alvin Wilbanks, Science & Technology- Dr. Ajeet Rohtagi and Media - Sachi Koto.

Finally, the floor got filled up with Dandia and Garba dancers enjoying the rhythm of a live band "Rangat" (the icing on the cake) especially flown from India. This band also regaled everyone playing to their mighty best and singing all along the Ram-Barat ceremonial procession route.

The curtains were not drawn until 1.00 am while dancers kept insisting for more and commenting "they have always missed this sort of open, free mela in past years and would love to have it every year."

"If people endorse this so eloquently, it makes sense to organize a mela each year and take it to yet another height year after year," said the CAB founders.

Sheet anchor support by Meenu Sharma, Nita



Shrivastava, Sewa International led by Rakesh Pathak, Gaurav Verma, others and Ravan making team led by Anil and Sandhya Bhagat accompanied by Vamshi Krishna, Ramesh Nallapu and Bhargav Gundabolu besides, Rajan Sharma, Ashok Goyal, Anurag Gaur, Akanksha, Rima, Madhu Kumar, Gary, Premchand, High school children (youth involvement is a major focus area for Cultures Across Borders), and several other young, old devoted volunteers played a key role in event's success because they all put in their utmost dedicated endeavor to ensure everyone's happiness, fun and joy. Surely it was an event to go deep down memory lane by leaving an indelible imprint.

Heroes of Humanity 2009 Honored

Atlanta: The Art of Living Foundation, the International Association for Human Values and Atlanta honored two local heroes at Heroes of Humanity 2009 on November 8 at Atlanta Unity Church in Norcross, Georgia.

The Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Award for Uplifting Human Values, named in honor of spiritual leader and humanitarian Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, is presented to two individuals who exemplify the spirit of service through their dedication to uplifting human values in our community. Hosted by Atlanta Unity Church, the Art of Living Foundation and the International Association for Human Values, the event featured performances by Atlanta's International Harmony Youth Choir, Atlanta Unity Choir and Atlanta Unity Musicians Guild. Rev. Lawrence Carter, first Dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel and professor at Morehouse University served as keynote speaker.

Rev. John Strickland, Senior Minister at Atlanta Unity says, "Even though I have served as a minister for 33 years and served a term as my denomination's Chairman of the Board, I have always believed and taught that a person's religion is how he or she lives life, not where that person goes to church. Practicing the teachings of the Art of Living on a daily basis has made me a better minister, better husband, and better person. I am so honored to be a part of the Art of Living and to have my congregation join with them to present these awards for giving back to society."

The non-denominational Art of Living Foundation is one of the world's largest United Nations-accredited NGOs.

BAPS Atlanta Celebrates Festival of Lights

Atlanta: As Indian classical music permeated the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir complex in Lilburn, colorful draperies and intricate décor marked the arrival of the most prominent Hindu celebration of the year: Diwali, the Festival of Lights. Excited chatter filled the air as families greeted each other and exchanged well wishes for the upcoming year.

"This is my favorite time of year," said Chandresh Patel, a volunteer who helped in preparations for the event. "Since I can't take my children to India every year for the celebrations, I feel blessed that I can bring them to the Mandir, where they can experience the same joy and excitement."

Among the highlights of this five-day festival was a special screening of the award-winning large format film *Mystic India*, which traces a young boy's treacherous journey through India to spread a message of love, service and harmony. Following the film were fireworks, held with the illuminated Mandir as a backdrop.



The week long festivities reached a climax on Sunday, October 18 with the offering of Annakut, an elaborate offering of thousands of vegetarian food items, all arranged artistically before the sacred images. By preparing food items for the Annakut, followers showed their devotion to God, thanking him for his providence in the past year and seeking his blessings for the year ahead.



"The Annakut is beautiful," said Kirna Parikh, who cooks items for the offering every year. "Every time I see it, I'm always impressed by the unique details like the creative fruit carvings and decorative cakes and pastries. The number of food items alone show how devoted and inspired the volunteers are."

Thousands of people from across the Southeast attended the festival. Among the most prominent attendees were three Georgia gubernatorial candidates: Congressman Nathan Deal, General David Poynthress and Attorney General Thurbert Baker. While he could not attend the weekend festivities, gubernatorial candidate, Commissioner John Oxendine, also expressed his best wishes. Also attending were Chairman of the Gwinnett County Board of Education Louise Radloff, Former Commissioner for Economic Development Craig Lesser and State Senator Chip Pearson, who chairs the Economic Development Committee.