

Second Unity dinner in California focuses on peace and harmony -

FREMONT- The second annual Unity Dinner, sponsored by Indo-American Community Federation and held at the Fremont Marriott in Fremont, California, drew more than 500 people, including federal, state, and local elected officials.

California First Lady Sharon Davis and Dorothy Ehrlich of the American Civil Liberties Union, were the keynote speakers.

Indo-American Community Federation celebrates annual Unity Dinner to showcase the Indian culture to a diverse group of community leaders and elected officials to promote understanding and appreciation of California's rich diversity and send a message of peace and unity, said Jeevan Zutshi, organizer of the event and founding President of the Federation.

"With 140 languages spoken in Fremont, once a year, we celebrate and bring together our diverse communities," said Jeevan Zutshi, adding, "Compared to other places in the world, we are uncommonly united in Fremont where we know how important it is to understand different cultures." The inaugural dinner was organized in January last year in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. About 400 people, including more than 100 public officials, attended that dinner at the Fremont-Newark Hilton in January, 2002.

Congressman Pete Stark presented Zutshi a copy of the Congressional Record entry honoring both him and his organization for being an energetic voice for Indian-Americans. The Alameda County Library foundation honored the organization and Jeevan Zutshi in recognition their outstanding service to the community. The California Legislature presented Certificate of recognition to the Federation on the occasion. Dorothy Ehrlich of the ACLU spoke about post 9/11 efforts to defend the rights of minorities. She assured the diverse audience that they will continue to play a pivotal role in defending the civil liberties of all. Among the politicians who attended were Rep. Fortney ``Pete" Stark, D-Fremont (represented by Jo Cazaneve); Rep. Mike Honda, D-San Jose; Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-San Jose; State Sen. Liz Figueroa, D-Fremont; Assemblyman John Dutra, Assembly member Ellen Corbett, County Supervisors from all districts of Alameda and Santa Clara County, Vice-Mayors of all the neighboring Cities and all the City Council members including School Board and Community College board Trustees.

"As we recognize our diversity, we must also appreciate the fact that as individuals, we share the same inherent problems of all humankind - and the solutions are also those that work for us all, irrespective of our cultural heritage, or social standing. If we are to work toward a peaceful world, we must begin with a peaceful society, and for that we must address the unit of society, which is the individual," Jeevan Zutshi said. "It is time for each one of us to take responsibility for peace on our planet. Every culture in the world, every tradition in the world, has since time immemorial extolled the virtue of peace - this evening, is an attempt to bring back our focus to this very salient of issues. An issue that is dear and critical to us as a species more so today, than any time before in history. To promote this value, that of peace, we, as individuals must do everything in our power to make sure that harmony and love prevail - that kindness and charity replace judgmental attitudes and bigotry, that patience and tolerance promote learning and progress," he said. "We must recognize that it is the positive values that we live, implement, and reflect that are the foundations of peace in our lives anything other than those are violent to their core," he said. "We have all seen from the unfortunate events of 9-11 how these destructive forces can change the landscapes of our lives forever. It is time that we become a part of the process that disallows such events from ever happening again. We cannot remove darkness

by fighting it on its level - the only way to change it is by bringing in the light. This evening we celebrate our participation in that process," he added. "In doing so, we help our leaders in government to implement those practices that will allow us all to achieve our goals. Because the policies of any administration are only a reflection of what we as a society deserve and desire. Let us make the right, constructive decisions in our own lives, so we can provide our government the basis for promoting peace, progress, and prosperity for the great United States of America, and through us, for the world," he added.

The Mistress of Ceremonies was Sandhya Patel of Channel 7. The meeting honored individuals and organizations.

The highest Grandmaster in the U.S Tau Yun Kim was honored as the woman of highest achievement. The second award went to the Chinese American organization Citizens for Better Community. The President Garrett Yee of that organization who is also the Trustee of prestigious Ohlone Community college said, "This recognition is significant because what we have is an organization whose members are Indo-Americans honoring an organization whose members are primarily Chinese Americans. This does not happen very often, and in fact, this is probably a first. Obviously we take this as a great compliment to be recognized by what we consider a "peer" organization." The third award went to the League of Volunteers from Newark whose President Shirley Sisk has dedicated 30 years of her life to her organization which helps children and senior citizens. Local Indo-Americans honored were Dr. Sarbjit Hundal, a leading ophthalmologist, Dr. Suroto kundu, a neurologist, Dr. Dharam Salwan, a veterinarian for service to the community. Sunil Aghi was honored for promoting Indo-U.S relations.

The Organizations represented a diverse cross-section of the community at large. Chinese Americans were represented by Citizens for Better Community CBC, the Korean community by Grandmaster Tae Yun Kim, The Afghan American Community by the Afghan Coalition, the Muslim community by American Muslim Alliance; Hispanic Community by the Hispanic Chamber and Unity Council, Phillipino community by Mayor Henry Manayan of Milpitas, Bangla Deshi Community by Khorshed Alam and the Sikh Community by Didar Singh Bains, a sikh pioneer from Yuba City. "Even though we're an Indo-American organization, we're dedicated to serve the entire community," said Zutshi, an Engineer and a real estate broker in Fremont.

A very appreciated Souvenir contained messages signed by Governor of California, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, State Senator, Congressmen Pete Stark and Mike Honda. It also contained "very appropriate for the occasion" poems written by Anjali Mahaldar. Shally Garg sang American and Indian National Anthem.

The artists who performed were Bharatnatyam Legend Indumathy Ganesh, Odissi dancer Shibani who performed with Madonna on MTV and Nupur Bangra dance group.