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FEATURED

## Unity Dinner: Immigration Must Be National Priority

Sunita Sohrabji, India West

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(L-r): Seen on stage at the Unity Dinner Mar. 20: Fremont Planning Commissioner Raj Salwan, Vice-Mayor of Fremont Sue Chan, Cupertino Councilmember Gilbert Wong, Cupertino Mayor Rod Sinks, Cupertino Councilmember Savita Vaidyanathan, Rep. Mike Honda, California state Controller Betty T. Yee, Indian American Community Federation founder Jeevan Zutshi, California state Treasurer John Chiang, Fremont Mayor Bill Harrison, Dinuba Councilmember K. Thusu, and Fremont Councilmember Lili Mei. (In Focus Photography and Graphics)

Milpitas, Calif. – Immigration must be a top priority to ensure the continued growth of the U.S. economy, said Russell Hancock, president and CEO of Joint Venture Silicon Valley, on the sidelines of the 14<sup>th</sup> annual Unity Dinner, held Mar. 20 at the India Community Center.

“We’re fooling ourselves by thinking we can build fences to protect our national interests,” Hancock – the keynote speaker at the evening event founded by Indian American Jeevan Zutshi – told **India-West**. He advocated for an expansion of the H-1B skilled temporary worker program, but declined to comment on a new initiative which would allot work authorization to the spouses of H-1B workers.

H-4 visa holders – spouses of H-1B workers who are often as skilled as their partners – were previously denied work authorization. But U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services unveiled a new initiative Feb. 24 that would allow some H-4 visa holders to work. Indian spouses make up the

majority of H-4 residents: 180,000 people will be eligible in the first year, and 55,000 will become eligible in successive years.

The annual Unity Dinner, organized by the Indo American Community Federation, brought together local, state and national elected leaders and Indian American community and business leaders. Rep. Mike Honda, D-Calif., California state Treasurer John Chiang; State Controller Betty Yee; and California state Assembly members Bill Quirk, Kansen Chu and Evan Low were among the many politicians who attended the event.

Fremont Mayor Bill Harrison, Cupertino Mayor Rod Sinks and Milpitas Mayor Jose Esteves also attended the dinner, along with council members from several local cities.

In his keynote address, Hancock acknowledged the vast contributions of immigrant workers – particularly Indian Americans – to the growth of the San Francisco Bay Area’s Silicon Valley. “Any technology company here is like the United Nations. You’ve got people from all over the world feverishly working to attain a common goal.”

“The Silicon Valley is not an American phenomenon. It was built by people from everywhere, working on a path to success,” said Hancock, the inaugural director of Stanford University’s Shorenstein Forum for Asia-Pacific Studies.

“Most countries have a race, religion or tribe that binds them together. What is unique about the U.S. is the lack of tribe that binds us. This country was based on the glue of nationhood, liberty, justice and opportunity,” said Hancock, noting that in 1776, when America’s leaders were founding a democracy – including an elected president and Congress – most countries were still ruled by monarchies. “Two hundred and fifty years later, only the American institutions remain,” he said.

Venkatesan Ashok, India’s new consul general in San Francisco, also spoke about the impact of the co-mingling of cultures in his keynote address. “India is the best example of diversity compared to anywhere in the world,” he said, noting the numerous cultural communities, languages and religions that make up the world’s largest democracy.

“From that community, you have come to this community, another shining example of diversity,” said Ashok, who took office in November 2014 when former consul general N. Parthasarathi retired from public service and returned home to Bangalore.

Ashok spoke about a new directive issued by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in which all Indian consulates and embassies throughout the world will celebrate the first International Yoga Day. The United Nations declared the date after Modi's address to the General Assembly, urging nations to adopt the practice with the aim of fostering world peace.

In San Francisco, the Indian Consulate has issued an open invitation to people "from the length and breadth of California," to participate in a day-long celebration of yoga at the Palace of Fine Arts. Per capita, non-Indians do more yoga daily than Indians, noted the affable diplomat, adding: "We will be teaching ourselves the value of something that many people here already know."

Ashok also addressed the troublesome visa process, noting that the consulate is holding "visa camps" throughout the Bay Area, in Fresno, Calif., and Seattle, Wash., to help people through the often tortuous process of applying for an Indian visa.

Former Cupertino, Calif., Mayor Gilbert Wong – who now serves on the city council – told **India-West** that the Silicon Valley township recently established a sister-city relationship with Bhubaneswar and hopes to promote cultural and educational partnerships. Cupertino currently has sister-city relationships with Hsinchu, Taiwan; Toyokawa, Japan; and Copertino, Italy. Initially, both cities will send six students over to experience the culture of each country.

Jeevan Zutshi, founder of the IACF, told **India-West** that the event had raised more than \$5,000 to support the Amit Zutshi Foundation. The foundation was created in 2008, he said, after Zutshi's son abruptly died that March from the use of over-the-counter health supplements. Jeevan Zutshi has written a book about the tragedy – "The Last Smile" – which has been made into a feature-length film.

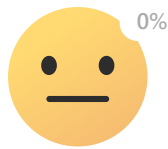
In the non-documentary film directed by Shankey Srinivasan, Keith Stevenson plays Kapil, a father searching for clues as to what killed his son. Danny Arroyo plays a detective who helps Kapil navigate the complex process of how drug manufacturers market their goods to a primarily-younger demographic concerned with body image.

"The Last Smile" is scheduled to be released this May, said Zutshi.

### What is your reaction?



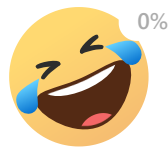
Happy



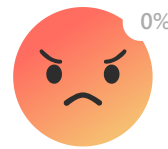
Unmoved



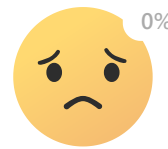
Amused



Excited



Angry



Sad

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