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FEATURED

## Community Members from All Backgrounds Join in Celebrating IACF's 17th Annual Unity Dinner

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Hundreds of guests were on hand at the Milpitas, Calif.-based India Community Center March 23 for the Indo-American Community Federation's 17<sup>th</sup> annual Unity Dinner. Pictured here is Tri-City Health Center chief executive officer Dr. Zettie (second from left) speaking after accepting an award from IACF's Indian American founder Jeevan Zutshi (left). (photos courtesy of IACF)

MILPITAS, Calif. — With tensions throughout the country high, stemming from a number of issues coming out of Washington, D.C., as well as the countless incidents of gun violence, many communities around the nation seem to be looking for solace.

Amidst all the uncertainty, however, one event has proved to be a constant since its inaugural event in 2002: the Unity Dinner hosted by the Indo-American Community Federation.

The 17<sup>th</sup> annual event, themed, “Unity through Diversity: Ethics in Public Life and Public Service to Promote Unity,” was attended by hundreds of guests, including high-profile executives and public officials, March 23 at the India Community Center here.

The annual event, created by IACF to improve community involvement, education, health and understanding of different cultures, was created in 2002 in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks to promote harmony and unity in diversity.

IACF was founded as a nonprofit by Indian American community activist Jeevan Zutshi in 1994 to build bridges with mainstream organizations, diverse leaders, think tanks and public officials.

“So much has changed in the last 17 years,” Zutshi said in his address to the event goers. “Hate crime is on the rise and the recent gun violence has sent shockwaves of fear throughout the entire community,” he said.

“What makes the sadness (grow) so much more in our hearts is the recognition that despite public uproar, nothing is being done to eradicate this,” the founder added. “We cannot allow senseless violence and hate crime to continue. We will need to play a bigger role in maintaining a vigil for peace and nonviolence in our schools, neighborhoods and communities.”

Among those attending the event included California state Assemblyman Ash Kalra, Saratoga Councilman Rishi Kumar, Fremont councilman Raj Salwan, San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo, California state Controller Betty Yee, state Sen. Bob Wieckowski and former U.S. Rep. Mike Honda.

Honda, the longtime representative of California's 17<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, was honored at the event with the Lifetime Achievement Award for his continued work in the community.

"In the 17 years since the first Unity Dinner I have been at, one thing has been consistent, and that's been Jeevan's dedication to the concept of unity," Honda told the gathering. "And today, I think that the principle of unity is something we're going to have to look upon to move our country forward and get through the challenges of today so that our children will be able to enjoy a country that we have dreamt about."

Yee served as the keynote speaker at the event and opened her comments by saying how she and all Californians are blessed to be "waking up in the great state of California, where we view diversity as a strength and not a threat."

About 25 percent of the state's population is foreign born, Yee said, adding that there are more than 10 million Californians who were born in foreign countries and that many have become naturalized citizens.

"I mention these numbers because there is no distinction in terms of legal status because we know, particularly right here in the heart of Silicon Valley, the contributions the immigrants make to our economy," Yee noted, crediting the people within the state for opening doors to those who come from outside the country. "And it's no accident we happen to be the proud bearer of the distinction of being the sixth largest economy in the world."

Yee noted that the strength of California is its embracing of diversity, and the economy would not be what it is without the attributes provided by those foreign-born individuals.

In addition to the speeches and dinner, the Unity Dinner also featured a variety of cultural dancers and singers.

The IACF also used the platform of the Unity Dinner to dole out several awards. In addition to Honda being bestowed the lifetime achievement award, the Fremont, Calif.-based Tri-City Voice was named Media of the Year; Dutra Enterprises was named Entrepreneur of the Year; Niles Rotary was named the 2018 Nonprofit Organization of the Year winner; the Asian Pacific Islander

American Public Affairs was named the Trailblazer Organization of 2017; Fremont, Calif.-based Tri-City Health Center was awarded for Outstanding Community Service; and Comcast's Ken Maxey was recognized for Outstanding Effort to Promote Unity in Diversity.

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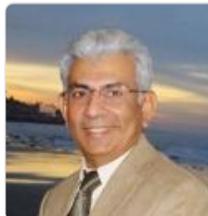


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