

## A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY FIRST 20 YEARS

Ever since my son left home to embark on his new career as a computer engineer I could not help but think that it was just yesterday when he was a baby and the Indians living in greater Augusta gathered at the Aiken Tech auditorium to celebrate Diwali. Attending the event as someone relatively new in town, I heard Dr. Bal K. Jerath speak about a temple in Augusta. I came from a world with temples already in it and assumed that someone else had built them for us; before I thought about it any further, we were attending a Puja in Dr. & Mrs. Shyamsundar Rao's home.

That was the modest beginning of our Augusta Hindu Temple – a membership of about 20 families and a dream to have our own place of worship. In those days there were no little Indias and no place of identity for Hindus. Today we are celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our temple that represents the diversity of India giving all of us a chance to take pride in our culture and community.

### TIMELINE

- 1979 – 1980 The Hindu Temple Society was formed. **Bal K. Jerath** was elected the first president of the board of directors. A decision was made to conduct Puja on every third Sunday in the homes of the devotees while looking for ways to collect money and acquire land and a building for the temple.
- 1980 – 1981 Under the leadership of **Shyamsundar Rao**, the second president, continued to raise funds. Ramchandra Reddy wrote the first Temple Constitution and registered the Hindu Temple as a nonprofit corporation with the Secretary of State and the IRS. An old building located by Kailash B Sharma on Lukes Road was purchased.
- 1981 – 1983 **Jaydev Varma** served as the third president of the board for two years. Diwali of 1981 was celebrated in our very own temple, which now serves as Pujari quarters. Lunch groups were formed, an annual essay-writing competition was initiated and the children of our community taught us the Puja Vidhan with the help of Sri Raja Rajeshwari Peetham of Poconos, Pennsylvania.

- 1983 – 1984 **J. K. Patel** was the fourth president of the board of directors when fundraising took on a new meaning. Funds were collected from nearby town for outer hall renovation and installation of murtis. Navratri Gara was celebrated in the temple. The first Indian classical instrumental music concert by Master Srinivas on the mandolin was conducted at the temple on September 30, 1984, setting tone for future cultural activities.
- 1984 – 1985 **T. Ramchandra Reddy** was the fifth president when the renovation of the temple hall and Murti Pratishta was accomplished. A new constitution was drafted by a committee headed by Vinod K. Bhalla, assisted by Raghunath Rao with the concept of the Executive Committee and the Board of Trustees. Balshala was headed by energetic Sheila Kamath.
- 1985 – 1986 **Kailash B Sharma** served as our sixth president when new Murtis were installed making room for two additional deities, Sri Venkateshwara and Sri Mahavir. A resident priest arrived through Sant Narayan Murniji. Jaydev Varma was appointed the chairman of the board of trustees.
- 1986 – 1987 **Raj Patel** became the seventh president when the community outgrew the existing temple. The idea of a larger temple was considered, and planning and fundraising for a new temple began, The resident priest departed after serving one year.
- 1987 – 1988 **Pravin Amin** was our eighth president when vigorous efforts to raise money for the new temple continued while the new membership continued to swell.
- 1988 – 1989 **Satya Tikare** was our dedicated ninth president when Sri Venkateshwara Murti Pratishta was accomplished. Temple bylaws were amended in the general body meeting to accommodate new committees. An annual blood drive was initiated by Kiran Shah.
- 1989 – 1990 **Dharm B. Sinha**, our tenth president, and his family are credited with starting Akhand Ramayan which remains Akhand to this day. The Holi celebrations that were started during his tenure continue to attract a crowd.
- 1990 – 1991 **Adarsh Gulati** was our youngest president when we celebrated Lord Mahavir Swami Pratishta on a grand scale with Sushil Muniji presiding. The entire Jain community was mobilized, making it a truly unforgettable event.
- 1991 – 1992 President **P. K. Natarajan** promoted several cultural and religious activities which strengthened the bond between the community and the temple.

- 1992 – 1993 President **Girdhar Vandra**, with his philosophical outlook, was instrumental in arranging several Satsangs, the senior citizens were more actively involved in the temple. Balasubramaniam, a resident priest, was hired to perform daily pujas.
- 1993 – 1994 **Ranjit Bandyopadhyay** strengthened organizational structure, implemented proper accounting methods and published quarterly statements. He also strove to unify the community by organizing several community activities. A comprehensive Hindu Temple telephone directory was published.
- 1994 – 1995 **Hari Subramanian**, with the help of Kamlesh Patel serving as the Chairman, was responsible for the Hindu Temple becoming an active participant in the Arts in the Heart festival. Sri Venkateshwara Abishekam and Sri Padmavati Kalyanam, a tradition established by the Sridharan family continue to be an eagerly awaited event.
- 1995 – 1996 President **Vinayak Karnath** and Chairman Adarsh Gulati moved at lightning speed with the entire community behind them to schedule the Bhoomi Puja in February 1996 and BUILD A NEW TEMPLE BY DIVALI 1996.
- 1996 – 1997 **Ramesh C. Khosla** was well known in the community when he became the first president of the new temple. Fundraising efforts continued and the temple was debt free by the end of his term.
- 1997 – 1998 **Ravi Murugappan** served as the president when the temple continued to function and flourish. The first Shanti Havan was performed for the community's benefit.
- 1998 – 1999 President **Surendra Gupta** and Chariman of the Board Satya K. Tikare complimented one another and started several new initiatives, such as guidelines for the proper use of the temple, completed landscaping, and the completion of the much-awaited Havanshala.

The Hindu Temple of Augusta became the central place for religious, cultural, philosophical, educational, social and community events. Regular religious events such as daily Arit, a weekly Venkateshwara Suprabhatam, and Gita study take place at the temple. Third Sunday Puja, Venkateshwara Abhishekam and Havan are monthly events; annual events include Diwali, Akhand Ramayan and Sir Padmavati Kalyanam

Renowned performing artists such as Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam and Troupe and Smt. Kamala have given spellbinding performances. Leading classical instrumental music performers like Ustad Amjad Ali Khan on Sarod, Ustad Shahed Pervez on Sitar, Padit Shivkumar Sharma on Santoor have been a rare treat. Leading vocalists like Pankaj Udhas, Ajay Chalaoborty, Maharajapuram Santanam, Vani Jayaram, Lakshmi Shankar, Purshotam Jalota, Anup Jalota and P. Susheela have mesmerized us with their artistic talents.

Great philosophers like Chinmayananda, Shantananda, Viditatmananda, Jyothirmayananda, and Yogeshananda have graced our temple, igniting a spark in our spiritual lives.

Local artists Prem Sharma, Vasu Patel, Bhanu Amin, P. K. Natarajan, and Shyam Iyer have touched our lives with their singing talent. Balshala is an unparalleled educational exercise of young Hindu minds. The yearly Raas Garba continues to unify the community. Sudha Sinha, Santosh Chand, and others continue to make invaluable contributions by coordinating lunch groups.

Several cultural awareness programs were developed during the last decade as the Indian community in Augusta became part of local American landscape: cultural programs in coordination with Augusta State, sponsoring World Day celebrations, and active participation by Hindu Temple in the Arts in the Heart of Augusta festival where India was the host country two years ago played a vital role in making our presence known in the community.

Yesterday's children are today's adults, and it is delightful to see them graduate, get married, honored, and be recognized in the Temple. I am very fortunate to bear witness to twenty years of history.

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