

SPECIAL CELEBRATION

Indian Organization Presents Second UTSAV

By Ann Mead Ash

The Indian Organization of Lancaster County held its second UTSAV - an Indian Arts Festival - at the Ware Center on Prince Street in Lancaster on April 11. According to organization president Deepa Balepur, last year's event sold out just before it was held, but this year's event was sold out by January 2015.

"Last year was unbelievable," said Balepur, who explained that UTSAV is derived from the Sanskrit word "Utsava," which means festival, celebration, or joyous occasion. Referring to the event program, Balepur noted, "This includes our mission and vision and why we want to share our culture with the rest of the community



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Guests at UTSAV, a celebration held by the Indian Organization of Lancaster County at the Ware Center on April 11, enjoyed exhibits from local artists, a fashion show, dance demonstrations, highlights of Indian history, a photo booth, and more.

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and how we like to integrate with the rest of the community." The organization's mission reads, "To facilitate and promote the richness and diversity of Indian culture and heritage in Lancaster County while integrating into the fabric of the local community." The Indian Organization of Lancaster County strives to encourage community participation and promote Indian culture and philanthropy to all Lancaster residents.

With that goal in mind, the UTSAV event included exhibits from local artists, a fashion show, dance demonstrations, highlights of Indian history, vocal performances, and an auction featuring a variety of items and experiences.

The event kicked off at 4 p.m. with appetizers including paneer chatpata, which is a homemade cheese stir fried with onion, tomatoes and green pepper, and mixed pakoras or vegetable fritters, served along with chilli pakoras, which are stuffed jalapenos dipped in batter and deep fried. Chutneys included tamarind date, mint and coriander, and spicy onion relish.

During the festival, guests arrayed in brightly colored native dress took in artwork created by local community members. Photographs included works by Bob Banerjee, scenic views of Lancaster County by Vilas Malankar, and a series of pictures of everyday life in Kolkata, capital of the Indian state of West Bengal, by

Pablo Jenik. Paintings by Daksha Tanna included "Worship at the Hindu Temple" and "Sindoor," based on a Hindu wedding tradition. Clay sculptures of famous Indian monuments, such as the Gateway of India and the Taj Mahal, by Saryu Patel were also on display.

The event also provided historical perspective on India, including information on the country's struggle for independence after being ruled by a number of other nations. The country is now the world's largest democracy and has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The presentation was created by Shyam Balepur with direction by Nash Bhatt and narration by Santosh and Sukeshi Iyer.

Native dance demonstrations included the classical Thillana, an abstract dance described as joyful and rhythmic. Another dance, based on a song from the movie "Thakshak," included sculpture poses and a mix of semi classical and fusion steps. Dances to the song "Sawan Mein" and "Rangeela Maro Dholana," a Rajasthan folk dance, were also performed. Bal Krishna dance, which celebrated the childhood pastime of Lord Sri Krishna, and "Yaadein," based on the Bollywood music of the 1970s and 1980s, were also performed by dancers. A fashion show, including clothing for shagun, meaning auspicious occasions such as weddings, was also held.



Local comedian Rubi Nicholas hosted a live auction featuring a number of donated items, including gift certificates for ethnic cuisine, a yoga workshop, and Indian apparel. Artwork, experiences such as an afternoon on the Chesapeake, and a Bollywood dance workshop were also sold.

Guests enjoyed Indian tunes spun by DJ Nash and tried on costumes, including Viking helmets complete with horns, at a photo booth.

Readers who would like to learn more about the Indian Organization of Lancaster County may visit www.iolcpa.org.