"My Friend Is Gone"

A year of action and implementation

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Imagine University of South Florida (USF) President Judy Genshaft and Medical School Dean Steve Klasko clutching the bar of an auto-rickshaw, as the driver swings and swirls on the crowded roads of New Delhi! Now, picture their foreheads colored deep red from multiple tilaks and their necks lowered with the weight of fresh flower garlands. These images are two of many from the memory book of the USF delegation that spent 12 days in India exploring educational opportunities between USF and India. This also was the latest brick to be added to the bridge to India that USF has been building for many years.

This year, USF is celebrating 50 years of excellence by paying tribute to the extraordinary achievements of its students and alumni, faculty and staff, and community partners across Florida and throughout the world. Fifty years ago, when the University of South Florida opened its doors, it served 2,000 students in three buildings. Fifty years later, USF is educating a student body of more than 43,000 in 300 buildings on four campuses. A recent study of economic impact showed that today USF gives back $3.2 billion in direct and indirect spending. From its origins as a small liberal arts school on the outskirts of Tampa, USF has developed into one of the nation’s fastest growing research universities. As we celebrate 50 years of USF’s success, let’s also celebrate the achievements and accomplishments of Indians and Indian-Americans at USF.

As the institution of higher learn-

ing, students are our treasure and USF has more students from India than from any other country! It is no surprise that Indian student organizations are some of the most active clubs on campus. Two weeks ago, I made an unscheduled stop at the Hindu Student Council’s get-together where I found myself with students from all walks of life learning about Hinduism over a plate of spicy bhelpuri that made me feel like I was in Chowpatty.

India are also some of the role models in the university.

Take Amlan Banerjee. He is from Calcutta, West Bengal, and pursuing a Ph.D. in the Graduate Transportation Program of the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department. Within the past three years, he has published more than 10 research papers and was awarded the Georgia Brosch Transportation Scholarship for outstanding contributions as a graduate student in the transportation engineering program. Recently, he was selected for the prestigious 2006 International Road Federation (IRF) Executive Leadership Fellowship Grant.

Another one of our shining stars is Bina Nayak from Mumbai, Maharashtra, who is pursuing a Ph.D. in Biology. She is working on an interdisciplinary project with the departments of Biology and Civil and Environmental Engineering. The project involves teasing out the chemical and microbiological characteristics of leachate from laboratory-scale lysimeters and actual landfills. She has received both the President’s Award for Outstanding Oral Presentation and the Henry Aldrich Student Research Grant from the American Society for Microbiology.

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3. Rs 500 Crores allocation by Government of India for Trauma Centers

Thanks to AAPI leaders like Dr. Navin Shah and others the Government of India has allocated over Rs 500 Crores for the establishment of Trauma centers along the newly constructed National Highways. We have been working closely with the Governments of the States of Gujarat and Maharashtra and have submitted a detailed proposal for the establishment of not only trauma centers but a fully operational EMS plan with all its components along National Highway 8 and 40, following the guidelines of the Central Government. We are expecting allocation of the funds within the next few months.

4. EMS ACT in the States of Maharashtra and Gujarat

After two years of discussion and debate, an EMS Act modeled in what exists in the State of California, will be presented in the State assemblies of Gujarat and Maharashtra. It is expected that this Act will be passed at the upcoming monsoon session. This Act, in each of the respective States, will ensure that a Standardized Emergency Medical System is in place with adequate funding with public and private partnership.

It is hoped that the utilization of the enormous funds that are available in the private sector in India, like Satyam Computers, Hinduja and others will help reduce the unnecessary deaths and disability by the establishment of an organized EMS with all its components similar to that which exists in the U.S.

Indian Americans are well represented in leadership positions at USF. In addition to my being the Provost and Vice President, USF can boast of an Indian American, Dr. Akshay Desai, as a Board of Governors member. USF's largest gift has come from an Indian American couple, Drs. Kiran and Pallavi Patel, to establish the Dr. Kiran C. Patel Center for Global Solutions. As a member of the USF Board of Trustees, Dr. Patel has given USF a chance to put itself on the world map. Five heads of departments in Engineering and Physics are currently from Indian heritage, as is Dr. Anila Jain, the former president of our 200,000 member strong Alumni Association. Indian faculty members are outstanding scholars, winning national and international recognition. Dr. Vijay Jain holds the coveted title of the Distinguished University Professor and Dr. Uday Murthy in the College of Business occupies one of the most prestigious endowed chairs.

USF's programmatic connections to India are equally strong. India-Chart works with Indian professionals in the training of HIV-AIDS. Drs. John Sinnott, Michael Knox and Ann DeBaldo consider India their second home and can differentiate between naan from tandoori roti. USF is the primary educational consulting entity, as India establishes its first college of public health. USF students have an opportunity to spend part of their semester in India through the Study Abroad program under the supervision of Dr. Gurleen Grewal. Perhaps the most cherished connection is the three-credit course in music to be offered by Indian music icon Pundit Jasraj in the fall of 2006.

The promise of the USF-India partnership is yet to be realized. I strongly believe that we have only taken baby steps toward building the ultimate synergy that could benefit both Indians and Americans. On behalf of President Judy Genshaft and the entire University of South Florida, I would like to thank the Indian community for embracing USF and for believing in us.