

Sewa-Day 2017

International Day of Volunteering celebrated across USA

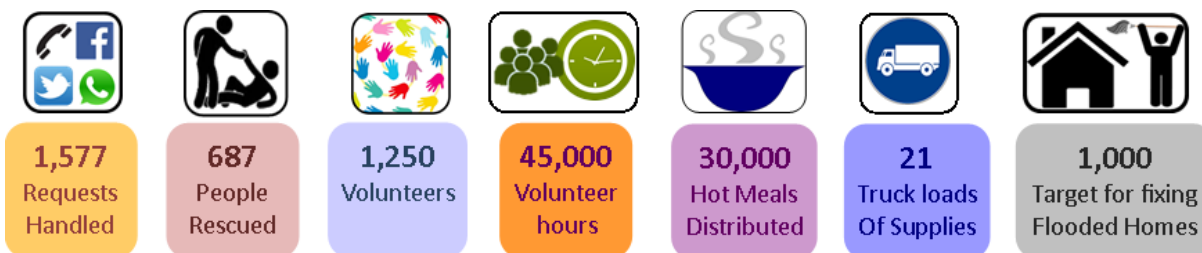
Houston OCTOBER 12, 2017

Sewa-Day, a day of pure voluntary selfless service, was conducted by the Indian-American community for the 7th successive year with **thirty two** community service projects in **twenty seven** cities across the US in addition to serving the communities hit by the Harvey in Houston, IRMA in Atlanta and Florida. While **one thousand two hundred and fifty** volunteers served in Houston alone to help the people hit by the hurricane, **five hundred and thirty nine** volunteers from *Sewa International* and partner organizations across different age-groups and backgrounds including youth and children came together between **September 09 and October 08** and worked **two thousand five hundred and fifty one** hours on a variety of activities to make a difference in their local communities.

Sewa-Day is supported worldwide by three guiding principles: 1. Serve the humanity to relieve hardship, 2. Bring a little joy to others, and 3. Help to sustain the environment.

This year, Sewa volunteers faced a major challenge during the aftermath of the Hurricane Harvey, IRMA, and Maria. Number of Sewa-Days were conducted in Houston, Atlanta, and Florida carrying out efforts to rescue the victims and provide relief to the general public.

The following figure provides the number of activities carried out in Houston by the volunteers during the four weeks of Sewa-Days this year.



Apart from the hurricane relief efforts, Sewa volunteers partnered with like-minded organizations that resulted in steady increase in the number of nationwide events and diversity of projects. From feeding the homeless, cleaning places of worship, tree planting, Highway litter removal, course marshaling, and helping other organizations in their activities, this year Sewa-Day was a huge success.

The first Sewa-Day of this year in the country was conducted on the 9th of September with volunteers from the Bay Area chapter cleaning the premises of the temple for the Srinivasa Kalyanam organized by the Hindu Community and Cultural Center, Livermore temple at Dougherty Valley High School. Sewa volunteers served food for more than eight hundred people and cleaned the school facilities. On the 10th, the Sewa volunteers at Cleveland Cleaned up the Weiss field in Avon Lake, and the DC volunteers served about one hundred meals to the needy at the Reston homeless shelter.

On 16th September, a team of fifteen volunteers from Sewa Atlanta chapter worked on packing and delivering one hundred meals as part of the MSG food drive. Similarly, seven volunteers

from Boston chapter cooked at a local Soup and kitchen to feed the hungry. Eleven volunteers from Washington DC chapter partnered with Optimists International to clean a one mile stretch in Clifton. Four volunteers from Los Angeles helped in organizing a cultural event that solicited funds for the Harvey relief. On 17th, eight volunteers of DC chapter rendered their services course marshalling a 5K run conducted by a non-profit organization called Asha-Jyothi. The following figure provides the Sewa chapter locations where one more Sewa-Days were conducted.



On 24th, seventeen volunteers from Sewa Atlanta have participated in cleaning up one mile of the highway in the Forsyth county. Chicago volunteers kick started their Sewa-Day on 29th September with thirty five volunteers participating in packing ten thousand pounds of nonperishable food at the Feed My Starving children (FMSC) location. On 30th September, Six Bay Area Sewa volunteers took part in Livermore Temple's Go Green project where the paper plates were replaced with stainless steel plates for serving food. Sewa volunteers steered the devotees to put the leftovers in a bin for compost and place the plates in a rack. Volunteers also moved the rack to the dishwasher area and brought the cleaned plates back to the serving stand. Sewa volunteers not only assisted more than six thousand plus devotees but also assisted in the temple kitchen. Impact of this service from Sewa to the ten thousand plus people throughout the day was well recognized and highly appreciated by the temple management and the temple devotees. Bay Area Youth team from 'LEAD' were very involved and supported the volunteering efforts through the day. The Sewa Boston volunteers cooked at a soup kitchen supporting their Boston's Feed the Hungry program serving over one hundred meals. Preserving culture and supporting organizations that promote native and classical cultures is an important service that the DC volunteers took part in. Fifteen volunteers rented a truck and helped Kalamandapam dance school to move and organize number of props and costumes. The New Jersey chapter volunteers enthusiastically collected about one hundred meals and delivered to the Morristown soup kitchen. Twenty five volunteers from Sacramento conducted a temple cleanup for Dussera festival throughout the day. On 1st October, Sewa DC volunteers helped Hindu Temple of Virginia at Sterling by managing and organizing various activities for their Shilanyas program.

The following figure provides the number of activities carried out in the rest of USA by the volunteers during the four weeks of Sewa-Days this year serving their local communities.



On 6th October, Sewa volunteers from Bay area helped with sorting and hanging up clothing, packing grocery bags with canned and dry goods, sorting & packing baby diapers, and bagging fruit while others helped distribute food to the needy waiting in line. Along with other volunteering groups, the total effort that morning helped to pack 250 grocery bags, 400 bags of fruit, 300 packs of baby diapers; the volunteers also sorted and displayed over 200 items of clothing for all ages and distributed groceries to more than 200 families by noon.

A total of six Sewa-Days were conducted on 7th October from volunteers belonging to Chicago, Bay Area, DC, NJ, Phoenix, and San Diego. Along with volunteers from Canopy.org, seven Sewa volunteers from Bay Area helped in planting forty trees at Jack Farrell Park and throughout this residential East Palo Alto and University Village neighborhood. In Chicago, at the Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) location, the Sewa volunteers hand-packed meals specially formulated for malnourished children that would be sent to partners around the world where they operate orphanages, schools, clinics and feeding programs to break the cycle of poverty. Twelve NJ chapter volunteers conducted litter removal on Rt 46 state road stretching two miles. In Peoria, AZ, thirty five volunteers packed One thousand six hundred and thirty emergency food boxes with non-perishable items, sorted the food, and repacked bulk produce.

On 8th October, World Hindu Day was celebrated in DC area with many other organizations participating with notable speakers addressing the gathering. The Sewa volunteers from DC worked on planning and serving lunch to about 300 participants. Ten Pennsylvania-Delaware chapter volunteers helped the Gopala Goshala cleaning the barn, cow vehicle and provided help with the logistics in the maintenance of the Goshala. There has to be a unique mention of the Columbus chapter who worked tirelessly for all the five weekends of the Sewa Day serving at the Bharatiya Hindu Temple in Powell that included cleanup, cooking and serving meals, management, and organizing events.

Due to weather inclination, and other logistic issues, few Sewa-Day events were rescheduled to later this month. The volunteers have planned to clean one more mile of parkway in Fairfax, plant 200 tree saplings in Chantilly, VA, Manage and organize a fundraiser for ACCEPT organization that helps the special needs kids in Rancho Cordova, and pack 10,000 more pounds of nonperishable food at FMSC, Chicago. The Phoenix chapter volunteers shall be conducting number of activities at the Bharatiya Ekta Mandir cleaning up with 25 volunteers to get the place ready for Diwali function that includes power washing the entire premises and shrines, and mopping the entire dining area and kitchen.

A **photo album** of Sewa-Day 2017 activities in the USA is available here:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/0AQLHw9cdMU3cY5S2>

About Sewa-Day

Sewa-Day is an initiative of Sewa International. “Sewa” a Sanskrit word meaning “service above self” is embedded in the Dharmic traditions of ancient India. On Sewa-Day, thousands of volunteers from the USA, UK, Canada and around the world come together to perform Sewa and experience the joy of giving in its truest sense. By participating in this collective endeavor, we hope that the seeds of Sewa are watered so that acts of kindness and public service are performed more often.

About Sewa International

Sewa International (www.sewausa.org) is a 501 (c)(3) Hindu faith-based charitable nonprofit service organization that works in the areas of disaster relief and rehabilitation, education and development (healthcare, women's empowerment, child welfare, rural and tribal welfare, and refugee support). Sewa has 40 Chapters across the USA and serves regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability or national origin. The Sewa movement works with communities in need, and is active in 20 countries including USA, Canada, India, and the UK.

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