

East Indian Charity Dinner an April Tradition

by Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

It's been twenty-five years since the Kumar family arrived in Saint John from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England.



Dr. Eshwar Kumar and his wife Vittu, were welcomed by Dr. Doug Smith and his wife Molly, key factors in his recruitment as a radiation oncologist at the Saint John Regional Hospital.

Says Vittu of Saint John "it was the right fit". They raised their three sons in Greater Saint John, quickly becoming involved in the community. Dr. Kumar has recently stepped down as Department Head, is past President of the Canadian Cancer Society and is now Co-CEO of the New Brunswick Cancer Network.

Vittu volunteered for many school-based projects. Knowing Dr. Kumar's "passion" for the cancer cause and as the children grew, their commitment to research, treatment and support for cancer patients became a family affair. She conceived of a dinner to benefit the work of the Canadian Cancer Society, based on their East Indian heritage. Nine years later, it has become a Saint John culinary experience which sells out each year with no advertising.

Countless volunteer hours go into the preparation of the East Indian Charity Dinner. The ninth annual repast and fundraiser will be offered to an appreciative group of more than 300 on April 17 at Rothersey Netherwood School. Pictured preparing for the event are Rose Ringeri, Maria Boutilier, Christine Sancton, Vittu Kumar, who has been leading the group since inception, Lisa Krause, June Anderson, Yeonsuk Cho, and Elizabeth Sutherland.

Photo by Peter Walsh/Telegraph Journal

It has grown from the first event which raised a respectable \$6,000 to a cumulative total of over \$317,000 to date. All proceeds assist the Canadian Cancer Society in its mission to eradicate cancer and to improve the quality of life of those living with cancer. Funds raised will support research, patient services, programs and advocacy for public policy.

The key to the dinner's success is teamwork and the appeal of authentic dishes lovingly prepared with care, under Vittu's watchful eyes. The dishes are created in her kitchen and using more spacious quarters at St. Mark's United Church for the final days of preparation. This year, and in the past few years, over 300 are served with flair. She adds "it's only possible with a strong team of volunteers and a lot of camaraderie" Many return year after year, rekindling friendships. As if that's not enough the thirty-odd member group attend a final thank-you luncheon, hosted by Vittu, to celebrate after the event wraps up.

"Samosa preparation day is our most popular" says Vittu as she explains this year's carefully coordinated menu, which varies from year to year. The April 17, 2010 menu also includes pakoras; a lentil soup; rogan josh, a rich, red curried lamb dish; butter chicken, a favorite; moong dhal, containing whole green lentils; a spicy eggplant dish; rice and peas with cumin; chappati, a griddle-fried flat bread; pachadi, cucumbers and tomatoes in yogurt; pappadam, a crispy rice and lentil wafer and special spicy mixed pickles, followed by mango kulfi, a reduced milk ice cream.

Not only does the East Indian Charity Dinner and Auction showcase fine home cooked East Indian cuisine, it also offers entertainment of traditional East Indian dancing and a high-end silent and live auction. With the skill of Tim Isaac as auctioneer and valuable organizational support from Colleen MacRae and Cathy McIntosh, who was a key part of its success until a recent move, it features items donated by artists and the business community.

The Kumars' message last year says it all: "Your support over the years had been invaluable and has contributed to making this such an enjoyable event. We are privileged to have the support of a fantastic team of volunteers and staff, as well as many donors and sponsors - their efforts have made this event possible. It is a reflection of the very loving and giving community we are so proud to be a part of. Your support helps the Canadian Cancer Society work towards fulfilling its mission to eradicate cancer and improve the quality of life for people living with cancer. We deeply appreciate your presence and thank you for your support."

Committee members continue to serve year after year and include: Reta Parent, Leonard D'Souza, Nancy Fox, Lisa Krause, Colleen MacRae, Teri Sherman and Susan Barry. Cancer Society staff Charlene Hayes and Cindy Floyd have been particularly supportive she adds.

Info:Cindy Floyd, Canadian Cancer Society, 133 Prince William St., (506) 634-6252, 1-800-455-9090/ www.cancer.ca



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Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880. To view other Community Profiles go to:

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