

COMMUNITY NEWS

Om Bhaskaraya Namah

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh concludes successful Suryanamaskar Yagna

Governor Brad Henry pronounced January 28, 2007 as "Yoga Awareness Day" for Oklahoma and Mayor Kathy Taylor did the same for her city, Tulsa.

During the last two weeks, through the country from the San Francisco Bay area to Boston to Houston, mainstream Americans joined with Indian-Americans in learning about and performing the yoga postures of *Surya Namaskar*, or "Sun Salutations."

The physical, mental and spiritual health benefits of doing the Surya Namaskar were directly experienced by individuals from four to 70 years old at more than 100 centers throughout the United States from January 14 through 28. Local print media and local affiliates of ABC and NBC covered this innovative national project.

Each year Hindus worldwide celebrate January 14th as Makar Samkranti, a change of season and the day the sun enters the sign of Capricorn, or Makar.

Makar Sankranti brings in longer days, thus the festivity symbolizes sunshine in life.

To mark this occasion this year, from January 13th to the end of Makar Samkranti celebration on January 28th, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh-USA (HSS), a non-profit organization, organized the Surya Namaskar *yagna*.

It brought together individuals and families, both Indian-American and others, many of whom had not regularly practiced yoga, at their weekly events all across the United States during the weekends. A number of the participants



OM ADITYAYA NAMAHA.... At Keshan Smruti in Houston, 117 participants performed a 10-hour Surya Namaskar Marathon and completed 7,327 Surya Namaskars. Photo: Krishna Giri

also practiced at home during weekdays.

This was an innovative campaign to raise health awareness using the ten-step yoga postures known as *Surya Namaskar Yagna*, or Sun Salutations offerings. Surya Namaskar is practiced in more than 40 slightly different formats all over the world.

These are sets of well-balanced movements that stretch all the muscles in the body combined with constant breathing pattern and keep the body and mind healthy.

With more than 3900 participants, Surya Namaskar Yagna achieved close to 425000 Surya Namaskars.

In New York, 73 participants performed Surya Namaskar Marathon and completed more than 5500 Surya Namaskars in a 24-hour period. In Houston, 117 participants performed a 10-hour Surya Namaskar Marathon and completed 7,327 Surya Namaskars.

One of the participants, eleven-year-old Ayush Sharma, said, "I never imagined I could do 234 Surya Namaskars in less than four hours."

In New Jersey, 80 volunteers performed 6,100 Surya Namaskars in a competition in 45 minutes.

In Texas a family of four started

performing 52 Surya Namaskars each with a goal to perform 3200 during the *yagna*.

In an Indianapolis temple more than 200 attended a Surya Namaskar presentation and later participated actively in the *yagna*.

In Georgia and in Florida, 300 individuals, in Massachusetts over 500, and in California over 700 persons have started practicing Surya Namaskars daily

Participants in the *yagna* have expressed their experiences and plans for continuing the practice. Some like Dr Lata Stead of Rochester, Minnesota, were interviewed on local TV.

She stated, "Once we started, my kids and I were hooked. Before I started this I really didn't think ten minutes of yoga was going to do anything because I already exercised a lot, but I've been very surprised by the results. Also, one of the things it teaches is patience and that's a good thing with four kids!"

Nishank Trivedi says "everyone is so busy. We kind of neglect our physical health, so with Surya Namaskar, or sun salutations, all you have to do is take out ten minutes and do these postures and it gives you a full body exercise"

"Prior to Surya Namaskar See Page 7



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