

West Coast Newslines

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The Santa Clara Convention Center garba was a packed affair. Sam Rao

Dandia beats in California

■ **SANTA CLARA, CALIF.:** Nearly 3,000 people danced to dandia beats at the largest Navratri Dandia Raas in the San Francisco Bay Area last week. Organized by non profit organization Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF) at the Santa Clara Convention Center here, the event was a jam packed affair.

Though dressed in traditional dresses, the revelers had a distinct 'cosmopolitan' look in every sense of the word. With South Indian accents mingling with distinct American accents of many second generation Indian Americans and their many non-Indian friends as well. Pulsating music from Madhavi and Asim Mehta group gave ample opportunity for everyone to show off their dance skills, many who picked up a move or two from Basmati Raas, an Indian-American youth dance group from Stanford University.

The Hindu temple in Irvin also organized an inaugural Ras Garba last weekend, where participants danced to the songs of Vipul Patel. Community members Nita Desai, Surabhi Lohia, Sandhya Khandelwal and Pushpa Rawal helped coordinate the event. One of the main features of the event was the Kids Garba, said temple president Vishwanath Tiwari, adding that there will be six Ras Garbas in all spread over three weekends. Encouraged by the successful event, Tiwari said the temple would be holding more such public functions in the coming months. —Sam Rao

SF Bay Area local elections get an Indian flavor

SAM RAO

SF Bay Area, Calif.

THE greater San Francisco Bay area, including the Santa Clara County and Alameda County, constitutes the second highest Indian-American population in the US. However, the lawmakers for long here have been predominantly Euro-Americans or Caucasians. Now it seems the scene is changing. This year, almost a dozen Indian Americans are in the fray for upcoming the local office elections on November 7.

Hailing from Fremont, two of the more promising candidates are Anu Natarajan, incumbent and candidate for City Council of Fremont, and Dr Jacob Eapen, incumbent and candidate for Director, Washington Township Health Care District.

During her two year tenure in the city council, Natarajan has earned a place for herself. In fact, Dirk Lorenzo and Rakesh Sharma, the third place and fourth place finishers of the last City Council, signed her nomination papers this time. An architect by profession, Natarajan has served on the city of Fremont Planning Commission from January 2003 to December 2004. She was the event chair for the recently held Fremont 50th celebration, which was attended by about 60,000 people. Natarajan maintains that her top priority is to "build a vibrant downtown in Fremont, define and implement smart growth with an eye on community vision and celebrate Fremont's pride and diversity."

Eapen holds the record for the highest polling South Asian in this part of the country and this candidacy been endorsed by nearly everyone ranging from Assembly member Torrico to labor unions and physicians and health care workers across the board. He is contesting from a special district, which encompasses cities of Fremont, Union city, Newark, South Hayward, and Sunol and is nearly the size of the 20th Assembly district. The Washington Hospital Board has a budget of \$317 million. Eapen, with his wide experience in public health care, intends to create more access, better service and increased preventive care and health education.

With simply no opposition, Balbir Dhillon has it easy for the Trusteeship of the San Jose-Evergreen Community College District Area 2.

Atul Mitra, a civil engineer turned realtor, runs for the membership of the New Haven Unified School District School Board, which controls schools in Union City and South Hayward. As a parent, Mitra was vocal in the Parent Teacher Association meetings and was encouraged by several local politicians, even before they

started embracing the Indian-American community. The New Haven School board consists of a total five members and this year, elections are being held for two seats, with six candidates in the fray. Mitra intends to increase student enrollments and also increase parent involvement in the decision-making process.

Vying for the same seat in the district, is Sarabjit Kaur Cheema. A substitute teacher in the New Haven school district, Cheema is endorsed by the Mayor of Union City and also by one board member of the school district. Another candidate in the fray from the Bay area is Mehul Thakker, a Green Party candidate for California State treasurer's post. Oakland-based investment advisor, Thakkar has made rounds around the state, citing his cause as one which will help open up the debate for better fiscal responsibility and more transparency.

Dr Ram Singh contests for the Directorship of the Santa Clara County Water District, while Mohinder Khanna for the Directorship of the Dublin-San Ramon Services district. Singh is a doctorate in Water resources and taught at San Jose State University while Khanna is a sanitary engineer with 35 years of experience in the field in the Bay area.

Trying his hand at Campbell Union High School District Board is Joe Pandit. On his agenda is improving the reading and writing abilities of students, encouraging more parental involvement and work on making a more efficient budget. With eight candidates in the fray for three seats, Pandit hopes to bring his experience as an engineer for 40 years and his stint as the Chair of Santa Clara Valley Water Board to good use.

East Bay psychiatrist Harmesh Kumar is running for Council member in the City of Concord for the first time. Eight candidates are vying for three seats which feature a couple of incumbents. Mountain View City Council is looking at eight candidates for three seats, one of which Kanwant Sandhu hopes to qualify. Also running is Ashok 'Ash' Bhatt for Alameda County Water district following his defeat for Assembly member of District 20 during last election cycle. While Democrat A.J. Sekhon, a Sikh from the town of Yuba city, is running for the US Congress in District 2, a heavily Republican district and faces Wally Herger, who has been re-elected to the post since 1987.

