

Vibha Atlanta – Dancing for a cause

Atlanta, Ga – Apr 14: Vibha organized its, what is now an annual jamboree of festive dances from India. Vibha Springfest this year featured dandia and bhangra over back-to-back weekends (April 5th and 12th) and drew a crowd in excess of 300. In keeping with its fine legacy of marrying the noble causes of serving underprivileged children with entertaining fund raising events, Vibha put together two nights of performances from some of the best garba and dhol acts in Atlanta. The dandia night featured Sur-Sangam, which was back by popular demand – thanks to their adaptive musical renditions combining popular film songs with the traditions of raas and garba. The Bhangra night featured some fine disc spinning by DJ Aladdin. It also featured an inspiring dhol act by Shawn Singh Tucker and a well-choreographed dance performance led by Kiran Bindra, founder of the Bhangra Elite dance troupe.

Every dollar raised from this event is benefiting projects in India of the likes of the literacy program run by the Verala Development Society in Kolhapur, Maharashtra and the long-term vocational training program for children run by the Gandhian Organization for Rural Development (GORD) in Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh. Vibha had been functioning in the US as CRY, Inc since 1991. The mission, to raise funds here in the US to support child development projects in India and the US, has been a phenomenal success both in the amount of money raised and in inculcating the spirit of volunteerism and creating awareness in the US of the dire need for grass root level support for under-privileged children in India.

Last year, through fund raising events such as Springfest, Vibha funded the Makkal Palli Iyakkam (People's Organization) – a program run by the Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF). The Tamil Nadu Science Forum is a voluntary organization that has been involved in the area of education right from its inception in 1980. As part of their new initiative, TNSF will be engaged in kala jatha (street theatre) in about 300 villages where people are being mobilized on the issue of education. Through the Kala Jatha program a substantial level of awareness would be created which would then pave the way for TNSF to set up local communities and use government schools' after school hours for community learning needs.

Speaking at the Springfest, Shyamoly Roy, this year's event coordinator indicated that Vibha has been driven by sheer volunteering efforts of people drawn from all walks of life. The Atlanta action center alone has more than 30 active volunteers who help in the smooth organizing of fund raising events. Daisy Kaur Bagga, 17, one of Vibha's youngest volunteers who this year had an opportunity to showcase her DJing talent, feels that it has been a very rewarding experience for her to make a difference in the lives of the not so fortunate children back in India.

Vibha enjoys unflinching community support – evident from the generous sponsors who showed their support for this great event and cause. Prime among this year's sponsors were Global Mall, Mirch Masala, Curry in a Hurry, India Sports and Recreation Center and Kruti Dance Academy. The total sponsorship dollars (\$1600) from these businesses and another (\$700) from other businesses raised alone through this event could fund for example Verala Development Society rural literacy program plan's requirement to fund the salary of a teacher or the mid day meals for 250 children of that program for 1 year.

Verala Development Society's splendid efforts in Kolhapur is sparked by grim numbers that paint a sad picture of a modern India - an India that seems to have been too busy cashing in on the technology wave and focused on increasing its foreign exchange reserves. According to a latest official estimate, of the 200 million children of the age group 6 to 14 in India, the number of those not enrolled in schools is 35 million (girls) and 24 million (boys). This figure does not include those children who are on the school rolls, but who remain totally absent from the classrooms throughout their schooling age; and their number is legion. The number of villages not having primary schools within one km. distance is 1,00,000 which works out to 14.3 percent to the total. Twenty five percent of the existing schools do not have drinking water facility. Those not having toilets are 69.5 percent of the total. Those numbers are indeed what motivates volunteers at Vibha to strive harder - be it approaching businesses for sponsorships or taking care of the several nuances of organizing an event.

Vibha's next fundraising event would be the cricket cup organized at the Georgia Tech Student Activity Center on May 3 and 4, 2003. Details of this event are available at <http://atlanta.vibha.org/cricket/>.

If you are interested in volunteering for Vibha in the Atlanta area, check for details on the several opportunities available at <http://atlanta.vibha.org>

Prepared by GiriMohan Coneti, Spokesperson for Vibha Atlanta in the interest of the general public and Vibha supporters and patrons.