

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Service



Zone 1 Centers: Service (*Seva*) Highlights



"Shining His Light on the World" are words etched in the SaiLights Logo—and week after week, that is exactly what Sai devotees are doing, as they engage in service activities. Sai families—adults, young adults, and children alike—are sharing with their fellow human beings the love and light of the Sai spark that resides within them. And they are doing it in the way taught by Swami: remembering that God alone is the Doer; we are but His instruments; and every act of service goes straight to God, for He resides in all.

Hot meals. Hot meals for homeless shelters were the most common type of service activity across centers in the period covered. Familiarly known as "Narayana Seva" (literally meaning service to Lord Narayana or God), such activities have been ongoing for many years—with as much if not more energy and vigor than when first begun, according to one center, a comment no doubt shared by all. The weekly-once (on occasion –twice) activity encompasses buying groceries, cooking, packing, transporting, and serving. Praying for the welfare of all and singing bhajans, prior to and during the seva, is an important part of the routine. Variations of Narayana seva include hot meals for soup kitchens, warm healthy breakfasts, and fresh home-made sandwiches.

New Jersey: Observing Aradhana Day with (Lots..and Lots...of) Love

New Jersey Sai centers (Bridgewater, East Brunswick, Edison, and Sarva Dharma Service Center) joined hands to observe the *Maha Samadhi*, or *Aradhana Mahotsavam* Day, on April 24, 2022.

The main event: a *Narayana Seva* feeding program, calling for **1300 meals** to be cooked in the morning, packed, and distributed to some **14 area shelters**, churches, and relief centers.

A massive undertaking: A total of 100 volunteers lined up at assembly stations set up at the Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple in Monroe, NJ, the central venue for the Seva, and packed, in container after container, four entrée items, bread and butter, a water bottle, a banana, and cutlery and napkins.

The numbers tell the story: 104 large trays of Baked ziti, Mexican vegetarian chili, Mexican rice, and Vegetable salad (26 large trays per each of the four items); 1300 bread rolls and butter packets; 1300 bananas; and 1300 16 oz water bottles.

Success, with Swami at every step. The teams launched the effort with holy sounds of *Suprabhatam*, bhajans, Swami's 108 names, and *Aarti*. Throughout, Swami's presence was felt: in the volunteers' enthusiasm; in the divine vibrations that come from working in unity; in the recipients' joy as they felt the volunteers' love and humility; and in the glitch-free success of the physically demanding operation.

Some reflections from the team: "We need more activities like this!"; "Working in harmony brings us closer to Swami"; "We must see Swami in all"; "We are forever grateful to Swami for bringing us together for a magnificent, joyful, gratifying seva and a wonderful *satsang*."

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Service (Continued)

The hot meals are greatly appreciated by the wide-ranging recipients. Most often, recipients include homeless shelters (or the homeless themselves) and local churches that support those in need. Sai centers also provide food service to places that house refugees or people in transition, i.e., between jobs or between homes (for example, **Atlanta**, **Mesa**, AZ, and **South Bethesda**, MD); homes for troubled or

less fortunate members of society (**Sugarland**, TX, **South Bethesda**); and women centers (**Atlanta**, **South Bethesda**). Some Sai centers also have programs to serve snacks to schools. Some centers undertake additional food service for special occasions, sometimes also teaming up with neighboring centers, as in the case of New Jersey, on Aradhana Day.

Some centers collaborate with other, non-Sai organizations, which may enable them to reach a wider group of beneficiaries. For example:

- ◆ the **West Palm Beach** and **Tamarac** centers serve warm meals once a month to the homeless community in South Florida, in collaboration with a local service organization known as the “God Squad”. This service, which sometimes includes the collection and distribution of gently used clothing, enjoys the active participation of Sai families as well as others not part of the Sai fold.
- ◆ the Sai Center of **Mesa**, AZ recently entered into a partnership with a local agency to provide support for two of their programs. Under program “OASIS”, devotees delivered 150 brown bag meals a week, each bag containing peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a healthy bar, juice/snack—and often a note of love and encouragement for the recipients. Under the second program, namely Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program, or “I-HELP”, Sai devotees prepared and served hot meals to about 50 participants temporarily housed in local churches at nights. *“You can tell when the participants are enjoying the food,” said one I-HELP coordinator, in appreciation for the volunteers’ dedication; “it gets quiet in here after they start eating!”*
- ◆ the **South Bethesda Center** also partners with other local organizations on homelessness and food insecurity.

Hygiene kits. Highly valued by recipients, hygiene kits have been extremely important during Covid, and have expanded to include such new essentials as masks and sanitizers. In **Phoenix**, along with hot breakfasts, devotees participated in a hygiene items drive for the homeless as well as a much-in-demand clothes drive. Covid kits for the elderly, along with masks and gloves, were also prepared and distributed by devotees at **Concord, CA**. Some centers, such as **South Bethesda** and **Mesa**, also put together donations of household items for homeless families in transition. The **Loudoun** Center also provided hygiene kits as a part of Aradhana day celebrations, while the San Diego also supplied such kits as well as other items, as discussed in the SSSE section.



Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Service (Continued)

Medical service. Devotees from three Sai Centers in the Greater [Phoenix](#) area have been participating in a twice-a-year blood donation drive for over 10 years. The centers coordinate directly with the blood bank; and the drive has gone beyond Sai devotees to prompt participation from many in the local communities. Medical service activities in [Trinidad and Tobago](#) included a medical camp, blood donation, and support for sourcing wheelchairs, for physically handicapped persons. The [Southern California Sai Center](#) also conducted a large, very successful medical camp, reported in more detail in the last issue of *SaiLights*. Global collaboration in medical fields constitutes another kind of service activity, as [international researchers](#) aim to bring the best knowledge to bear in caring for underprivileged persons. Project Lion Heart, launched more than a decade ago with Swami's blessing, aims to resume its important knowledge-sharing collaboration with Swami's hospital in Bangalore (see box on page 12).

Adopt-a-road. Adoption of a road or community is another non-food, family service activity, helping not only to keep a city clean but to create a culture of environmental mindfulness. The [Greensboro, NC](#) center has been participating in the Adopt-a-Street program for several years. In agreement with the City, Center volunteers clean the street, sidewalk, and storm drain, at least once a quarter. Adults and SSSE children participate, the latter taking to heart Swami's message on cleanliness. The teams start by chanting the *Sai Gayatri* prayer, wear safety vests, go over safety guidelines, and busy themselves for some 90 minutes, ending with thanks to Swami for the chance to serve. The environment is also a high priority for the [Atlanta](#) Sai Center. As part of a monthly Adopt-a-road activity, Sai devotees walk the street, and pick up litter on sidewalks and median strips. Also in [North Carolina](#), the [Asheville](#) Sai Center recently adopted a community and is making a difference (see box).



Other environmental service projects. Other centers have also been engaged in environmentally oriented service activities. [Indianapolis](#) center, for example, conducted an E-waste recycle drive between Aradhana Day and Easwaramma Day, with volunteers helping to drop off items or finding centers for people to drop off their items. As part of a go-green initiative, devotees in [Phoenix](#) are planting 97 trees/plants in the community to mark Swami's 97th birthday, with the first lot of 30 trees donated to the Maha Ganapathi Temple in Arizona. In the [Baltimore](#) Center too, volunteers engaged in tree planting and park cleaning (see also the section on Devotion).

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Service (Continued)

Varied service opportunities. Many Sai centers look out for ways to serve communities beyond the usual projects:

- ◆ A cereal drive in May kept Sai devotees in **Orlando** busy, for example, as they sought to help with the breakfast needs of local, underprivileged members of the African American community. The center's aim is to dedicate each month to a different local need.
- ◆ **Sugarland's** Sai Center (Texas) too has found some unusual ways to serve and help meet local needs. Partnering with Second Servings of Houston, the center "rescues" 100-200 pounds of gourmet bread and cupcakes and delivers them to area homeless shelters. For the first six months of 2022, a total of 3200 pounds of food were distributed to the needy.
- ◆ The **Sugarland** Center also helped to restore a cowshed and fix a barn for an area yoga center, and provided an animal shelter with treats, dog and cat food, and cleaning supplies, by way of carrying out a "Pawsitively Purrfect Valentine Seva"! The **Milton** center (Trinidad and Tobago) also supported an area animal shelter.
- ◆ Other notable activities of the **South Bethesda** center include the recycling of 100 eyeglasses for distribution to Swami's hospital in Bangalore, and the knitting of wool hats for newborn babies for delivery to area hospitals (a project begun two years ago and enjoying great popularity with knitters—and

The Eliada Home Service Project – SSSGC Region 3, Asheville, North Carolina

Problem: The Eliada Home houses abused and neglected children, most of them with significant academic deficiencies and behavioral problems, tending even toward violence. For the staff of Eliada, work is enormously stressful, and turnover has been high. A key need identified was a place for staff to relax, away from the children.

The Ambitious Project: Collaborating with the Asheville Group, we at Region 3 adopted Eliada Home as our Adopt-a-Community project. The goal was to turn a long-neglected, dilapidated space into an "oasis for rejuvenation"—too zealous, perhaps, in relation to the many inherent obstacles of bad electrical outlets, plaster walls, and the like. But...

Unexpected help: Challenging as the task appeared, the work has advanced robustly. How? People beyond the Sai community were inspired by our vision to help the staff and ultimately the children, and by the magnitude of the project, and came forward to assist with painting, construction, and electrical work. The project is now nearly completed!

With Swami, all is possible: We undertook the Service, putting our complete trust and faith in Swami. Then...He took over!



SERVICE ACTIVITIES



SERVICE ACTIVITIES



30 Basic Household Items