



INDIA COMMUNITY RELIGIOUS & CULTURAL CENTER, INC. (ICRCC)

A non-profit organization founded in 1984
1990 Meadowbrook Drive, Syracuse, NY 13224

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Winter 2021

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Upcoming ICRCC Events Summary:

Event	Time	Place	Contact	Additional Notes
Holi	April 11	TBD	Falguni Vora & Bala Murthy	Additional info to follow
Spring Festival	TBD	TBD	Falguni Vora	
Yoga	Saturday 9:30	Virtual, on zoom	Bala Murthy	Email: vidyubala@yahoo.com

Information on events is listed on our website, at <https://icrcc.org/ICRCC/EventList>

President's Message

Dear friends,

I am Falguni Vora, newly elected president of ICRCC.

For those who don't know me, I am an Electrical Engineer with Master's degree in Computer Science and currently working for a telecommunication company. I have lived in Manlius since 2011 with my husband and 2 children. I have been involved in community events in various capacities since the beginning.

I am very excited, honored and humbled to be chosen for the job by our fine board members. I am grateful to our outgoing President Mr. Sanjeev Kumar for his strong governance and leadership even during such an unprecedented, pandemic-clad year. Thanks to all past presidents for leaving strong legacy, solid foundation and great framework.

With the purchase of the building, our new home, ICRCC's vision has become even more focused as well as diverse. Board members have been working very hard to serve the community and making Greater Syracuse a better place to live for anyone who is of Indian origin. There are also opportunities to make our presence felt in the broader circles in CNY areas.

There were a lot of things in line when everything came to a screeching halt last year. But 2021 is a year of new hope and rejuvenation and I am looking forward to work with board members as well as community members to take our organization further. There is a lot to achieve and some challenges on the road but with support and involvement from each of you, we can overcome all of them and improve upon what we already have.

I would love to hear your input, ideas, questions and comments. Please feel free to contact me.

Best Regards,
Falguni Vora
falguni@icrcc.org
(405) 706-2969

***A great big THANK YOU to all healthcare and essential service workers for their diligence, dedication, and determination during this challenging time.
You are a modern-day Superhero!
We appreciate everything you do to give comfort and save lives.***

Former President's Message

Fellow Community Members,

I would like to thank everyone in the community, especially the ICRCC Board, for placing their trust in me as a leader. It has been an honor to serve as your President over the last two years during unprecedented times and this kind community has shown me amazing enthusiasm and teamwork.

Congratulations to President Falguni Vora, Vice President Shridevi Karikehalli, Secretary Dayaprasad Kulkarni and Treasurer Jayant Datta as they were elected by the board. Their prior leadership is well known within our community and I am looking forward to their successes.

Best regards,
Sanjeev Kumar

Greetings from the Editor

Namaste

We made it! We made it through 2020 and into 2021. It was a long painful year replete with uncertainties about a novel virus, which has descended on humankind.

We are thankful to the remarkable progress made by the scientific community in getting out an effective vaccine in record time. Hoping for good times ahead. Trust me – it is only going to get better!

We have lots to offer in this newsletter! First, I would like to thank the contributors for responding to our questionnaire on pandemic. It is so nice to get to know the challenges everyone faced and the unique coping mechanisms, which helped them. Just like everyone else, I too am looking forward to meeting people and traveling again!

We have the experts from our local community provide us latest update on COVID-19.

We are very proud of our members who have done outstanding work in their field and in the community and are acknowledging their work in this newsletter.

This time we have featured Dr. Anju Varshney on her successful completion of the doctoral thesis on Hindu Studies, and Dr. Indu Gupta our Onondaga County Health Commissioner. Dr. Chilukuri Mohan's work in the Food Bank of CNY is exemplary and you can read his interview and be inspired to volunteer for organizations in CNY. No one should go hungry to bed!

We welcome all newcomers to town. Please reach out for any help needed in settling down.

Yours,
Shridevi Karikehalli

ICRCC Membership and Contact Info



ICRCC is looking for volunteers to help operate and maintain the recently acquired center at 1990 Meadowbrook Drive.

Currently the ICRCC Board members and their families are tirelessly working in setting up the center to facilitate the much-anticipated community events. Please help us in any form you can.

High school students may be able to fulfill their community service hours requirements by helping at ICRCC, as this is a not-for-profit organization.

Please contact us: falguni@icrcc.org

ICRCC Membership: January – December 2021

- Regular Yearly Membership, Family: \$50, Single: \$30
- Permanent Membership, Family: \$1000, Single: \$750

Preferred method of payment online: icrcc.org

OR mail a check to:

ICRCC, 1990 Meadowbrook Drive, Syracuse, NY 13224

If you have any questions, please contact the membership committee:

Dhruv Sikka (Chair): dhruvsikka@gmail.com

Shridevi Karikehalli: shridevi@icrcc.org

Beena Kappil: bjkappil@yahoo.com

ICRCC is a Not-for-Profit Corporation under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Your donations and contributions to the Permanent Member Fund may be tax deductible. Kindly check with your tax advisor.

India Center: Building Committee Report

Submitted by: Kishan Mehrotra

It is my honor to chair the Building Committee, where we are mainly concerned with general maintenance and improvements. After purchasing India Center in 2019, multiple improvements were made but are not documented here; this report is confined to year 2020 only.

We are very fortunate to have a team of dedicated volunteers who care so much about our new home that we continued to make improvements to the building through 2020, even though COVID did not allow us to use the building – thus ensuring that we are good stewards of the investment the community has made.

In the winter of 2019, it was observed that the main hall takes lots of time to reach a comfortable temperature and is hard to maintain at it. Experts within and outside were consulted and several options were evaluated with associated costs. Only one of the recommendations was implemented – cover the open window, overlooking the foyer. Other recommendations such as – build a door to enter the main hall, use extra insulation in the attic, and consider purchasing more efficient heating/cooling unit are on hold and will be reevaluated in forthcoming year.

Inside and mostly outside cleaning and maintenance were organized couple of times; several individuals participated. Dead trees were removed, fence reinforced and replaced, trees covering the roof were trimmed, mailbox was replaced, outside of the windows were repaired and painted. Inside the building some ugly patches were removed, stairs from the basement to foyer were fixed, some old cabinets were properly mounted for better use; kitchen has a new electric stove (a donation).

Couple of items approved by the board could not be completed, due to time constraints: fixing a dent in the roof and some of the large potholes in the parking area. We anticipate these to be addressed in early 2021.

Our committee is considering several tasks, for example: improving the exterior by planting flowers and trees, especially in the backyard; consider improving the backyard for possible picnic style use by the community. Enclose the space on porch (concrete surface near the main entrance). Enclosing is a costly proposition but has multiple benefits such as – space for leaving the shoes and hanging winter jackets, excess space for community members to mingle especially when down stairs and foyer is crowded, and most importantly improving the heating in the rest of the building.

India Center is a community property – we seek your opinion for additional ideas as well as financial support to accomplish some of the above-mentioned goals.

Update on recent Community Events

ICRCC Weekly Brunch

Submitted by: Sunil Gupta

Pilot programs are a great way to test a new idea without investing lots of time, effort and money. Weekly Brunch Program was such an idea that we thought could create awareness of our Community Center and generate money to meet operating costs.

The program started on August 14, 2020 to be tested for 4 weeks. A group of volunteers prepared food, which was then carefully and hygienically packaged and delivered to their cars at the ICRCC building. Food from different parts of India to include South Indian, North Indian, Punjabi, and Gujarati including some famous street food was offered.

Needless to say, the program exceeded our expectations in all aspects. Originally planned 4 weeks the program ran for 13 weeks! The number of weekly meals served was almost two and half times more than what was originally planned. The people who completed our survey consistently rated our quality of food and service 5 stars.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who helped in cooking, packaging and distributing the weekly brunches. Many community members graciously sponsored this weekly event to help cover our costs; and their support is greatly appreciated as well.

Please look out for this event again starting this spring. We are always looking for help with cooking, packing and distribution. We would also like to hear any new items for the menu.



Example of Packaging

If you can help in any aspect please contact Sunil Gupta at (315) 727-0445 or sunil4911@gmail.com.

India Day Celebrations

Submitted by: Bala Murthy

Given the current pandemic situation, with no end in sight, India day picnic was conducted virtually. This was a combined program with STICA (Southern tier Indian cultural association). Various events including solo singing and instrumental recitals, Bharatanatyam, Bollywood dancing, fashion show, children performances (dance and yoga and poetry) were showcased.

Srikant Ramarao was the Emcee for ICRCC along with Rimsha Nigam for STICA.

Special thanks to Rugmani Kutty from STICA community, who made this combined event possible. It was wonderful from entertainment and inspiration perspective. Participation was excellent with more than 100 zoom windows. It was received very well by the ICRCC and STICA communities and was a grand success.

We sincerely appreciate all the effort and commitment of everyone involved.

Virtual Diwali and Christmas Celebrations

Submitted by: Falguni Vora and Beena Kappil

ICRCC celebrated one of a kind event this year at very short notice. Diwali event had to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances, and Christmas could not be celebrated in person due to the pandemic. Both being festival of lights and keeping current pandemic situation in mind, it was a perfect opportunity to blend both celebrations together on a virtual platform. The virtual event was held on December 20, 2020.

By God's grace and Community's support and the board's effort this was the third virtual cultural program to be organized during pandemic.

We witnessed a vast range of varieties that showcased lot of talent, hard work and creativity. There were performances featuring classical dances such as Kathak & Bharatnatyam, instrumental recitals of Veena, violin, guitar and piano, karaoke singing, Bollywood and fusion dances and a few completely out of the box varieties. It was like a "thali" served with every color and flavor. More than 100 people joined the zoom call and there were numerous positive feedbacks from community. It was truly an event with runaway success.

Dr. Anil George gave the "True Spirit of Christmas" message. The event was emceed by the energetic and talented sisters – Richa and Shruti Zirath!

ICRCC would like to thank all the performers for their time and dedication

It was a great occasion for 'bringing lights' together with 'peace and happiness'

Toys for Tots Collection

ICRCC also organized Toys for Tots – Christmas gift donation for deserving children in the local community. The new toys collection was donated to the Salvation Army. Many thanks to our generous donors. It surely put a smile on a child's face!



Pandemic Experience Responses

Community Members Experiences During the Pandemic

We asked our community members to write to us about their experiences during pandemic and what were they looking forward to most once the pandemic was “over”. We have compiled their responses below.

Akshat, Grade 2, Mott Road Elementary School

How did you spend 2020 in the midst of the pandemic?

I spent 2020 in the midst of the pandemic by playing board games with my family such as SORRY, LUDO, SPACE-VENTURE, JUMANJI, PIE FACE, SNAPPED and SCRABLE. I also spent the time going out with my dad and playing, walking; rollerblading, playing a live game called TRAC-BAL and skateboarding.

How did you manage school and your social life?

I managed school by attending all the classes regularly and making sure to submit the homework assignments on time. I enjoyed my social life by playing with my friends virtually. The games I played virtually with them were ROBLOX, MINCRAFT and FORTINITE. I also did a few play dates, which were a lot of fun.

What was the most challenging aspect?

My most challenging aspect was to stay safe from the corona virus and sticking to my daily schedule and not going off task.

What are your New Year resolutions and plans?

My New Year resolutions are ... 1) getting rid of all my bad habits, 2) meeting more friends at school. My plans are 1) go on more trips to places.

Achintya Raghu Ramaswamy, Grade 3, Enders Road Elementary school

How CoViD19 pandemic changed my life

School was a lot of fun but now thanks to COVID-19 it's not as much fun. Masks are not really fun to wear. They get wet 2 minutes after wearing them during the school day. Another way covid has really changed our lives is that I can barely see my friends. We used to see each other for playdates and birthday parties. But now we are unable to do that. Recess was A LOT of fun but thanks to covid-19 recess is a waste of time. We used to eat in the cafeteria but NOW WE HAVE TO EAT IT IN THE CLASSROOM!!!!

We used to be able to go to the toilet but now we just have to hold it in. I used to be out playing with my friends all day long but now all we do is call each other and play video games.

The only thing that's good that's come out of this year is I started a youtube channel and I was taught algebra by my grandma (ajji). I wish we could Thanos snap COVID-19 away. I want to get vaccinated soon so I don't get covid-19.

Fun fact: COVID-19 was first discovered in China.

Fun fact no 2: the virus is now changing and spreading faster

Fun fact no 3: masks are still the best way to prevent spread of covid-19

I just want to go on a plane like I did before covid-19 because I like flying plus they give out free snacks!! Covid-19 has really changed our lives!!

Arusha Shivani Ramaswamy, Grade 9, Fayetteville-Manlius High school

How COVID-19 pandemic changed my life

COVID-19 has made things different for almost everyone, and it's made for quite an interesting experience. Some things that have changed seem obvious, while others not so much. I think one of the obvious ones would be that I personally have become more isolated socially as a result of social distancing. It's simply harder to keep in touch with people during lockdown, and the extra effort we need to do it just makes us, myself included, ignore it. It is easier if I can contact them through means other than in person, like texting or email. I'm on my computer a lot more since lockdown started and I think I'm reading more, so it may be that since I am around people a lot less than before, I'm doing more things that don't require people. School, ever since it started, has been very different than how it was before the lockdowns. In March a large majority of the teaching started to be done through videos and pdf. This made it harder to learn things and to fully understand the concepts we were learning about. This year, I think people were more prepared for virtual learning, because we have things like Google Meets, hybrid learning, etc. We're using online learning a lot more than we did in 2019-start of 2020 as well, and it's made the learning experience more flexible, because even though we have mandatory google meets and such at specific times, we can use videos and PDF readings as supplements whenever convenient, as long as we stay within the submission deadline. I find this makes school seem less rigid and a new experience for everyone.

Rishma Vora, sophomore at Georgetown University

2020 was a difficult for everyone, including me. Unlike many other students, Georgetown did not allow us to go back onto campus for both the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters. I had fallen in love with life in DC, so being away from that and my best friends has certainly been hard. However, there were still a lot of moments in 2020 that I may not have experienced or valued if the pandemic didn't happen. The pandemic gave me the ability to spend more time in nature, cook, and learn how to be okay being alone.

I also joined a social impact venture called Project Olas, which employs moms from the Guatemala City Garbage Dump as online Spanish tutors. My involvement in this organization has been incredibly rewarding, especially because it provides safe and sustainable work to these women during a time of crisis. Surprisingly, I also met some of my best friends online through this work. I never thought I'd be able to connect with people on such a deep level through a screen, but this pandemic has shown me that this is entirely normal and possible!

My Bollywood Fusion dance team, Guzaarish, has also been a source of comfort and routine during the pandemic. Even though we have practices on Zoom, we've still been able to build our team and come together through dance.

Looking towards 2021, my resolutions are geared towards not taking things or people for granted, and making the most out of every moment

Kaushik Krishnan – pursuing higher studies in Human Services and Culinary Arts – OCC

I had to make lots of changes in my life, almost 180 degrees. My on campus class switched to online in the middle of the semester. I thrive in the midst of social settings. So, this was life altering for me. There were a couple of months of adjusting period and slowly we switched over to social meetings via zoom, google duo, and Microsoft team. Fall semester was better with hybrid model. I am feeling more adjusted, than I was in last March. In spring and summer, I enjoyed outdoors a lot.

My goal this year is to bake more and continue my studies. My resolution is to learn not to let my mind be affected by external circumstances.

Kanishk Krishnan – pursuing higher studies in Poetry and Writing Online

The pandemic was quite devastating for me. Really it took away all my outings, and support structure. My family, walks and hikes were my life support. Slowly things got better, as we started a new way of life with virtual meetings. I enjoy my zoom meetings with friends and love all the spiritual programs online. I have recently started poetry classes virtually as well and thoroughly enjoying it as well.

My goal for 2021 is to publish a poetry book. I have a resolution to manage my emotions better.

Oh, the Places You'll Go!
(Dr. Seuss)

Recognition of Community Members

Dr. Anju Varshney



Anju has been a part of the Syracuse Indian community for over 42 years. She has served ICRCC in various roles over the years including being the Treasurer and Newsletter Editor. In addition, she has volunteered extensively and made a significant impact on the greater CNY community. We are so happy to share this recent additional accomplishment of Anju- that is acquiring a Doctorate degree in Hindu Studies! Congratulations Dr. Anju Varshney.

The title of her thesis was” **Religious Practices of First-Generation Hindu Diaspora in United States in the Internet Era**”

Study Design: The rapid evolution of the Internet and the numerous functionalities that it provides has transformed the society in a dramatic fashion. In her dissertation, Anju studied digital Hinduism and the impact of the Internet on Hindu religious practices. In particular, she focused on the religious practices of first-generation Hindu immigrants in the US, and the role that the Internet is playing in their practice of religious faith. The broad questions addressed are:

- In the specific context of religious practices among Hindu Diaspora, how has the Internet impacted the practice of Hindu poojas? How has digital religion become a part of people’s religious experience?
- How satisfying or fulfilling is it when the pooja is performed only digitally using the Internet resources? Are there more fulfilling options where “traditional” pooja is complemented by “digital” means and vice versa.
- What role is the Internet playing to motivate and encourage the next generation to practice the Hindu faith and in the mechanisms being used to convey Hindu thoughts and religious practices to them.
- How has the Internet mitigated the impact of the COVID pandemic on the practice of Hindu religious practices?

The research findings reported in the dissertation are based mainly on interviews with many from the CNY Hindu community. It is inferred that the Internet serves as a very important resource which enables the Hindu diaspora to follow their religious practices in a more authentic and fulfilling manner and that the Internet has become an integral part of their religious practices.

Dr. Chilukuri Mohan



Chilukuri Mohan, a professor at Syracuse University, has been a member of ICRCC for over 30 years and served recently as ICRCC's President. He has been serving on the Board of Directors of the Food Bank of Central New York (FBCNY) since 2015.

Q. What has been your involvement with the Food Bank?

A. For many years, I have been a donor to FBCNY. In 2015, when I had completed serving in a leadership role in our college, I had a little more time on my hands than before, and wanted to serve the local community in some manner, so I joined the Board of Directors of FBCNY. I also serve on their Finance Committee and have a clear picture of how their work is carried out. Occasionally, I volunteer for fund-raising activities.

Q. Why the Food Bank, and not some other organization?

A. FBCNY is an organization I hold in high regard due to the essential service they provide to the needy in our region, and the effectiveness with which they carry out this service. It is remarkable that every dollar donated to FBCNY results in providing three meals to the needy, and that the administrative costs are very low (less than 5 cents on the dollar).

Q. Is there any personal reason why you are working with the Food Bank?

A. As with most of us from India, I grew up seeing poverty and hunger all around me, as well as the effects of malnutrition and hunger on children: recent newspaper reports and articles from UNICEF show that this is still a huge problem, often ignored by the middle class and the affluent. Even my father grew up poor, due to the early demise of his father; there was a period of time when he relied on community support for food while he was going to school, eating at a different house each day of the week, and fasting on the seventh day for which there was no sponsor. The idea that any child has to grow hungry pulls at the heartstrings, and I cannot understand how we can allow that to happen even in this country when billions of dollars are squandered on various superfluous things. Organizations such as the Food Bank address this problem, to the best of our abilities.

Q. Is the Food Bank the same as a soup kitchen?

A. Soup kitchens and food pantries directly provide food to individuals. The Food Bank provides the infrastructure and logistics that help provide nutritious food to various soup kitchens and food pantries in the entire region. Some food comes from the government, some is donated by food producers and groceries, and some is purchased by FBCNY. These are stored in a FBCNY warehouse, which includes cold storage, and distributed using trucks to various locations in Onondaga and neighboring counties. Other Food Banks cover other regions of the state and the country.

Q. What can others in the Indian community do to help?

A. In addition to donating, it would be great if we could volunteer for the Food Bank [\[foodbankcny.org\]](http://foodbankcny.org) as well as soup kitchens and food pantries in our region. Fund-raisers could be organized, focused on an activity, neighborhood, or employer. In addition to the Food Bank, there are also several other local organizations which assist the needy in our region; we can volunteer time, effort and resources to the same. Some employers match their employees' donations, doubling the effect.

Dr. Indu Gupta

Submitted by: Dr. Neerja Vajpayee

Onondaga County Health Commissioner Dr. Indu Gupta has been front and center leading the county through the global COVID crisis. Her vision is a product of vast personal and professional experiences over the course of last 25 years. After receiving her medical degree from Kanpur she immigrated to the US and settled with her husband in Central New York in 1986. She recertified in the U.S. and subsequently ran a private practice in Syracuse at St. Joseph's Hospital for 15 years. Besides being their medical doctor, she practiced by providing tremendous empathy and support to her patients.

While taking care of her patients she was also a full-time mother to her two beautiful daughters and also pursuing master's degree in public administration at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. In 2009 she got her master's of public health at John Hopkins in Baltimore, Maryland. Subsequently she moved to the west coast and besides doing patient care also got involved in medical student teaching as an assistant professor at the University of California in Los Angeles. Having been engaged in the medical system in various roles she decided to come home to Syracuse in 2014 when she was offered the position of Onondaga County Health Commissioner in 2014.



Dr. Gupta strongly believes in public health and her dedication to community health runs much deeper than the scientific aspects of disease. Her leadership style is based on both scientific facts and understanding of the complex social issues that play a very vital role in both an individual's and community's health. She has co-chaired county drug task force, an organization with memberships from various local agencies that help address the opioid crisis in Onondaga county. In that capacity she has worked closely with both the medical and law enforcement communities. She has been also a champion and advocate for reducing and eradicating poverty in Syracuse through her collaborative work with H.O.P.E, an anti-poverty non-profit organization powered by Gov. Cuomo's Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative.

Since the COVID crisis hit Dr. Gupta has been working tirelessly with the Onondaga County Executive office and physicians to spearhead multiple operations such as contact tracing and establish various support systems for patients. She is dedicated to making the community healthy and safe.

In her role as a health commissioner she strives to create an environment where everyone can feel taken care off in a safe manner. She is an ardent champion of public health and has committed her life to the cause. As a woman, a mother, an active member of the Syracuse community and in her role as health commissioner she continues to engage people, build relationships and work towards achieving comprehensive health for all.

Besides her achievements and multiple talents her Indian origin is a source of great pride for the Indian community. We are so honored to call her "one of our own" who now belongs to everyone.

Everything you want to know about COVID-19

Submitted by: Dr. Mantosh Dewan

Infection rates in Central New York:

COVID infections have come in waves. Here are the daily % positives and number of people diagnosed with COVID in Central New York: March 1%, 25; May 2% 50; through summer less than 1%, ~10; October 2%, 50; November 4%, 200; December 7%, 350; January 1 8.6%, 499; now 5.4%, 250.

Importantly, although rates are now decreasing it is many times higher than the 1st wave. If these current numbers would have occurred in April, it would have led to a complete lock-down. Continued vigilance is needed.

Mutations:

The UK variant is more infectious and maybe more deadly. It is expected to make up half of all infections by March. There are other variants eg S. African and Brazilian that may be even more destructive and, of greater concern, may be able to evade the immune response produced by the current vaccines.

It is likely that the death rate from COVID is lower in India. This has led to speculation that vaccinations such as BCG that are more common there and universal exposure to numerous viruses may have conferred partial immunity, thereby lessening the rate and severity of COVID infection. Even if this turns out to be accurate, Indians do not have full immunity and therefore need to take all precautions and get the vaccination as soon as your turn allows.

COVID Tests:

If you are exposed or have symptoms, you must get a PCR test. This is important: many easily-available rapid" tests are antigen tests that are not PCR-based. These will miss a positive infection ~60% of the time, giving you false confidence that potentially enables transmission to family members. While any PCR test is good, the easiest, most accurate saliva test is available at Upstate Community Hospital- you can walk in every day, no appointment necessary.

Vaccines:

Clinical trials in over 70,000 people have established the safety of both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. They are also remarkably 94-95% effective. Vaccines need to be 50% effective for FDA approval. There are legitimate questions but undue concern because these vaccines were developed so quickly. Briefly, the mRNA technology is decades old and there are already mRNA-based medicines on the market. This technology was applied to vaccines for the first time and reportedly designed in just a few days. For the first time, testing and production were done in parallel rather than in sequence because the federal government gave them billions of dollars, thereby eliminating risk. This allowed vaccines to be shipped the day after FDA approval and injected within a couple of days.

Although safe and effective, there are several things we do not know about these vaccines. How long will they protect us? Will we need a shot every year like the flu vaccine or every ten years as with the tetanus shot or will it confer long term protection as with many of the childhood vaccines? Another important unanswered question is: if you are protected, you are unlikely to get COVID but can you give it to others? That is, can you be an asymptomatic carrier? It is because we do not know the answer, we must continue to wear masks.

When will we all get vaccines?

There is lack of clarity on the availability of vaccines. With the two current vaccines, it is estimated that everyone (including adolescents; clinical trials are underway) will be vaccinated by the end of the year. However, new vaccines are likely to be here soon. Besides the Oxford-Astra Zeneca vaccine (already approved in the UK), we eagerly await the Johnson & Johnson vaccine- if it is proven safe and effective, it is easy to use and requires only one shot. If both are approved, it is likely that everyone will be vaccinated by fall.

Looking ahead:

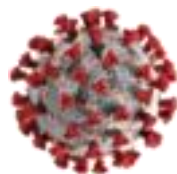
There is optimism that we have weathered the holiday surge, rates are coming down [although still very high] and vaccines are here. However, concerns persist because of potentially more dangerous mutations, pockets of refusal to wear masks and to distance, migration of college students in the next few weeks, and the opening of indoor dining and winter sports.

Given the more dangerous strains of the virus, it is essential that we must continue all precautions, especially wearing masks properly and observe physical but not social distancing- even if you are vaccinated. Based on this, large gatherings are discouraged.

One of the most painful things about the pandemic is that we are unable to be with our loved ones when they are hospitalized. Because there are strict universal precautions in the hospital, you are more likely to get infected in the community than at the hospital. With high rates of infection in the community and the need to keep this out of the hospital, visitation is not allowed. By extension, it is entirely safe to go to a hospital if you need treatment.

Please keep up with the best data because it changes literally every day. A reliable source is the CDC at [CDC.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus). There is also a 24/7 Upstate COVID hotline 315-464-3979 to answer questions regarding testing (Press#1) and vaccines (Press #2).

If we are careful and do what is recommended by the experts (wear a mask; get the vaccine; physically distance and spend time outdoors; stay socially connected including children having one friend over, always masked and distanced, and outside as much as possible) we can expect a good summer and hope for a near-normal fall.



Special Articles

How did 'January' get its name?

By Arusha Shivani Ramaswamy, Grade 9, Fayetteville-Manlius High school

January – as the first month of the year, when we transition from one year to the next, is a gateway to a new year. But January didn't always exist, even though some of the other months we have today did.

Even though today we use the Gregorian calendar which was introduced in 1582 by Pope Gregory the Third as a minor modification of the Julian calendar (this was based on the Roman calendar and made during the reign of Julius Caesar – it is based on the one the Ancient Romans used) and the first month in their calendar was March – the earliest time it would be warm enough to start a war.

For ancient Romans, the year started in March and ended in December, with January and February not having formal titles for centuries. However, King Numa Pompilius of Rome eventually revamped the Roman calendar during his reign (715-673 BCE), and he added two months to the start of the year – one of which was January, which he added to the start of the year, and the second was February, right behind it.

Although it's not clear if he actually created the month or just gave it a name, this was when January took its place at the start of the year, although there's evidence to suggest that January first wouldn't come to mark the start of the Roman new year until a while later - around 153 BCE.

After that, the Roman calendar underwent modifications under the reign of Julius Caesar (around 45 BCE) and became the Julian calendar, and then, after inconsistencies and inaccurate dates due to leap years were found in the Julian calendar, the Gregorian calendar was eventually adapted, and January remained the first month.



The name of the month itself - January - was derived from Janus, the Roman god of two faces – one looking at the past and the other into the future – crossroads, beginnings and endings, doors, and transitions.

He was also said to have the power to see the past and the future, which feels quite appropriate for the name of the month, which marks the ending of the old year and the beginning of the new one.

Head of Janus, Vatican museum, Rome

Magical Sufferings of 2020

By Swati Gupta

An optometrist makes sure you have perfect vision to see the world clearly. **20/20**. In a T20 cricket match, each team plays 20 overs to have a fair chance at winning. **20.. 20..**

In 2020, after almost **400** years (**20 times 20!**) Jupiter and Saturn passed very close to each other. 800 years ago, an alignment of these planets had occurred at night. The brightness and nearness to Earth made this “*Great Conjunction*” visible to the naked eye. It occurred on winter solstice (12.21.2020) and was called the Christmas star even though they are planets.

According to the lunar calendar followed by Hindu religion, there was an extra month (called “Adhik Maas”) in 2020. So much for adding more days to the suffering! It aligns the lunar and solar calendar and can be in any of the twelve months every 3 years or so. The timing in 2020 delayed some very important religious festivals by one month and that happened after 165 years. Both of these coincided in 2020!

Just one more interesting fact. There were 13 full moons in 2020, one of them being on Halloween! Eerie!!

The turn of 2019 was going to start a new decade, a fresh start to the world. A world that had gone separate ways, like a divorced couple. *Could everyone put their differences aside for the sake of humanity?*

There'll probably be more questions than answers. Maybes more than “Should be(s)”. “Could be(s)”, “Would be(s)” are more appropriate because that's how mind boggling all the information was. *That's how uncertain 2020 was and will be until the pandemic ends.*

A new term “*Social Distance*” became a universally disliked concept. One had to be 6 feet away from anybody not living in the same house and not wearing a mask. Don't you think “*Physical Distance*” is more accurate? Lockdowns were the immediate remedy to control the spread of this virus. Even if it meant losing jobs. Unemployment was high and a lot of companies went bankrupt, yet it didn't reflect in the stock market. Did it make any sense? Not on the surface, but I'm sure the financial gurus can explain it all.

How can the economy keep running despite this crisis? If the liquor shops stay open! Close the malls, restaurants, salons. Limit capacity in stores. Long lines were seen outside stores, people wearing masks waited patiently for their turn to enter stores. They looked like kids at school. Why was toilet paper sold out? Coronavirus doesn't cause diarrhea! But definitely “*No Mask, No Entry*” would help!

Do Masks really work? Which mask works? KN95 or N95 or cloth masks? A number of memes, the world's coping mechanism, floated around to make light of the pandemic. The most striking one was where dogs stare out the windows and wonder “*Did these humans bite someone? Why are they wearing muzzles?*” I think that was profound. It took a dog to tell that humans had gone wrong somewhere to create so much havoc and adopt this unnatural process of protection from coronavirus!

Masks had become a fashion statement. Ladies brought out their sewing machines that had collected dust and made masks of different colors and patterns for the entire community. They became pioneers to popularize the use of masks, the easiest defense!

But can a 2-year-old or a 60-year-old wear a mask? Can anyone wear it for 6 hours or longer? What if someone has asthma? Will it work if someone is sweating or they get wet in the rain? Do they stay 6 feet away? How is that possible in a crowded, congested place? Some people were empathetic, some judgmental. Some who really couldn't wear masks had to bear the bad looks and finger pointing that happened openly from others. *Is it fair to be treated differently?*

Fatigue set in as months rolled by. Should one still go to a beach party, frat party or a get together? Tourist spots were now Hotspots. Celebrations with family at Thanksgiving and Christmas was an annual ritual and important for many. But putting their loved ones at risk would probably not be the best Christmas gift! No question about that!

Many barriers and doubts built anxiety in people some had mental health problems during this time. Constant, never ending flow of patients into hospitals for treatment took a mental and emotional toll on healthcare workers. It became a daily struggle for them to give their heart and soul to treat these people and save their lives. *Hail the Frontline Workers!*

Medical system had changed. Surprisingly all elective surgeries and preventive appointments were cancelled. Had they ever been necessary? Or had they been a source of income for many? I personally prefer Telemedicine, although do you think a "physical exam" can be done "virtually"? In clinics, Doctors wore masks and head shields to protect themselves. The "White coat syndrome" would show an erroneous blood pressure reading. Would the new gear raise anxiety levels?

Kids learnt about endemic, epidemic, pandemic. What does quarantine mean? Why are we in a lockdown? When can we have a play date or go on a vacation? Adults were in a similar dilemma. No one knew anything. It was the beginning of a new decade. Good, Bad or Ugly – it was here! Somebody should have foreseen it, after all based on the trend a pandemic happens once in 100 years. The last one was in 1918 that went on until 1920. *Why was the modern world so unprepared?*

Some early analysis showed that the first infection was in Wuhan, China. All travel was banned from China and other countries. By the time focus shifted to the next hotspot in Europe, the virus had entered New York from there. The infection rate had outdone medical supplies, hospital capacity, and sadly morgues. *Unfortunately, it had taken more lives in New York City in 2020 than 9/11 had in a day.*

Scientists worldwide put their minds together and worked overtime to find solutions. Is there a drug that can protect them? Or a vaccine? The virus will not go away just like that! By the end of 2020 more than 330K American lives were lost! More than 1.5 M people had died worldwide. *A promise of several vaccines was the silver lining.*

Schools faced the challenge of continuing education through all this craziness. Teachers had very little time to catch up on technology of online teaching. Some knew how to send emails, but that's it! *How will teachers conduct a class on Google meet or Zoom?* Students were now testing teachers. Soon parents jumped on board. Was it fair?

Work from home was the only way to continue business while distancing. *Who would have thought of PJs to be the new work attire?* My hubby and kiddo were home doing their own stuff. The dog loved it! Uber took a huge hit to its business and was no longer a reliable means for me to travel around. So, hubby came to the rescue! I liked it!

Frequent calls to parents were a way for us to keep them safe and healthy. A remarkable societal shift of housework in India is worth mentioning. Friends and relatives couldn't meet during a lockdown, how could a servant from a poor neighborhood who would sweep and mop the floor and clean dishes cross the door? *All generations finally found a new appreciation for these servants.* Some husbands got their act together to become better partners. Seniors had a tough time!

A WhatsApp group became a way to reconnect with friends from a city I had left physically two years back even though it was about cooking. Their love for cooking rubbed off on me. Finding old friends from school after three decades would have been impossible before the pandemic! *Friends were a cushion to give support and we motivated each other to keep going on.* Kudos to the wonderful instructors for doing a fantastic job of holding hands of beginner artists in a virtual class to create a painting while having fun. I had six paintings by year end! It felt magical!

Book club meetings that I might have skipped became necessary when they went on Zoom. I read books that didn't interest me just to see and talk to the neighbors! I also spoke to an author once – that was magical in its own way!

Praying for the well-being of people to reduce their suffering is the least one could do from being at home during a lockdown. It would normally happen in a place of worship but now it could be done over Zoom – how magical was that!

The Warp Speed program developed an *mRNA vaccine*, based on a new technology, within a year and more than 90% efficacy! A vaccine takes several years to be approved and is usually 70 – 90% effective. Why is it taking so long to develop an HIV vaccine? I'm sure there is a scientific reason. A new generation of *Corona Babies* will probably be more united and technologically advanced to handle such emergencies. They'll surely hear a lot of stories about the Coronavirus Pandemic.

2021 should be positive but not coronavirus positive. *Science and technology has taken us through this pandemic against all odds.* The battle will continue until herd immunity is achieved. A few years later scientists will become writers to pen down their own stories about successes and failures in search of a treatment.

Positivity is important, it helps. I can say that for sure!

Stay Safe, Stay Healthy!

Community Activities (Virtual)

1. Yoga Program



Details: Free for ICRCC members. Classes will be offered in virtual mode via zoom. Please check email from ICRCC for updates.

Contact: Bala Murthy (vidyubala@yahoo.com)

2. Jnana Mandir



Details: Jnana Mandir program was initiated in ICRCC premises as of Sept 2019 by few members of Gita Vichara Group of Syracuse, in collaboration with Arsha Vidya Gurukulam (AVG) in Pennsylvania. The vision and mission is to promote spirituality and philosophy and devotion in the community. There are programs for adults as well as children. Currently, due to the pandemic, all the programs are offered in virtual mode via zoom.

When: Group chanting of Hanuman chalisa every Tuesday and Friday at 7:30 PM
Every Saturday Bhagavatam discourses offered live by Swami Pratyagbodhanda from AVG.

Every other Saturday, Purna Vidya classes for children are offered. Currently they are learning Yoga, Ramayana, and Hindi.

Contact: For more details, please visit <http://www.jnanamandir.com> and any questions contact Bala Murthy (jnanamandir101@gmail.com)

Please contact falguni@icrcc.org for inclusion of any Community News and Events in the ICRCC Newsletter for circulation.

Email to let us know your interests

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** *The President is an ex-officio member of all committees, except the Nominating Committee.*

* Corrections made 2/17/21

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