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# Community

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## Utah governor hosts first Diwali celebration

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Thanks to the clout and influence of leading Indian American entrepreneurs in Utah, Drs Ragula Bhaskar and Dinesh Patel, and their close friendship with the Republican Governor Jon Huntsman, the governor hosted the first Diwali celebration November 9 at his mansion. Utah's First Lady Mary Kaye Huntsman came draped in a sari.

Besides several dozens of Indian Americans from across the state – many of them among Utah's most prominent businessmen and businesswomen – also present were India's Ambassador to the US, Ronen Sen and his wife Kalpana, Lieutenant Governor Gary Herbert and former US ambassador to Mauritius John Price.

In his welcoming remarks, Huntsman spoke of how valuable the local Indian American community has been

"The influence of the Indian culture can be seen throughout the state from business and education to science," he told *India Abroad*.

He also pointed out that Sen was the 'most prominent guest' in the governor's



■ Utah First Lady Mary Kaye Huntsman in a sari, and Governor Huntsman, with a tikka on his forehead, talk to India Ambassador Ronen Sen. Business leader Ragula Bhaskar looks on

■ UTAH ■

mansion since 'President Theodore Roosevelt's visit in the early 1900s.'

On a lighter note, the governor had everyone smiling and applauding his apparent vast knowledge of Indian cuisine and his confession that he even helped Bhaskar and his team in the preparation of the food for the evening in the mansion's kitchen, 'preparing some of the delicacies like gulab jamuns.'

Bhaskar, the primary organizer of the event, said he appreciated the governor's recognition of one of India's biggest holidays and also lauded Huntsman for his easy accessibility to the Indian-American community, 'providing us with an avenue for all of us to share ideas and concerns that may ultimately benefit the state.'

In keeping with the main theme of the Festival of Lights, Bhaskar wished 'the bounties of fortune' to visit the state and its population this year.

In his remarks, Sen spoke of the meaning of Diwali and, in appreciating Huntsman's magnanimity in inviting him to be a special

guest at the first-ever Diwali celebration in the mansion, said, 'It is an honor for me to be here today among friends here in Utah in the governor's mansion. This evening's celebration represents all good things about the extraordinary goodness and potentiality of humanity.'

Earlier, a puja was led by Charu Das at an altar with statues of Ganesh and Lakshmi. After the puja, Das expounded on the meaning of Diwali and briefly explained the several aspects of Lakshmi. He then asked all the guests to chant mantras for peace.

Bhaskar, president and chief executive officer of FatPipe Networks – a company that invented router clustering devices for reliable, redundant and fast Internet/Wide Area Networks, told *India Abroad* that he had first broached the idea of a Diwali celebration in the governor's mansion to Huntsman during an economic summit about three months ago.

"I said it would be fun to have a Diwali celebration in the governor's mansion and the Governor Huntsman spontaneously responded with great enthusiasm and asked me to organize it."

"Dinesh [Patel, managing partner of

*vSpring Capital, a venture capital firm*] had also talked to the governor about holding some India- and Indian-American-related events in the mansion."

"During my time abroad I've learned to appreciate Indian culture and cuisine," Huntsman told *India Abroad*. "One of my favorite dishes is gulab jamun."

Bhaskar said that besides the gulab jamuns, Huntsman also helped in frying some okra and other dishes.

He said that he had once told the first lady that she could wear a sari and she had responded with enthusiasm. Bhaskar's wife Sanch helped her into the beautiful pink and gold sari, he said.

"She liked it so much and was so happy to be wearing it that she wants to wear another sari to the upcoming Governor's Ball at the White House," he said.

Bhaskar, who along with Patel, served on the review committee of Utah State's Boards and Commissions for the Huntsman Gubernatorial Transition Team and now advises Huntsman on policy issues, said the governor had told him and Patel that he intends to hold a Diwali celebration next year too.