

HEF hosts Guru Vandana in Houston

On Saturday, April 12, over thirty teachers and a principal from seven school districts in the Houston area attended Guru Vandana (Teacher Appreciation), at Keshav Smriti. Organized by the Hindu Education Foundation (HEF), a project of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, the utsav allowed hardworking teachers to be honored and appreciated for their endless work by their own students. In the spirit of respect for their Gurus (Teachers), children from Houston area Balagokulams invited their teachers to the event and presented them with a token of appreciation.

To commence the program, Acharya Premchand Sridhar of Arya Samaj Houston was invited forward to the beautifully decorated altar, where he lit a lamp, symbolically awaking the raging fire in every student's soul. With the lighting of the lamp, the cultural portion of the evening followed, filled with dances, songs, skits and explanation on the Hindu concept of Gurus. To begin, the children of Meenakshi Balagokulam in Pearland performed an incredibly graceful Ganesha Vandana dance, followed by a humorous skit, comparing the wisdom of pursuing knowledge with the foolishness of chasing wealth. Performed by children from Alief and Sugar Land Balagokulams, the skit taught all of the audience a lesson in the importance of knowledge. One of the participants, Ayush Sharma, played the role of a foolish man who had never paid attention in school yet inherited his family's fortune. "In the skit, my character makes a mistake and loses all the money he had because he didn't work hard in school," Ayush explained. "Afterwards, my character learns how important school was and how important it was listening to his teacher. My character wasn't real, but after acting like him, I myself started working harder." History teacher at Clements High School, Jennifer Craddock, commented after the event. "We especially enjoyed the dancing and the music. So many talented kids! The preparations must have taken much planning and coordination." After the memorable skit, several cultural performances followed, emphasizing the importance of the arts in the Hindu tradition of education. Keertana, a student of Ms. Asha Bhaktavatsalam, presented Carnatic music, Mrs. Chandrakantha Courtney accompanied on the tabla by Dr. David Courtney presented Hindustani music, and Ms. Neha Gupta, a student of Mrs. Courtney, sang a film song based on Raga Bhoopali. The eloquent musical pieces were followed by an explanation of the origins of Hindu dance and a Bharatanatyam performance by students of Yamuna Srinidhi's Nrityasiri Dance School. The cultural program ended with the Veda Vrinda group chanting from the section of the Taittiriya Upanishad known as the Vedic Commencement Address. As the program wound down to a close, teachers enjoyed chatting with the parents and students over a delicious dinner catered by Gourmet India. Many teachers voiced their positive comments of the utsav. Donna Court, a teacher at First Colony Middle School, mentioned that she was "honored to attend the Teacher's Day Celebration. It was a wonderful introduction to Hindu culture and traditions." "It was an amazing experience and an honor," commented Karen Staley, an 8th grade science teacher at Fort Settlement Middle School. Several teachers even expressed the desire to help organize seminars on Hinduism in their schools. For more information on HSS visit www.hssus.org. Click here to view pictures from the event.