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Ramesh Bhutada: Pioneer places philanthropy over bottom line

A pioneer in philanthropy, he also brings together seemingly disparate business and bottom line in the same sentence with compassion and community service.

Ramesh Bhutada was recently recognized by the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston as a “pioneer” businessman who built a multi-million dollar enterprise over the past 25 years.

His business success acquires added significance, or is even dwarfed by the enormity of the generous philanthropic contributions he has made, numerous community service organizations he has helped establish and dozens of volunteers he encouraged through his business, Star Pipe Products.

Bhutada looks and sounds humble and modest.

“I believe the award is mainly for the team, not for an individual. I just happen to be a representative of the team. I feel good that the team has been recognized. We are very fortunate to have a good team in Star Pipe,” Bhutada says.

Community service is a part of the company’s core business philosophy.

“We allow and encourage employees to participate in community service. We give them paid time-off to do the service. In most cases, we also support the voluntary efforts with cash donations,” Bhutada says.

Encouraging community service among company employees is not merely good business practice or just for the sake of augmenting business value, but it helps nurture the good in individuals, and leads to building a strong value system in the company.

Such a business environment instills more team spirit, more helping nature and additionally workers in harmony contribute to higher productivity.

“In organizations people depend on each other. Here we learn to solve, not to create problems,” Bhutada says.

In Star Pipe, growth does not mean merely the volume of sales or revenue earned, but the emotional and spiritual growth in individual employees as well. Volunteerism helps achieve a balance in life.

Bhutada agrees that such a business climate cannot be created overnight. But the flexible work environment provides a platform for change.



Ramesh Bhutada, second from left, after receiving the pioneer businessman award from the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston, poses with daughter-in-law Shraddha, left, wife Kiran, and son Rishi Bhutada.

It is obvious that Bhutada’s philanthropy is not aimed at gaining name and fame. He makes his major contributions quietly, behind the scenes, with little fanfare.

As a seasoned businessman and community activist, Bhutada takes pride in the proliferation of several community organizations. He is glad that Houston is the home of organizations such as the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation, Pratham and several other charitable, religious and spiritual organizations.

“When you have so many organizations scheduling events, schedule conflicts occur. I would like to see the organizations, especially religious groups come together and coordinate their activities. That would help manifest the true spirit of religion,” he says.

Bhutada was born in Nandura, Maharashtra, in a middle class Maheshwari family. He did his matriculation in Marathi medium.

Bhutada came to Chicago in 1968 to do his master’s degree after earning a bachelor’s degree in engineering from the Birla Institute of Technology, Pilani.

In 1969, he got a job with Texas Instruments. A year later, he was laid off. The next ten years he worked at Racal Survey Systems, a geophysical survey company, as a computer programmer, and later as manager. Then, in 1981, he quit and started Star Pipe Products. He had another firm which sold computer systems for hydro-

graphic surveys.

Star Pipe first began importing manhole covers from India in 1980 and later diversified into pipe fittings and accessories. From humble beginnings, Bhutada built Star Pipe Products into a company of decent size. Today it has 14 distribution centers across United States and Canada. The company is an importer, manufacturer and distributor of pipe fittings and other industrial castings used in the waterworks industries.

Bhutada attributes much of his business success to the contributions made by his brother-in-law, Jugal Malani, as a partner in Star Pipe Products.

Now, Jugal Malani, who owns, Unique Industrial Products, is a noted industrialist and philanthropist, in his own right.

Bhutada was exposed to the spirit of selfless service back home in India, in his early years, when he came in contact with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

In his later years as he came in contact with spiritual organizations, he realized that the human spirit seeks the higher consciousness or the goal of liberation which in turn requires the attitude of selfless service and compassion.

“I am not where I would like to be in that respect. It is a work in progress. One has to inculcate the qualities and work towards the higher goal,” Bhutada says.

Expanding this thought, Bhutada regrets the misplaced emphasis given to children’s

education where character building takes a back seat.

“The secular education teaches children how to make a living, but does not teach how to lead life. The Hindu value system fills this gap. I encourage parents to get their children involved in character-building activities through the Sunday schools and Bal Vihar conducted by various organizations,” he says.

Bhutada also has keen interest in holistic health. “In the modern industrial society, not much attention is paid to healthy living, exercise and good eating habits. Health is in our own hands. We all must pay attention to it. Listen to your own body,” he says.

“In early part of my life, I ignored the health aspect and to some extent, I am paying the price for it now. We need to become more conscious of our health and, adopt holistic health practices to maintain good health, devoid of stress,” Bhutada says.

Bhutada does not merely pay lip service to holistic health, and youth. He was instrumental in bringing Yoga through different establishments such as the Vipassana Meditation, Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhan Samsthana, and of late, Swami Ramdev’s Patanjali Yog Peeth. Bhutada played major role in bringing this institution to the Houston area.

The same interest in health and exercise motivated Bhutada to contribute to the MS 150 bike race and Star Pipe employees are encouraged to partici-

pate in this fund-raiser in large numbers.

Ramesh is currently serving as President of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) Southwest USA Division. HSS is a character-building, voluntary organization primarily involved with youth.

He has been a strong supporter of the DAV Montessori School.

He is on the board of trustees of Samskrit Bharati, USA. Samskrit Bharati is a non-profit organization, working to bring Samskrit back into daily life through the ‘Speak Samskritam’ movement.

He was also the founder and director of the Indo American Chamber of Commerce.

Bhutada is on the board of directors, Sewa International USA which manages projects in India and USA. Sewa International (India) is an umbrella for 45,000 projects and programs all over India, 80 types of activities and has more than 150,000 volunteers involved in running these programs and projects. Sewa International (USA) work in USA includes relief work during Hurricane Katrina (Louisiana), Hurricane Ike (Houston) and Bhutanese Refugee Empowerment project throughout the USA.

During 1975 to 1977 Emergency was declared in India. Democratic elections and civil liberties were suspended and opposition leaders were imprisoned. Bhutada organized protest meetings in Houston in support of restoration of democracy in India. He supported leaders who took active stand against emergency and organized public meetings for them.

Shrinarayan Chandak, a classmate and friend of Ramesh Bhutada, has this to say:

“I have known Ramesh Bhutada from his graduate schooling days at Illinois Institute of Technology, (IIT) Chicago, 1966-68. Satyen (Sam) Pitroda and I had just graduated from IIT Chicago then. Ramesh was active at the India Student Association at IIT Chicago. He was always friendly, cool and clear about his thoughts. He probably carried some of his great qualities of “doership” and leadership from his father who was a patriot, went to jail for freedom, and was a RSS (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) functionary in Nandura, Ramesh’s home town back in India. Over the four decades Ramesh has earned our respect for being

COMMUNITY NEWS

modest, charitable, an entrepreneur and a compassionate person. Ramesh and his wife Kiran are best known for their deep commitment to charity and simple living. They are a role model couple. Ramesh has exceptional visionary and leadership qualities. He is the accomplished champion of team play and empowerment of people around him.

“As Founder/President of India Development and Relief Fund, (IDRF), I have known Rameshji for almost two decades. IDRF is a U.S.- based Public Charity dedicated to India’s integrated development at the grass roots level. We admire Rameshji’s contribution to IDRF as one of its major donor, who has also guided us regarding meeting our objectives. IDRF has so far contributed over \$21 million towards self-empowerment of thousands of the needy/poor people in India,” says Vinod Prakash.

“Rameshji is always in the forefront whenever there is endeavor of service, creation, and emancipation of mankind based on principles of Dharma. As a founding trustee of Patanjali Yogapeeth Trust, USA, his contribution are significant in our work of establishing Yoga, Ayurveda and spiritual principles based on Dharma in the world. The Indo-American Chamber of Commerce deserves our appreciation for selecting a very appropriate person for the award; by giving awards to deserving persons, not only the award gets prestige but it encourages the righteous people to do more good,” according to Swami Ramdev of the Patanjali Yog Peeth in Haridwar.

Sharad Amin, a Hindu community activist, says, “Rameshji is a true pioneer in community work as well as business. Houston’s first Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh Shakha started at Rameshji’s house. With his humbleness and persistent efforts, he has inspired so many volunteers, including me, to do grassroot



Ramesh Bhutada, in third row center, joins MS-150 participants from Star Pipes family.

community work.

“Rameshji is the first entrepreneur in Houston area who has provided facilities to be used exclusively for community activities. Keshav Smruti Community Center has been utilized for Yoga Classes by SVYASA, Janmashtami meetings by Hindus of Greater Houston, camp counselor training by Hindu Heritage Camp, weekly Shakha meetings by Hindu Swayam Sewak Sangh and so many other community meetings, all completely free of charge.”

Ramesh Shah, Chairman, Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA, says “Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA is very proud to say Ramesh Bhutada is one of us not because he is one of the largest donors sponsoring 200 schools every year, but due to his consistent guidance since the inception in 2001 and frank and honest opinion about operations and

donor relations.”

Renu Khator, Chancellor and president of the University of Houston System, says, “Rameshji is an inspiration to me. His simplicity and humility add to the depth of wisdom and insights that he has. He gives so much of himself to his family and the community and yet I have noticed that he always credits others for success. I cannot think of anyone more deserving of the Pioneer Award than Rameshji.”

Beth Kulkarni, a community activist who promotes the cause of Hinduism, now in The Woodlands, says “I have been privileged to know Ramesh Bhutada for about 20 years. One thing about Rameshji that impresses me the most is his choice of a simple lifestyle. He does not seek to make friends with those in high positions, but spends his time with family and friends with similar values. He does not seek out

community awards or recognition, but would prefer to see others get awards.”

Rameshji has supported Indicorps over the years because he understands the importance of getting young Indians abroad to reconnect to India through service, says Rupal Shah.

Daniel Dominguez, CFO and Director, of Centro Familiar Cristiano or Christian Family Center, says “Ramesh is a

prime example of an individual that not only does things right but he also does the right thing. A very successful business person that in the process remains sensitive to human needs (the youth, the poor and the underprivileged), he never seeks recognition or self indulgence.”

Venketesh Murthy lived in USA and moved to Bangalore. He founded Youth for Seva.

“One thing I noticed about Rameshji is that he looks for people and organizations working with dedication for the society and offers to help even without being approached for help. When we launched ‘Youth for Seva’ in Bangalore, simply after reading about our activities, he offered to support our programs for the first year. That was a great morale booster for us,” says Murthy.

“Walk the talk and lead a balanced life with a strong element of seva (service) in it; nature will take care of you and your family,” is Bhutada’s mantra. He believes and practices joint family tradition – his son and daughter-in-law live with him and his wife Kiran in the Telfair subdivision in Sugar Land.

Kiran Bhutada, who has a law degree from Osmania University, deserves considerable credit for Bhutada’s success as she is also a very silent worker and a valuable advisor to her husband.

Thus, the family values pervades the business as well.

—SESHADRI KUMAR



Ramesh Bhutada with Swami Dayanand Saraswati.



Ramesh Bhutada and Rameshwar Kabra at the Maheshwari Mahasabha of North America 2008 convention in The Bahamas.