

WestCoastNewsline

DECEMBER 16, 2005

\$5 million expansion for Sunnyvale Hindu temple

SAM RAO

Sunnyvale, Calif

THE Hindu temple and Community Center in South Bay is ready for its next phase of expansion at current location on Persian Drive. "We are planning a minimum \$5 million expansion and beautification project" said founder-trustee Raj Bhanot, who is also treasurer of the temple.

Plans for the redesign and improvement efforts, which include establishing a *Gopuram* structure of six domes, were submitted to the Sunnyvale City Council on November 17. Construction is slated for May 2006 and completion expected by 2007.

Currently, the 10-year-old temple still retains the look of a light industrial warehouse, as when it was established in 1994. The L-shaped one-storey warehouse was established over a 3.8 acre lot and sits adjacent to the Highway 237, which cuts across the Silicon Valley in an East-West direction.

Since the building was acquired during lean times in the Silicon Valley, and by sheer perseverance; fueled by the growing population of Indian-Americans in the Bay area, organizers have managed to establish a thriving temple. The two open areas of the warehouse space has grown to accommodate a main prayer hall area, an extended dining room area and separate community hall which can accommodate up to 1,500 people.

Over the last decade, the community hall has been a big draw because of its central location, and this has helped with fundraising quite a bit. However, the emphasis on this aspect has not sat well some of the devotees. Particularly, they are unhappy that not much was accomplished in temple capital building improvements, except for necessary electrical, fire sprinkler systems and improvements to the restrooms etc. Another problem has



(L) Raj Bhanot shows the plan for the Sunnyvale Hindu Temple expansion; (R) A closeup of the plans. Sam Rao

been parking space, which gets filled up at major festivals.

The prime location of the site has prompted several builders and property developers to offer bids on the property. The last bid being entertained by the temple authorities and board was a reported \$15 million offer for the 3.8 acre lot. It has been reported that a neighboring property has already been acquired by the same builder.

However, the temple board recently decided to remain committed to the present location and make improvements, which have been pending for awhile. The new design of the temple has been proposed by Fremont-based Archevon Architects and Builders, led by Kartik Patel. Patel has done a similar project with the Northern California Jain temple

in the neighboring city of Milpitas, which was completed 2000. Naranji Patel, current president of the Sunnyvale temple said that the all-marble façade and specially designed gates and doors will be imported from Ahmedabad. Deities and related construction materials will come from Jaipur. "We have \$860,000 in the temple construction fund and a \$2 million loan approved. We have to raise \$2.14 million from the community. With about 5,000 families, this comes to about \$1000 per family" said Bhanot.

While the Jain temple has a beautiful architectural design, it was bogged down by cost overruns and also some design and landscape deficiencies. These have been addressed and the Sunnyvale temple design has been approved by the Sunnyvale Temple Board of di-

rectors and prominent community members as well, according to Bhanot.

As in any US construction project, approvals, city-sponsored inspections and permits are routine and thorough. "The maximum allowable height for a structure in Sunnyvale is 32 feet, so we decided on 28 feet as the height of the main dome, under which we will house the main deity of Lord Ganesha" said Bhanot. A similar long process of gaining approval was performed in July 1994, until the conditional use permit was granted.

On popular festival dates like Holi, Diwali and special events, it is customary to attract 5,000 people on a day-confirming the vision of founding members who recognized the need for a temple in the South Bay region, as Santa Clara County comprising of San Jose, Sunnyvale and Santa Clara, constitutes the second highest concentration of Indian Americans in the US.

Address: 420-450 Persian Drive, Sunnyvale, CA 94089

Phone: 408-734-4554

www.sunnyvaletemple.org

Temple rivalry: Priest establishes a 'proper' temple

SAM RAO

Sunnyvale, Calif

SUNNYVALE already hosts one 10-year-old temple: Sunnyvale Hindu Temple, which was converted from a warehouse and sits on a 3.8 acre lot in North Sunnyvale. In what has seemingly become a battle of ideology, well-respected Bay Area Hindu priest Pandit Gajanan Joshi is all set to establish a rival temple in the city.

"We are going to establish a proper Sanatan Dharma Mandir-according to Vedic principles," emphatically declared Joshi, who until four months ago was the head priest at the Sunnyvale Hindu Temple. Joshi claims that the Sunnyvale temple is operated more like an Arya samaj temple and, according to him, places too much emphasis on social and cultural programs, avoiding proper Vedic and Sanatan Dharmic principles.

Joshi, who hails from Brahmin priesthood lineage, is well respected and considered a Vidwan among priests. He is well-known for his grasp on Dharma Shastra, Aagama and Hindu astrology. He has served at the Livermore and Sunnyvale temples for over a decade. He has also held the head priest position at Sri Kshetra in Gokarna, Karnataka and Ganga Dhareshwara Temple, Siddha Pura, Karnataka.

The current location of the new temple, the Sanatan Dharama Kendra, is also in a light industrial location about 2 miles south of the current temple. The location on Kifer Road puts it plumb in the middle of a road that connects the busy COSTCO supermarket and the Home Depot center with neighbors including National Semi Conductor. The temple location is next to the RTS Center-a contract circuit board



Pandit Gajanan Joshi of Sanatan Dharma Kendra. Sam Rao

manufacturer, which is housed in a 44,000 square feet lot with about 164,000 built space. The Sanatan Dharma Kendra will share its leased facility with the RSVP Center, a company that coordinates and offers facilities for events. The location was previously unoccupied from 1990 to 1995.

Asked about the choice of location, Joshi says, "We have this site leased for 2 years; which had a conditional permit for a church. We will establish a proper temple here. We have the

support of a lot of devotees, who realize the need for proper rituals; trained priests and the correct priorities of a Hindu Sanatan Dharma Kendra."

According to Sunnyvale city officials, the use-permits are subject to improvements and are to be primarily operational on Sundays and weekends and (only) 'church' office uses during the midweek. In past instances, as in the case of the Great Exchange Church (Non Denominational Christian) at the same location, no related church uses were approved, such as a weekday private school, childcare or other types of weekday classes. All congregation related activities were supposed to occur within off-peak hours during the week and at limited times on weekends.

The proposal for the Sanatan Dharma Kendra is to use the facility for general temple operations, meeting rooms, storage areas, and classrooms. The two large open floor areas will include about 5,000 square feet of usable floor space, which will house the deities and have a small stage area. Three adjacent rooms are defined as office or classrooms and will also be used by RSVP center, which shares the facility.

"The numbers of devotees are not important (yet). We are doing the temple the proper way and we are already seeing a good response from the community, South Indian, North Indian and others," says Joshi.

Current hours of operation are Monday-Friday: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.; and weekends from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. with services from Homams, Aartis, and marriages, and birthday parties and other events.

Address: 895, Kifer Road, Sunnyvale, CA 94086

Phone: (408) 973 9294 or (408) 734 9335

www.sanatanandharmakendra.org

