

# India Centre Honours AIM for SEVA, Educational Charity, at Annual Gala Dinner

by ANUPAM SHARMA

Photos by AK FILMS

More than 300 people attended India Centre's 3rd annual gala dinner on Nov. 10 at Canad Inns, Polo Park, Winnipeg.

India Centre for Academic, Business & Community Excellence was created in 2013 through the partnership between India Association of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg. The centre strives to showcase the contributions of the Indo-Canadian community, heighten awareness and understandings among our two peoples and countries, and celebrate India from where the community traces its roots and values.

Distinguished guests who conveyed greetings in their official capacities included Ian Wishart, Manitoba's Minister of Education and Training; Terry Duguid, MP for Winnipeg South, and Brian Mayes, City Councillor for St. Vital. Chief Jim Bear of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation was a representative guest from the First Nations.

Dr. Pawan Singal served as Master of Ceremonies and ably guided the proceedings for the evening.

The annual dinners give India Centre the opportunity to recognize individuals and/or organizations for their achievements and contributions. This year, the India Centre Award was presented to a worthy community organization, AIM for SEVA, which helps educate needy students in India. Its main objective is to eradicate poverty through education in rural and tribal areas of India. This is achieved by providing free student hostels for underprivileged children. AIM of SEVA currently serves about 3,400 boys and girls, living in nearly 100 free student hostels across 16 states of India.

Dr. Terry Papneja, president of AIM for SEVA Canada, accepted the award on behalf of the organization and gave the keynote address. He was accompanied by his wife, Nimmi, and their friends, Dr. Vipin Mithia, vice-president of AIM for SEVA Canada, and his wife, Susmita.

AIM for SEVA was first established in North America in 2001 and the Canadian chapter in Toronto was started by Papneja in 2002. Of the 3,400 students in free student hostels in India, 1,800 students are supported by 15 city chapters across North America. The Toronto chapter leads all chapters in providing supporting for 600 students. The Toronto chapter has raised more than \$5 million, which Papneja attributed to the commitment and dedication from the chapter's



**L to R: Dr. Annette Trimbee, Dr. Terry Papneja (receiving India Centre Award), Prashant Tipnis and Dr. Pawan Singal president of Engineers Geoscientists Manitoba.**

volunteers.

Supporters can either build a hostel for \$190,000 in the city of their choice in India or sponsor a student for 10 years at \$500 per year. The Toronto Chapter has built 26 hostels.

Papneja's empathetic and inspiring leadership came through in his keynote address. Starting with an idea, he has been able to develop to a level where there is buy-in at all levels – volunteers and sponsors – and there is a strong institutional basis for sustainability.

He is personally moved by the inequalities (economic and social) that disadvantage the weaker and marginalized segments of society. For him, there is both a moral and economic argument why such situations should not be allowed to persist and stand. No effort is small or big, so long as we all in our various capacities "walk the talk" and commit to doing something about situations that rob children of hope and possibilities.

Papneja indeed "walks the talk." A few days after the event, India Centre received from him a letter of appreciation and thanks for the honour bestowed upon AIM for SEVA. A pleasant surprise was that his letter was accompanied by an unsolicited cheque in the amount of \$20,000 dedicated to the cause of the



**Dr. Vipin and Sushmita Mithia, left, with Dr. Terry and Nimmi Papneja.**

India Centre.

For both the partners – India Association and the University of Winnipeg – and India Centre, the above gesture is highly meaningful. It is more than just the money received. It is a concrete manifestation that the work we have undertaken in Winnipeg has begun to resonate with our supporters elsewhere and those we seek to serve. It is a vote of confidence! Income from the

India Centre Fund established with the University of Winnipeg Foundation will be used for various academic and community activities of the centre.

*Anupam Sharma is vice-chair, Board of Directors, India Centre for Academic, Business & Community Excellence*



**L to R: Anupam Sharma, MP Terry Duguid, Prashant Tipnis, Dr. Terry Papneja, Dr. Annette Trimbee and Dr. Pawan Singal**



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