

United Punjabis of America Vaisakhi Mela a Huge Success



The United Punjabis of America board of directors joins with dance participants and guests during the Vaisakhi Mela on Saturday, April 15, at the Mall of India in Naperville.. [Courtesy of Suresh Bodiwala]

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More than 700 people turned out for the United Punjabis of America's Vaisakhi Mela on Saturday, April 15, at the Mall of India in Naperville.

The festive celebration featured 20 booths selling colorful clothing and jewelry, providing information for various services available in the community, and offering delicious food for purchase.

A Dhol Tasha performance by Maharashtra Mandal heralded the start of the cultural program. Emcees Neha Sobti and Ramesh Malhan offered a warm welcome to all and invited the dignitaries to help light the lamp of friendship and celebration.

Congressmen Bill Foster and Raja Krishnamoorthi offered Vaisakhi greetings and congratulated UPA for hosting this event. Other dignitaries attending were Ranjit Singh (Consul, Indian Consulate in Chicago), state Sen. Laura Ellman, Naperville Mayor-Elect Scott Wehrli, Aurora Alderwoman Shweta Baid, Aurora Alderman John Laesch, and representatives of Illinois State Comptroller Susana Mendoza.

Every year, United Punjabis of America recognizes community members for their outstanding entrepreneurial or technical achievements and community services. This year five of these awards were conferred. Sudhir Dureja was recognized as a Distinguished Punjabi for Technical Achievements & Community Service; Dr. Anuja Gupta as a Distinguished Entrepreneur & Community Service Leader; Dr. Vijay Prabhakar as a Distinguished Community Service Leader; Ratna Kapur as a Distinguished Punjabi for Community Service Leadership; and Neha Sobti as a Distinguished Young Punjabi for Community Service. Dharam Punwani, President of UPA, congratulated the awardees and thanked them for their dedication to service.

Colorful giddhas and scintillating Bollywood-style medleys were the order of the day and included performances. The judges Sarita Sood, Kanan Dhingra, Shammi Wahi, and Ratna Kapur had the difficult job of selecting the winners. Placing first was Neha Sobti Dance Academy, second place went to Rhythms and Grace Dance Studio by Shalini Dixit, and Dwance Academy by Anu Bhattacharya. won the third-place trophy. But in the eyes of the audience, every performance and performer were a winner. The entertainment ended with a bang with another exciting performance of Dhol Tasha by a group of young

performers who handled their dhols with great confidence and skill.

"I am so grateful to everyone who participated in these performances and made Vaisakhi Mela such a success," said Rosey Bhasin, a UPA Board member. In his vote of thanks, Ashwani Mahajan, UPA Secretary, offered thanks to the entire UPA board and executive committee along with a special word of thanks to Girish Kapur and Atul Wahi for working with the Mall of India team on the logistics and the set up for the entire event."

"What a lovely Mela UPA has organized," gushed a guest as she collected her shopping bags. "I am so glad our friends and we decided to come. We've all enjoyed the shopping and watching these excellent performances." The celebrations continued well after 5 p.m. as the traffic at various booths continued to enjoy brisk business.

"Vaisakhi is such a beloved festival for us, and I am so proud that UPA continues this tradition of hosting a Mela to bring people together in friendship and gratitude for the bounty this festival blesses us with," said Pratibha Jairath, former board chairwoman.

Entry to the UPA Vaisakhi mela was free. It was made possible by the support of various levels of sponsorships that included: International Fresh Market (Event Level), Mr. Anil Loomba, Home Mortgage Solutions Inc. (Platinum Level), Mr. Amrit Mittal, New York Life (Gold Level), Four Silver Level sponsorships of Mr. Rahul Wahi, LLT Group; Mr. Sunil Shah, New York Life; Dr. Bhupinder Beri, Crossroad Animal Hospital; Heartland Bank, and eight Bronze level sponsorships of Iroquois Dental, Moin Hauque Group, Veranda Senior Living, State Bank of India, Blue Sky Innovations, Orochem, Sajmil Builders, and Om Signs and Graphics.

United Punjabis of America is a charitable nonprofit community service organization that has been organizing cultural and social events since 2013, donates food to various food pantries, and offers scholarships for community service.