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## Centre aids Indian Americans

By Ritu Jha (source: Home News Tribune Online)

Perth Amboy: From outside it looks like any other nursing home, but a step onto the third floor of the Alameda Center for Rehabilitation and Care reminds one of Shakespeare's best known lines from "As You Like It."

"All the world's a stage . . . Last scene of all, That ends this strange eventful history, Is second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

Sending parents to a nursing home is difficult for American families. But for an Indian family, doing so runs counter to the culture.

Hindu culture teaches followers to stay close to parents and to look after them when they are old.

But things change.

Now Indian American children who cannot take proper care of their parents send them to the Alameda Center in Perth Amboy, which has a floor dedicated to the care of elderly Indian residents.

The floor was created by Dr. Mukund Thakar, who said the Perth Amboy facility is the only one of its kind in the country.

"It's all Indian from start to finish," said Thakar who started the Indian nursing home as a rehabilitation and care center on July 16, 2005.

Thakar said, "People adopt children, I adopted parents." and "I have 50 parents right now."

The center has an Indian ambience with images of Hindu gods and goddesses hung on the walls. "These pictures of god remind them of home," Thakar said.

Thakar, a medical doctor, came to the United States in 1989. He said after working at various hospitals for years in U.S., he felt there was an urgent need for an Indian American hospital or nursing home dedicated to South Asians and matching their lifestyle.

"I once saw a hospital staff offer nonvegetarian food to an old patient who was vegetarian. And the old guy was eating tuna fish because he was not aware what he was eating," Thakar said.

"The hospital incident was shocking, and my wife who is a nurse and I decided to work for the Indian community," Thakar said.

The center not only offers medical treatment but Indian meals, freshly cooked by Indian chefs. Everyday prayers are held before lunch and evening prayers before dinner at 6.30 p.m.

Every room is equipped with a television carrying Indian channels. And patients can talk in their local dialects with nurses and doctors.

The center now has 50 patients who fill the 50-beds on the third floor. Plans are now being made to expand it to the fourth floor.

"In one year we have received tremendous response from Indian-American families from all over the country," Thakar said.

The center has patients from Texas, Chicago, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Washington D.C and is receiving inquiries from West Coast.

Most of the patients are 88-years-old and older.

Jagarnath Trivedi, a 102-year-old, was a teacher in India. Trivedi, a former resident of Roosevelt Hospital in Edison, said, "I am in the rehabilitation center because I was trouble to my family, and they are Americanized and independent."

Trivedi said that he cannot stay alone at home and at the center he gets Indian food and can enjoy the Indian way of living. B"The center looks after me," he said.

Trivedi, who likes to read New York Times, said, "It is expensive, and so I read other newspapers now.

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Trivedi's son Arvind Trivedi, who is 71 years old, lives in Manalapan. He said that sending his father to the rehabilitation center was "not an easy choice." He said Hindu culture does not allow it, but sometimes you accept life as it comes.

Gangolli has been chosen for this year's Spirit of Liberty award for his contribution to his community.

Arvind Trivedi, who is a first-generation immigrant, said he "made the most difficult decision" in his life, sending his father to the nursing home.

Another patient at the center, Shankra Hari Haran, 88, said, he is happy he is at the center because every 30 minutes someone comes "to look after your needs."

"At home everyone goes to work, and I am all alone so it makes no difference to me now where I stay," said Haran.

Thakar said that the center tries to send residents home, if that's what they want.

"Our aim is to make them feel homey," he said.

He cited the experience of Vanita Mehta, an 88-year-old from Washington, D.C., who at first refused to speak but has overcome that.

"I was a trouble and had problems at home. Here I am fine," Mehta said.

Another patient, Malati Shah, of Cranbury, said, "I like this place because everyone lives together."

Thakar said that most of his patients, who refused to talk on their first visit, now read, sing and play games organized by the center.

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