



Diwali for a cause

AJIT JAIN

Over 150 members of the South Asian community and many doctors and business leaders got together at the Toronto General Hospital February 28 for the launch of the United Health Network's first Diwali fundraising Gala.

The event — which will be held October 16 at Toronto's Royal York Hotel — will be the UHN's starting link with the

here annually for treatment. Our mission is to achieve global impact with exemplary patient care.'

"This launch signifies the importance you attach to both Diwali and those who celebrate Diwali and that means persons of Indian origin who live in this country," said Indian Consul General Preeti Saran. "I commend the South Asian community of the Greater Toronto Area for supporting the University Health Network. Communities like ours continue to benefit from the excellent care provided at the Toronto General and Western Hospital emergency departments; they are greatly deserving of our support."

"As a UHN trustee, I am tremendously pleased that Diwali is being celebrated at the Ivy league institution of Canada. It shows the importance of the Indo-Canadians influence in Ontario and the goodwill of UHN... towards our community," Dr Dhun Noria, member of the gala organizing committee, told *India Abroad*.

She complimented Bell for "doing a phenomenal job of raising \$125,000 within 5 minutes." He convinced the guests to buy tables of \$10,000 each. As many as 11 tables were sold, with one person offering to pay \$25,000.

"This also shows the generosity of Indo-Canadians," said Noria, who bought one table for \$10,000.

Dr Anil Chopra, co-chair of the fundraising committee, spoke about the work they do in the emergency departments, how they attend to over 85,000 patients every year and the type of care they receive.

"The patients in our emergency departments come from all backgrounds and communities within the GTA (Greater Toronto Area). We are grateful for the leadership and enthusiasm of our South Asian community leaders who are coming forward to support our program and excellence in patients care," Chopra said.



From right, Dr Shaf Keshvjee, Dr Dhun Noria, Dr Bob Bell, and businessman Farooq Noria

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South Asian community, said Dr Bob Bell, chief executive officer, UHN, making the formal announcement. The launch assumes added significance, as it will happen during the Year of India in Canada.

"We are excited to host this event," he said. "A Night to Shine will raise funds to support emergency medicine at the UHN."

Providing a brief overview of the achievements of UHN, which comprises of the Toronto General Hospital, the Toronto Western Hospital and the Princess Margaret Hospital, Bell said, "We have over 12,000 health care professionals now, leading the Canadian and in many cases North American medical industry... over a million patients come

'The beginning of a wonderful celebration for our community'

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Organizers of the first Diwali fund raiser of the University Health Network are pleased to have Ajay Virmani, president and chief executive officer, Cargojet, on board to organize the entertainment for the event.

"Under his leadership you can expect nothing but the best and the entertainment will be stellar with Bollywood artists performing," said Dr Anil Chopra, director, emergency medicine, UHN, and co-chair of the Diwali Gala.

Virmani is a big name in the entertainment industry in Canada, Chopra said, listing the films that he has produced, including *Breakaway*, which's in the post-production stage; *Bollywood/Hollywood*; *Water*; *International Khiladi* and *Mr And Mrs Khiladi*.

"I am confident this will be one of the hottest events in the city of Toronto in 2011," Virmani said. "What better way to celebrate this auspicious occasion (*Diwali*) then by giving back to those who have worked so hard to make our lives and our communities stronger. The proceeds of this gala will go towards the support of the life-saving care offered in the emergency departments of the Toronto General and Toronto Western Hospitals at University Health Network."

He also announced the launch of the Virmani Family Foundation's philan-



Ajay Virmani

thropic division, Heroes for Humanity, which will host an annual gala to raise funds for charitable causes across Canada. The money that they raise this year will all go to the UHN.

"We are confident that through the joint efforts of our two great organizations, we will put together a first class event that all of you will enjoy," he added. "As we continue to celebrate India in Canada in 2011,

we feel this is just the beginning of a wonderful celebration for our community."

'We cannot always wait for the government to step up to the responsibility'

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Vikram Khurana, president, Prudential Consulting, is looking forward to co-chairing the Toronto General Hospital's inaugural Diwali fundraising gala with Dr Anil Chopra, head of emergency, TGH.

Khurana is optimistic about raising over \$1 million for "patient care in the emergency department of TGH, buying new equipment and making more investments in technology to make wait time shorter and enhance patient care."

"Lives are at stake. We cannot always wait for the government to step up to the responsibility," he added. "We all, as citizens, have a responsibility towards the

less fortunate. While many of the well-heeled people that you see in this room can easily get on a plane and fly any where across the world to get the best health care, many Canadians can't. This fundraiser is about them. This is about providing care for everybody in the same way as we have received care in our lives."

But it is believed that 30 to 40 percent of the money raised goes towards organizing the fundraiser. "The problem," Khurana said, was "you need a rallying point to raise funds, as without that it is so difficult to persuade people to write checks."

"Charitable institutions in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) alone need to raise \$4 billion. Each institution has some worthy cause," he added.

This is why Khurana and the others behind the TGH Diwali gala are not worried about other fundraisers like the Trillium Health Center Diwali fundraiser, which will mark its 10th anniversary this year dividing the community.

"The Trillium can only take 1,000 to 1,500 guests," he said. "The community is now 400,000 in the GTA. So, as the community matures and grows, there's an ability to reach many other institutions that are geographically diverse and are attending to the needs of the patients."

He added that the TGH's Diwali fundraising team had discussions with the Trillium team over a year back, advising them about the plans for such an event.

"Both organizations agreed that this (*Diwali*) event is very near and dear to Indo-Canadians, and so it is a matter of time before there are many similar events around the same theme," he said.

"They (*THC*) have their own channels," Khurana said, "which needed a rallying point. We are creating such a rallying point to help raise funds. The giving is still the same. Giving at a particular time is the same. And giving at an auspicious time of the year is the same."



Vikram Khurana