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EPIC DUSHEERA AND DIWALI FESTIVAL AT CONSTELLATION STADIUM

by Shobana Muratee
SUGAR LAND – It was that time of the year when Constellation Stadium gets a cultural makeover, from Sugar Land Skeeters baseball ground to a celebration pavilion for Diwali – ‘Festival of Lights’.



Parade Marshal Himesh Gandhi, Mayor pro-tem, City of Sugar Land leads the parade at the Skeeters Stadium with Dr. Arun Verma during the Dusheera – Diwali festival . Photo credit: Bijay Dixit.

Drawing capacity crowds for the fifth year in a row, the stadium had nearly 10,000 people on Saturday, October 15th evening witnessing the largest Diwali celebrations in Houston organized by the Shri Sita Ram Foundation. As the epic drama ‘Ramayan’ – the story of Lord Rama and his conquest over the evil King Ravana of Lanka unfolded on stage, crowds cheered ‘Jai Sri Ram’, hailing victory of good over evil! Lord Rama coronation thereafter, was heightened by showering of flowers from a helicopter,



Vinnie Verma (left) founder of host organization Shri Sita Ram Foundation getting ready for the Maha Aarti at the Diwali festival held at Skeeters Stadium. With her is with Grand Sponsor Wells Fargo representative. Photo by Bijay Dixit.

“Everyone felt the presence of Lord Ram. Spirituality was in the air and the atmosphere was electrifying with slogans of Jai Shri Ram, reverberating all night long,” expressed Dr. Arun Verma, founder, Shri Sita Ram Foundation. he welcomed the guests and dignitaries: Consul General of India, Dr. Anupan Ray, Himesh Gandhi, Mayor pro-tem, City of Sugar Land, Harish Jajoo, Sugar Land Councilman, Ken Mathew, Mayor pro-tem, City of Stafford and Sam Merchant representing US Congressman Al Green. He later recognized Grand Sponsors Wells Fargo Bank and the Nova Asset Management and other sponsors and vendors. Media sponsors, including Voice of Asia were also

recognized on the occasion.

Classical and Bollywood dances by local artists engaged the audience throughout. The epic play ‘Ramleela’ presented by Dr. Ratna Kumar was engaging with its many characters (of all ages) and colorful



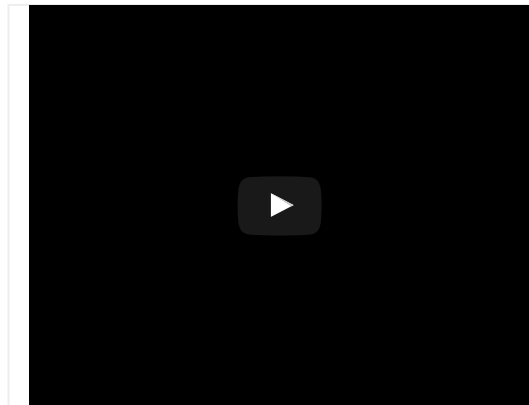
Students of Divya Unni, Choreographer, performing. They are one of the many dance performers.

costumes. Ashirwad – A Blessing, presented an enchanting and informative skit, “Goddess Lakshmi’ (Goddess of Fortune), detailing the avatars and power of Goddess Lakshmi, superbly directed by Geetha Ravala. Last year they had presented Goddess Durga. Reciting the ‘Hanuman Chalisa’ was added to this year upon the request of former Consul General Harish Parvathaneni and will remain as an attraction. The cultural segment was emceed by Dr. Nik Nikam, Director, and Sangeeta Dua, host, TV Houston.

Under the floodlights, 50 ornate floats representing various organizations of Houston were led in parade by Parade Marshal Himesh Gandhi, Mayor pro-tem, City of Sugar Land and Dr. Arun Verma. The grandeur of the parade was in the variety and detailing of the floats like Goddess Lakshmi seated on a lotus, Lord Ram’s Court and all the magnificent Gods and Goddesses, brides, temple chariots, the elegant Wells Fargo stagecoach, and dancers captured the essence of Indian culture. Abha Dwivedi gave the commentary while presenting the floats.

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Giant red Lord Ganesha seated at the entrance. In front is the elaborate flower rangoli. Photo by Bijay Dixit

This was followed by the Maha Aarti led by Hindu priests from Sri Meenakshi temple and others, and joined by Dr. Arun Verma, Mrs. Vinnie Verma, Consul General Dr. Anupam Ray, his wife Dr. Amit Goldberg, mother and son and other dignitaries and guests. The sounds of chanting emerging from the center of the stadium (where the aarti was being performed at a shrine) synchronized with the thousands in the bleachers, all holding digital diyas (lamps), joining in the aarti.

Part of the celebrations included the bazaar with 70 stalls including nine food vendors serving delicious Indian street style food. The entire stadium was decorated with over 250,000 multicolored light bulbs. A giant Lord Ganesha at the entrance, 25ft tall Lord Hanuman, and full-fledged temple in the concourse managed by priest Hanuman Swami of Rama, Jaya Niketan temple of Katy was all transcending experience for many. Apart from the costume competition, children got to enjoy the pony rides, explore the fire engine and play in the playground. But the best part was in the grand finale giant effigies of Ravan,

Kumbhakarn and Meghnad were set ablaze symbolizing ridding the world of evil. The spectacular fireworks illuminating the skies were the highlight of the event.

"Attending Diwali -



From L-R: Dr. Sen Pathak (2nd), Subhash Gupta and Sarojini Gupta (5th & 6th) and members of media honored on the occasion.. Koshy Thomas, Voice of Asia publisher seen far right.

DasheharaMela in the Skeeter's stadium organized by ShriSita Ram Foundation was a thrilling experience for me and my wife Pushpa. Every performance, parade, burning of Ravan's effigy and the firework in the packed stadium was amazing. Houston became Ram Jiiikii Ayodhya when the rose petals showered from the sky. What a celebration!,' exclaimed Hindi guru Arun Prakash, Author 'Namastejii' elementary, intermediate and advance Hindi books.

An event of such a magnitude takes a whole year of planning and the host organizers; Sri Suta Ram Foundation is already getting a head start on 2017. The play Ram Leela will be presented on Sunday, November 6th at 3pm at the Stafford Centre.



Fireworks lit up the skies at the Constellation Stadium in Sugar Land during the Dusheera and Diwali celebrations. Photos by Bijay Dixit.

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