



Temple History

It is well known that the United States of America is a country of immigrants from all corners of the world. Immigrants from India started arriving in the Tri Cities (Saginaw, Bay City and Midland) in the early 1970s, in small numbers. Their numbers gradually grew, and by the first decade of the present century there were a fair number of Hindu immigrants from India in the Tri Cities. They were desirous of building a place of worship- a temple.

In late September of 2009, there was a Deepavali function organized by the local India Association at the Horizon Conference Center in Saginaw. Soon after the function a few of us were talking, standing in the corridor outside the meeting hall. I said: "If there are a small number of dedicated individuals among us, we can build a temple here."

Dr. Narendra Kumar took up the challenge and scheduled a meeting of interested people from the Tri Cities at his house the following day, Saturday October 3, 2009. At that meeting, a decision was taken to build a temple. Dr. Bhandiwad suggested the name "Tri City Hindu Temple" and it was adopted by the group.

An ad-hoc group of office bearers was selected as follows:

President: K.P. Karunakaran, M.D.
Fundraising: Narendra Kumar, M.D.
Construction: R. Sarvepalli, M.D.
Worship/Puja: A. Bhandiwad, M.D.

Sometime later, a regular election of temple trustees and various office bearers was conducted under the direction of J. Chandran as Election Commissioner. A Board of Trustees consisting of thirty members was elected. The Bylaws of the temple were written by J. Chandran and were adopted by the temple's members during the General Body meeting held on November 13, 2010.



Temple History

A Temple Construction Committee was constituted with the following members:

R. Sarvepalli, M.D. (Chair)
K.P. Karunakaran, M.D.
N. Kumar, M.D.
S. Malewar
V.C. Reddy, M.D.

This committee searched far and wide in the three counties - Saginaw, Midland and Bay - for a suitable location, driving to several remote locations, often braving Michigan's harsh winter weather. After a long and hard search, the committee settled on what became the current location of the Tri City Hindu Temple. The purchase of the approximately twenty-acre plot of land at a cost of around \$300,000 was approved by the Temple's Board of Trustees and the transaction was completed on September 10, 2010.

An approach road was constructed from Bay Road to the temple site and duly named Temple Court. The address of the Tri City Hindu Temple's future location thus became 3311 Temple Court, Saginaw, MI 48604. Mr. Deepak Gupta was instrumental in getting the County Road Commission's approval to name the road 'Temple Court'. The important ritual of Bhumi Puja or worship of the Mother Earth, symbolizing the consecration of the temple construction site, was conducted on an auspicious day in the presence of a large number of devotees. The date was September 18, 2010.

Fundraising for the construction of the temple was progressing well under the leadership of Dr. Narendra Kumar. The construction of the temple was entrusted to the Manyam Group of Frankenmuth, who had prior experience with construction of temples, most notably the Novi Venkateshwara Temple which was nearing completion. The Manyam Group, under the leadership of Praveen Manyam, also assumed the responsibility of General Contractor in addition to that of Temple Architect.



Temple History

It was decided from the outset that temple construction would begin only after sufficient funds had been collected. Despite the tireless efforts of the fundraising committee and the generosity of the members of the community due to the relatively small size of the Tri City Hindu diaspora, it took several months before there was enough money in the bank for the trustees to feel comfortable about commencing the construction of the temple. The groundbreaking ceremony was conducted on Sunday, May 12, 2013. Another important decision that the trustees made, with the approval of the temple's General Body, was that the construction of the temple would be completed in two phases. Given the considerable cost involved and the limited resources at our disposal, this was considered a practical approach. Phase-I would consist of a prayer hall with provision to install temporary deities and perform daily puja. Phase II would be the temple proper, with the sanctum sanctorum, gopuras and all the other accouterments traditionally present in temples.

As fundraising efforts went on and temple construction progressed steadily, the devotees met regularly for pujas and Gita study classes under the guidance of Dr. Anirudha Bhandiwad, maintaining the collective enthusiasm and spiritual impetus so essential for a project such as this.

Although there was widespread participation and involvement, a few individuals deserve special mention: Vidya Bhandiwad, Lakshmi Karu, Sheilanthi Chandran, Samarajyam Kondapaneni, and Vanishree Chavali were instrumental in sustaining the momentum of this spiritual effort. Several of the pujas were conducted at rented premises in Freeland, and several at Dr. V.C. and Lalitha Reddy's condominium in Bay City which, through their efforts, we were able to obtain rent free.

The first phase of the temple, consisting of a large prayer hall, meeting rooms, a well equipped kitchen and generous parking facilities, is now complete. Despite several unforeseen and unavoidable delays, cost escalations, etc. the project has been completed without incurring a single penny of debt.



Temple History

This testimony to the tireless dedication of the community leaders who spearheaded the effort, the commitment of the Trustees who gave of their valuable time to sit through countless meetings (fifty eight to be exact), and the generosity of the community members, several of whom gave much more than the amounts they had originally pledged. The amount raised thus far totals approximately 2.3 million dollars, which is commendable for a community of this size, but has barely been enough to complete Phase-I.

We can all be proud of our achievement, and hope to secure divine blessings through the regular conduct of pujas at our temple. However, we must continue to work tirelessly to complete the second phase of the temple as soon as possible. That will ensure the perpetuation of our glorious heritage in Central Michigan, and enable us to put the stamp of our generation on this community. A complete list of donors is published in this souvenir. Everyone's contribution is valuable; no amount is too small, and no effort is too little. May the blessings of Lord Rama be showered upon all of us.

By
K.P. Karunakaran
Former Chairman, Board of Trustees (2015)

Early History of TriCity Hindu Temple (TCHT) has been documented in the souvenir published on the Inauguration Date of the First Phase of the Temple on June 7, 2015 and is reprinted in this souvenir.

Subsequent to opening of Phase I of TCHT, the devotees and the Board of Trustees were desirous of building an additional conventional style Hindu temple, as the Phase I building was considered as “temporary housing” of the Temple proper.



Temple History

But as our community is not very big in the TriCity area, there were doubts and questions about the capability of venturing into expensive and expansive projects as well as its future sustainability. We discussed these issues at several Board Meetings. Finally, a definite decision was made to proceed with Phase II to build a conventional (traditional) style temple. The optimists who pushed this idea were, Dr. Kumar, Dr. Maragiri, Dr. Bhandiwad, Dr. Sarvepalli, and Mr. Prabhakar, Dr. Karunakaran.

Sufficient funds of about \$6.5 million was raised from the community over a period of six years.

Fundraising was a long, tedious, and laborious process. We considered every contribution, whether small or large, was of great value. A group of donors were very generous in their contributions.

In connection with achieving our target of \$6.5 million, special mention of Dr. Kumar, Dr. Maragiri, Dr. Bhandiwad, and Dr. Karunakaran has to be made.

Dr. Sarvepalli, Chairman of the Construction Committee, along with the following members, Mr. Ben Prabhakar, Mrs. Rajyam Kondapenini, Dr. Maragiri, Dr. Bhandiwad, Dr. Karunakaran, Mr. S. Malewar, Mrs. M Malewar, and Mr. Subash Ramani, steered the construction efficiently and cost-effectively and accomplished a beautiful and structurally safe building.

Special mention has to be made about Dr. C. Reddy for handling the finances for the Temple.

Mr. Prabhakar was the main member who brought up the idea of “Indianization” (meaning a conventional style traditional temple architecture) with fiberglass structural additions.



Temple History

The fiberglass structural additions were supplied by FRP Associates, Inc. in Pune, India, through their agent in the U.S., Mr. Vipul. The structures were made in Pune, India and were shipped from Mumbai to New York via the Arabian Sea, Suez Canal, Mediterranean Sea, and Atlantic Ocean. They were then transported from New York to Saginaw by road.

The construction company was Wolgast Corporation, Saginaw, who built an aesthetically beautiful and structurally strong temple.

The processes of fundraising and resolving construction issues were not easy. The dedication, cooperation, and resolve of everyone, especially the members of the Fundraising and Construction Committees and the Temple Board was instrumental in solving the problems which came up every now and then. Every member of these committees deserves credit for these achievements.

The phenomenal work done by Dr. Maragiri, Dr. Kumar, Dr. Karunakaran, Dr. Bhandiwad, and Dr. Sarvepalli in fundraising is acknowledged and appreciated.

There were occasions when the course of action has been difficult and sometimes hanging in balance. At these junctures, there is no question we had to admire at the astonishing optimism provided by Dr. Maragiri, Dr. Kumar, Dr. Bhandiwad, Dr. Sarvepalli, Mr. Prabhakar, and Dr. Karunakaran in accomplishing this final outcome. They are our cheerleaders.

We also appreciate the contributions of Lakshmi Karunakaran, Rajyam Kondapenini, and Vidya Bhandiwad in the Puja Committee and other Temple services. Their constant and ubiquitous presence in all Temple activities is gratefully appreciated.

A note on the change of Chairmanship of the Board: Dr. Karunakaran expressed the desire to step down from the Chairmanship of the Board of TCHT in November, 2017 and so in June, 2018, Dr. Bhandiwad gracefully agreed to assume the Chairmanship, and did so in June, 2018.



Temple History

During the tenure of Dr. Karunakaran's Chairmanship from October 3, 2009 to June 2018 we conducted about 110 Board Meetings. All the Board Members were enthusiastic in their support of the Temple.

The Board Meetings were held in the houses of the members from October 3, 2009, until June 7, 2015, when Phase I of the Temple was inaugurated. The meetings were mostly at Dr. and Lakshmi Karunakaran's residence. We used to have at least 20 members attending. There were also several General Body Meetings at their house with at least 100 members attending. Lakshmi was the one providing hospitality—and she worked hard at it. She made everyone feel welcome and provided enough snacks, especially vada and tea. It was a labor of love, warmth, and cordiality. Thus, she nurtured camaraderie and cooperation among the members.

Mrs. Chinna Maragiri as the Chairperson of the Kitchen Committee, did a yeoman and formidable job, providing good food at the Temple.

Mrs. Vidya Bhandiwad was the Temple's multi-tasker, taking overall care of the Temple needs and activities, from flower deliveries, making garlands (along with Lakshmi Karunakaran, Rajyam Kondapenini and others), to taking care of accounting and banking responsibilities (in association with Lakshmi Karunakaran).

Bhagesh Patel and Amit Surati have done yeoman-service for the Temple. They have been available to do all kinds of service at the Temple, ranging from the mundane to the spiritual. Amit Surati was appointed as the Temple Manager in 2021.



Temple History

I wish to record one instance which occurred about 2 years ago. As a new Temple Priest had arrived from India in the dead of winter, he was temporarily accommodated at a room in the Temple, alone. That year the winter was severe. A few days after his arrival there was a severe winter storm during the night. It was heavily snowing and suddenly the power (electricity) went off at the Temple and the surrounding areas. The alarm system sounded continuously. The priest, new to the place, started panicking and called me at home. I called Amit. Amit, disregarding the heavy snowfall, slippery roads, pitch darkness and below freezing temperatures, went to the Temple. He disarmed the alarm system and took the priest to his motel and consoled him. That was a timely and heroic help. That is what Amit is. Bhagesh Bai is an ongoing help at the Temple, in all its activities and his help is gratefully acknowledged.

Special mention has to be made of Dr. Meena Ramani and Dr. Vani Chavali of their dedication to the Temple activities, active participation and contributions.

Mr. Prabhakar took care of the website, announcements and was a visionary in giving us ideas for the aesthetics of the Temple building.

We also want to acknowledge and appreciate the good work and contributions of Lakshmi Karunakaran, Rajyam Kondapenini, and Vidya Bhandiwad in the Puja Committee and other Temple services. We consider that this new Temple in the TriCities is a great achievement for a small community like ours. Every one of us has reason and basis for being proud of it.

We thank all the donors—every contribution is valuable; no amount is small, and no effort is too little.

A part from the names mentioned above, there are many others who have contributed in several ways to bring the Temple to its present level. We acknowledge their contributions and express our appreciation.



Temple History

At this juncture it may not be out of place to look into the future of the Temple. The “Founding Members” of TCHT will eventually have to hand over to the younger generation. We hope they will rise up to the task.

May the blessing of Lord Rama be showered upon all of us.

K.P. Karunakaran

Historian and Chairman, Kumbhabhishekam Committee

