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HMM Celebrates Makar Sankrant

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By Neeta Patwardhan

HOUSTON: Houston Maharashtra Mandal (HMM) got off to a sizzling start in the New Year by welcoming more than six hundred guests to their annual Makar Sankrant celebration. Held at Durga Bari on January 17, the event celebrated the diverse taste of Maharashtra.

Incoming President, Bhagyashree Dixit thanked the Maharashtrian community for their overwhelming response and expressed gratitude to HMM sponsors. The 2015 platinum sponsors were KT Bombay Bazaar and CGS IT Staffing Services. Gold sponsors included Vishala Grocers and Maharaja Bhog restaurant. Additionally, Aling's Hakka, KT Bombay Bazaar, Vishala Grocers, Maharaja Bhog, Udipi Café, Radha Ravala and Ayesha's Salon contributed raffle prizes.

The event, a tour de force of Maharashtrian cuisine included more than twenty stations with enthusiastic participants serving up their favorite family recipes from "Thalipeeth," (multigrain

pancakes) served with a fiery “Kolaphuri Thecha” to “Panhe,” a sweet, summertime beverage made from raw mangos, and laced with cardamom.

All time chowpatty favorites, “Vada Pav,” “Pani-Puri” and “Bhel” were devoured with delight. As low temperatures hovered outside, these zesty dishes with an explosion of flavors warmed up more than just our hearts. No gastronomic excursion of Maharashtra would be complete without steamed “Modaks” and “Puran Poli,” calming antidotes to otherwise spicy fare.

Ladies were welcomed with time-honored Haldi-Kunku and received “Tilgul” (sesame sweets). All HMM members received “Waan,” a gift of bright candle holders and a copy of Kalnirnay, the best selling calendar that documents festivals and auspicious days.

Younger kids took part in Bor Nhaan, a custom where they are showered with the new crop of the season. The idea behind this ancient practice was to introduce toddlers to new food.

New brides had the opportunity to partake in a long standing Maharashtrian tradition – to be photographed in delicate jewelry made from “Halwa,” (sugar beads).

In popular lore, Makar Sankrant celebrates the harvest and bounty we receive from the earth. In so doing, it should also serve as a gentle reminder to remain conscious in our every day interactions with the planet we inhabit.

More importantly, Sankrant represents movement. Makar Sankrant marks an astrologically significant movement in the skies. This shift in the zodiac brings about a change in the way we embrace the world. We are all travelers after all, moving constantly in search of new places, meaningful experiences and wisdom that might further enrich our journeys.

This festival marks the beginning of spring, with a renewed promise of warmer and longer days ahead. At the end of a chilly spell, when Houstonians were more than ready to let go of our unusually cold winter, the warmth of HMM’s 2015 Makar Sankrant was definitely one to be savored.