

Golf, the Pranav Mandir and Educational Scholarships

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There's nothing more that Michael Dave Surajpaul would like than to make his temple—which he has dedicated himself to for the past seven years—proud of him. Equally, his temple—the Pranav Mandir—would like nothing more than to see him excel and carry on the burning torch of his heritage into the subsequent generation.

Michael, an 18-year old embarking on his first year as a student of the University of Toronto at Scarborough, is “privileged” to be the first winner of the annual scholarship bestowed by Mr. Dhaman Kissoon, a prominent lawyer, university lecturer and administrant of numerous charitable causes, and his three brothers Danny, Krish and Mitra Kissoon. This scholarship—given to students with excellent marks entering their university career—will provide Michael with a total of \$3,000 which is to be released in sums of \$1,000 per academic year for three years.

“It motivates me to do something that will make the temple proud of me. It would be like they put the money to good use” says Michael as he awaits the start of his weekly heritage class at the Pranav Mandir during which he is taught the history, meaning and philosophy of Hinduism and the musical technique of the tabla.

Michael, like many other children most of whom are younger than he, is the product of a disciplined structure of allegiance and altruism. The foundation of that structure is held tightly in place by active members of the Pranav Cultural Centre, frequent and visiting devotees of the mandir and the extraordinary dedication of individuals such as Mr. Kissoon, Swami Bhajanananda, the religious leader of Pranav Mandir and Sat Purushuttam, President of the Pranav Cultural Centre.

Within this institution, children of all ages are able to excel through the guidance of cultural and religious leaders, enabling them to surpass the expectations assigned to them by their social status. Equally, the Pranav Cultural Centre strives to create opportunities for young adults and children in Canada and abroad, to excel academically and socially and ultimately convey their heritage to the succeeding generations in the same manner that it is imparted on them.

Last Saturday, September 12th Mr. Kissoon, Swami Bhajanananda and Mr. Purushuttam gathered at the Royal Ontario Golf Club in Hornby, Ontario, along with their steadfast committee members, and over 100 golfers including their families, to play a round of golf in the 1st Annual Pranav Golf Tournament. The tournament is the first of what is to become a yearly practice aimed at raising funds to facilitate the growth and endurance of schools and scholarships in India, Guyana and within the Pranav Mandir, focusing strongly on children with a higher degree of social and educational deprivation. Spearheading the tournament is Mr. Kissoon and his brother Danny Kissoon who was able to secure two sponsors at a combined donation of \$20,000.



Tournament organizers Dhaman Kissoon (left), Navin Kissoon (right) and Sat Purushuttam (2nd right) pose with the winning players. Pix by Ramesh Ramkhalawan

“We have local community [members], Guyanese business professionals and we have business associates that we are familiar with from other communities,” states Mr. Kissoon. These professionals include a list of doctors, lawyers, accountants and business owners who according to Mr. Kissoon were not likely to miss the event as long as a good cause and a good game of golf was pledged.

The tournament committee comprises Dhaman Kissoon, Danny Kissoon, Sat and Linda Purushuttam, Janet and John Persaud, Mukesh and Indra Persaud and Gord Ramkissoon. Not to be discounted is the generous contributions of the tournament sponsors, the assistance of the Kissoon family, volunteers including Michael Surajpaul, and the unfaltering support of Swami Bhajanananda.

“One of the things that I was very pleased with is the hole sponsors and [they] are local community businesses that have come forward and given anywhere from \$200 to \$500 to sponsor a particular hole in the golf tournament” said Mr. Kissoon. Contented with the turnout, Mr. Kissoon is hoping the event will amass somewhere between \$20-\$25,000.

The game consisted of 18 holes played by about 120 golfers on teams of four players—each attempting to master the water hazards and sand bunkers of the beautifully constructed course. Young volunteers from the Pranav Mandir monitored the holes in the event that a golfer would hit a hole-in-one which offered a \$10,000 prize. While the winning hole-in-one was not rewarded to anyone, raffled prizes of golfing staples, games and crafts, food baskets and a mountain bike were presented to lucky participants and trophies to the winners of the tournament. The festivities were concluded with a delicious lunch featuring a fusion of Caribbean and North American cuisine prepared by the golf club’s house chef.

In his address to those in attendance, Mr. Purushuttam said, “We are very focused on the kids today. We firmly believe that our future lies with our kids. Every single thing that we do at our temple is focused on the future, teaching our kids our culture.” Mr. Purushuttam recalled the “insurmountable task” of planning the details of the tournament while pressed for time, but admits that it would not have been possible had it not been for the “remarkable” effort of this very “effective” committee. “I feel a great sense of belonging to a remarkable organization” he adds.

All proceeds will be divided among various schools in India, the Cove and John Ashram in Guyana and the children of the Pranav Mandir and will provide educational materials and improved facilities for all recipients. “It’s always good to give back to the community” says Mr. Kissoon. “It feels good. It’s a good thing to do when you see other people benefitting from what you are doing and you’re making progress in the community.”

