

KHAASBAAT

A PUBLICATION FOR INDIAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA

FEBRUARY 2023

WWW.KHAASBAAT.COM

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813-758-1786

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INDIA FESTIVALS

SET IN PALM BEACH (FEB. 11), NAPLES (FEB. 18)

PALM BEACH: The annual IndiaFest, put together by Palm Beach India Association, will be on Saturday, Feb. 11, at Meyer Amphitheater in downtown West Palm Beach. Admission is free.

According to organizers, IndiaFest is a way to celebrate the rich ethnic and cultural diversity of India with the South Florida community. Over the past decade, IndiaFest has become one of the premier events in South Florida, with more than 15,000 people in attendance.



Geetesh Iyer

The daylong outdoor event, which begins at 10 a.m., will feature cultural performances by local talent, guided meditation breathing session, college team bhangra/fusion performances, interactive story time; food, clothing, jewelry, henna and craft vendors; and art exhibits.

Indian Idol and X Factor finalist Geetesh Iyer of San Francisco will also perform; DJ is Jiten. Meyer Amphitheater is at 105 Evernia St., West Palm Beach. For details, visit <http://www.sfindiafest.org/> or e-mail info@sfindiafest.org

NAPLES/BONITA SPRINGS: Organized by India Association of Naples, the annual India Fest will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Feb. 18 at Cambier Park, 755 Eighth Ave. S., Naples. About 3,000 to 5,000 people are expected to attend. Admission is free with a \$5 suggested donation. This year's theme is "A Glimpse of India." Apart from cultural performances on stage, there will be booths selling Indian food, clothing, accessories, henna tattoos, etc. For information, email naplesindia@gmail.com or visit www.naplesindiafest.com

India Fest



(MAR. 4-5) IN MIRAMAR

Presented by Bangladesh Association of Florida, the 28th Asian Trade, Food Fair and Cultural Show will be on March 4-5. Indian Idol contestant Sayli Kamble will perform. On both days, the event is set from noon to 10 p.m. at a new venue – Miramar Regional Park Amphitheater, 16801 Miramar Parkway, Miramar. For information, call (561) 389-8844 or visit www.asianfair.org



EAST-WEST MUSIC & DANCE FESTIVAL FEB. 19 IN TAMPA

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WHO'S WHO

Khaas Baat is a monthly publication that has been in circulation since August 2004. Issues are direct mailed to subscribers and also are available at South Asian grocery stores and restaurants. It presents exclusive, informative and relevant news about the Indian American community in Florida to its readers.

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FEB. 18: MAHASHIVRATRI EVENTS

TAMPA/ST. PETERSBURG/CLEARWATER

FEB. 14: HANUMAN CHALISA; second Tuesday of month; Vishnu Mandir Tampa, 5803 Lynn Road; 7 to 9 p.m.; for information, call Deo Gajadhar at (813) 817-9714.

FEB. 15: ICC SENIORS GET-TOGETHER; India Cultural Center, 5509 Lynn Road, Tampa; 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; free seminar, lunch and entertainment; no age restriction; for information, text email address along with your name to Bhikhu Nayi at (631) 560-2718 to receive details about seniors gathering every month; or call Mahesh Modha at (813) 476-1540.

FEB. 18-19: MAHASHIVRATRI FESTIVITIES; Sanatan Mandir, 311 E. Palm Ave., Tampa; to register and for information, call (813) 221-4482 or visit sanatanmandirtampa.org

FEB. 18: MAHA SHIVRATRI; Ambaji Mandir, 10991 58th St., Pinellas Park; 6 a.m. to midnight with mahaprasad served after 7 p.m. aarti; for information, call (727) 388-6685 or visit www.ambajimandir.com

FEB. 18: MAHA SHIVRATRI; Sri Laxmi-Narayan Mandir, 4615 George Road, Tampa; 6 a.m. to midnight with mahaprasad served after 7 p.m. aarti; for information, call (813) 444-9786 or visit www.hindutemplemtampa.com

FEB. 19: EAST-WEST MUSIC AND DANCE FESTIVAL; organized by Shruti Foundation; 1 to 7 p.m.; Water Works Park, 1710 N. Highlands Ave., Tampa; free; multicultural event with music bands, dance performances, food, vendors; for information, call (813) 549-9288 or visit www.shrutifoundationtampa.org

FEB. 25: AMIT TANDON - MASALA SANDWICH; presented by OHO Productions; 7 p.m.; India Cultural Center, 5511 Lynn Road, Tampa; for tickets, other information, call 1-888-333-4614 or visit www.ohoproduct.com

FEB. 26: SHAAM-E-GHAZAL; singer Gayatri Asokan accompanied by tabla player Shankh Lahiri; presented by Shruti Foundation; 11400 Morris Bridge Road, Tampa; online early bird discount \$35 per person, \$60 couple; for information, call (813) 549-9288 or visit www.shrutifoundationtampa.org



MARCH 18: DONOR APPRECIATION

CONCERT; "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa" fame Vishwanath Batunge concert; organized by Ekal Vidyalaya; for time, venue and details, call Jaimin Amin at (813) 283-8125.

APRIL 15: NACHANGE SARI RAAT; dinner, dance, entertainment; organized by Punjabi Association of Tampa Bay; India Cultural Center, 5511 Lynn Road, Tampa; DJ music, Punjabi dhol; for information, call (813) 340-8640 or (727) 462-2320.

LAKELAND

MARCH 10: DONOR APPRECIATION

CONCERT; "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa" fame Vishwanath Batunge concert; organized by Ekal Vidyalaya; for time, venue and details, call Nilesh Patel at (863) 853-9315.

SARASOTA/BRADENTON

ONGOING THROUGH MAY 28; "Gods & Lovers: Paintings and Sculptures from India;" exhibit at John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 5401 Bay Shore Blvd., Sarasota; for details, visit www.ringling.org

OCALA

MARCH 24: DONOR APPRECIATION

CONCERT; "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa" fame Vishwanath Batunge concert; organized by Ekal Vidyalaya; for time, venue and details, call Dr. Nagesh Kohil at (352) 427-1542.

ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY

FEB. 5: HSCF NEW AGE GROUP SEMINAR;

Hindu Society of Central Florida community hall, 1994 Lake Drive, Casselberry; 1:30 to 5 p.m.; seminars on India Center opening at University of Central Florida by Leila Chacko and important tax law changes for 2022 by Madan Arora; tea, coffee, snacks; free for annual paid 2023 members, non-members \$5 per person; RSVP to hscfnewagegroup@gmail.com

FEB. 11: KEERTHANA; musical gala night presented by Hindu Society of Central Florida; veteran singer S.P. Balasubramaniam to perform; for information, call (321) 277-3724 or visit <https://keerthanaband.us>

FEB. 11: EVENING OF GEET, GHAZALS AND BOLLYWOOD; presented by Indian Horizon of Florida; 4 p.m.; VFW Post 10147, 519 E. Central Ave., Apopka; \$75 per couple; for information, call (407) 758-6739.

FEB. 19: KIDS' DAY OUT AT FUN SPOT

AMERICA; organized by Gujarati Society of Central Florida; Fun Spot Orlando, 5700 Fun Spot Way; free all day ride bands for kids ages 16 and under with GSCF registered parent; for information, call (407) 461-2979 or email info@gujaratisocietycfl.com





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MONTHLY EVENTS	WEEKLY EVENTS
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 04 (5:00 PM to 8:00 PM) • MATA KI CHOWKI	EVERY MONDAY - 6:30 PM • SHIV ABHISHEK AND PUJA
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 05 (5:00 PM to 6:00 PM) • PURNIMA SHRI SATYANARAYAN VRAT KATHA	EVERY TUESDAY - 7:00 PM • SUNDARKAND • HANUMAM KATHA
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11 (5:00 PM to 8:00 PM) • MATA KI CHOWKI	EVERY THURSDAY - 7:00 PM • SAI BABA SATSANG • MAHA PRASAD
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16 (7:00 PM) • EKADASHI PUJA VISNU SAHARSNAM	Pandit Manikya Sharma 813-484-9568
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17 (6:00 PM to 8:00 PM) • PRADOSH PUJA	Pandit Rushi Vyas 813-503-3388
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18 (9:00 AM to 6:00 AM) • 4 PART MAHASHIVRATRI PUJA (Registration Required)	Pandit Pranav Bhatt 813-720-1460
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19 (4:00 PM to 7:00 AM) • MAHASHIVRATRI MAHA MRITYUNJAYA RUDRA HAVAN (Registration Required)	Next Month Events • HOLI PURNIMA KATHA / 16-Mar • CHAITRA NAVRATRI / 22-30 Mar • MATA KA JAGARAN / 25-Mar



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LIFESTYLE: YOUR BEST MEDICINE - PART I

By M.P. RAVINDRA NATHAN, M.D., FACC



“Let food be thy medicine,” is a famous quote attributed to Hippocrates, the father of medicine. This mantra captures the central role of nutrition and dietary patterns in human health. In other words, if you eat the right diet, it can maintain your health helping you to prevent or reduce the symptoms or even reversing major diseases. There are, of course, many other factors that influence health and longevity.

Let me start with three sad but true stories. A 65-year-old lady comes to see me because of chronic cough and then a touch of blood in the sputum. It

turns out she has developed lung cancer from chronic cigarette smoking. A 52-year-old man collapses with a heart attack while working in the yard and dies. He was quite obese, hypertensive and diabetic. A physician, 70, a chronic alcohol user, suffering from cirrhosis of liver, develops cancer of liver and dies. Could these tragedies have been prevented? The answer is ‘yes’ because they have a lot to do with an unhealthy lifestyle.

There has been spectacular progress in medicine during the past two decades. We understand the mechanisms of most serious diseases now and there are preventive or treatment measures for all. Yet, people continue to suffer from these diseases, preventable to a large extent. The key factor here is ‘healthy lifestyle.’ Although, life expectancy has risen in the U.S. in the past, lately there has been a drop – falling to about 78 from the previous high of 80. There are many other countries like Japan, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Spain, Australia, etc., that have much higher life expectancies. So, it’s time that we delve deep into this issue and seek some solutions.

Have you heard about ‘blue zones,’ a designation for places of exceptional longevity? These are areas where people live longer and lead healthier lives than anywhere else on the planet. Blue zone regions are Ikaria, an island in Greece; Okinawa, an island in Japan; the Sardinia in Italy; Loma Linda, a small city in California; and the Nicoya peninsula in Costa Rica. As incredible as it is, the people here generally live much longer ... like into the 90s and many to 100 or better. And they are quite active too in their old age and often do not suffer from many

chronic diseases common in the industrialized world.

What are the special characteristics of those living in blue zone? During a recent vacation to Crete Island, off the coast of Greece, my friend, Dr. Venugopal, a senior cardiologist from West Palm Beach, observed one thing. Crete is close to Ikaria and people here also share much of the same features of inhabitants of Ikaria, especially in the quality and longevity of life. There were many older people walking along the roads and they appeared to be reasonably healthy. He thought, maybe not many own a vehicle, hence they are walking. Hardly there was anybody who is overweight or obese. When asked why they are walking, they said, they prefer not to use their cars for short distance and they like to park their cars at the end of the road and walk the distance to the shopping centers or to their destinations. After dinner, they have a ritual of all family members dancing in their front yard or going for a slow walk. This gentle exercise helps to digest the food and reduces the post-prandial rise of blood sugar, and hence beneficial to diabetics. This goes along with the old Indian saying, “Walking 100 steps after supper is good for health.” Now, you know why. All these add up.

What is this sudden interest in lifestyle? According to the World Health Organization, 80 percent of heart disease, stroke and Type 2 diabetes and 40 percent of cancer could be prevented, with improvements to diet and lifestyle. “Lifestyle medicine has now become a medical specialty that uses therapeutic lifestyle interventions as a primary modality to treat or prevent chronic conditions including, but not limited to, cardiovascular diseases, Type 2 diabetes, obesity, many gastrointestinal diseases and more. Now, we have an entirely new medical organization called “American College of Lifestyle Medicine” with certified clinicians who are trained to apply evidence-based, whole-person, prescriptive lifestyle changes to treat and, when used intensively, often reverse such conditions. Fascinating, right?

To be continued ...

M.P. Ravindra Nathan, M.D., is a cardiologist and Emeritus Editor of AAPI Journal. For further reading, “Second Chance - A Sister’s Act of Love” by Dr. Nathan from Outskirts Press, can be found at www.amazon.com

3RD ANNUAL EAST-WEST MUSIC & DANCE FESTIVAL FEB. 19 IN TAMPA

Shruti Foundation will hold its third annual East-West Music & Dance Festival on Feb. 19 in Tampa. The free event will feature performers of both Eastern and Western styles.

Food vendors, jewelry, clothing and other service vendors with family activities will also be present. More than 100 dancers from around the world, including different forms such as Indian folk, Bollywood, African dance forms, Flamenco dance and belly dance, will take the stage.

La Lucha (Latin jazz band), Rumbero’s De Tampa Bay (salsa, merengue, bachata), Africa Meets India (Morikeba Kouyate & Friends), Shankh & Friends (Rhythms around the World Ensemble). Spinning Canvas (Indian folk and Bollywood Dance group directed by Shivali Vyas), Dr. Payal Patel (Bollywood fitness dance), Rudram dance company lead by Tara Bikkasani (folk dance), Irene Rimer and group (Flamenco dance), Vania Ojeda (belly dance) and



Karmen Plasencia (Sunset Yoga) will participate.

The family-friendly event will be from 1 to 7 p.m. Feb. 19 at Water Works Park, 1710 N. Highland Ave., Tampa.

The East-West Music & Dance Festival is supported by a CAIG Events Partnership Grant from the Cultural Arts Commission, part of the Arts Council of Hillsborough County.

For more information, visit shrutifoundationtampa.org

EVENTS

Cont'd from page 2

FEB. 25: 10th ANNUAL INDIA DAY; Amway Center, 400 W Church St., Orlando; 7 p.m.; pre-game festivities at Fan Fest, Indian food, on-court performances; Orlando Magic vs. Indiana Pacers; for tickets, visit www.orlandomagic.com/indiaday; for information, call (407) 916-2949.

FEB. 26: "KAKA KO KUCH KUCH HOTA HAI;" organized by Gujarati Society of Central Florida; Hindi play; Olympia High School, 4301 S. Apopka Vineland Road, Orlando; 7 p.m.; free for GSCF members; for information, visit www.gujaratisocietycfl.com



MARCH 4-5, 11-12, 18-19, 25: CRICKET TOURNAMENT (FINAL ON MARCH 25); organized by Central Florida Indian Cultural Association; PFC Emory L. Bennett Veterans Memorial Park, 1365 Veterans Memorial Parkway, Orange City; free; for information, call (407) 335-0485.

MARCH 12: DONOR APPRECIATION CONCERT; "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa" fame Vishwanath Batunge concert; organized by Ekal Vidyalaya; for time, venue and details, call Suresh Gupta at (407) 352-2889.

GAINESVILLE/ALACHUA

MARCH 25: INDIA FEST 2023; organized by India Cultural and Education Center; Legacy Park Multipurpose Center, 15400 Peggy Road, Alachua; to participate or for more information, email indiafest@icec-florida.org

FORT MYERS

FEB. 5: ART FEST; RAAGA to participate with Indian dances; 1 to 2:30 p.m.; downtown Fort Myers waterfront; for information, email shaila@raagafl.org

NAPLES

FEB. 18: INDIA FEST; organized by India Association of Naples; Cambier Park, 755 Eighth Ave. S., Naples; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; music, dances, food; for information, email Palakmunim@gmail.com or vishalavaranas@gmail.com

JACKSONVILLE

MARCH 11: DONOR APPRECIATION CONCERT; "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa" fame Vishwanath Batunge concert; organized by Ekal Vidyalaya; for time, venue and details, call Sarath Kuravi at (904) 537-7200.

TALLAHASSEE

MARCH 19: DONOR APPRECIATION CONCERT; "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa" fame Vishwanath Batunge concert; organized by Ekal Vidyalaya; for time, venue and details, call Santosh Dixit at (850) 559-1080.

SOUTH FLORIDA (WEST PALM BEACH/HOLLYWOOD/MIRAMAR)

FEB. 11: INDIAFEST 2023; organized by Palm Beach India Association; Meyer Amphitheater, 105 Evernia St., West Palm Beach; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; cultural performances, clothes, jewelry, arts/crafts, yoga sessions; free; to showcase talent, email performance@gopbia.org

FEB. 25: "INCARNATIONS OF LORD VISHNU;" classical dance performance organized by Association of Performing Arts of India; Hollywood Central Performing Arts Center, 1770 Monroe St., Hollywood; 6 to 9 p.m.; \$40 per person; visit www.apaiart.com

MARCH 4-5: 28th ASIAN TRADE, FOOD FAIR AND CULTURAL SHOW; presented by Bangladesh Association of Florida; new venue this year, Miramar Regional Park Amphitheater, 16801 Miramar Parkway, Miramar; noon to 10 p.m. both days; Indian Idol Sayli will perform; for information, call (561) 389-8844 or visit www.asianfair.org

MELBOURNE

MARCH 11-12: INDIAFEST; presented by Manav Mandir; Wickham Park, 2500 Parkway Drive, Melbourne; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday; for information, visit www.indiafestbrevard.org

Disclaimer: Event details are subject to change. Please check with local organizers. Event submissions are free, e-mail information to editor@khaasbaat.com by the 20th.

FEBRUARY 2023

Punjabi Association of Tampa Bay
Upcoming Event

SAVE THE DATE

April 15th, 2023

for

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CHILD STATUS PROTECTION AND PREMIUM PROCESSING FOR EB1 PETITIONS

By **DILIP PATEL**



This month, we would like to share some items of interest to our readers.

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has announced that it will expand the Premium Processing Program. Effective Jan. 30, 2023, multi-national executives and managers, as well as applicants for National Interest Waivers can use the program, which guarantees review of petitions within 15 days of filing based on payment of an additional \$2,500 filing fee.

While it is generally good to get a decision quickly, those with dependent children close to age 21 should seek expert advice about the implications on Child Status Protection. A child's age for Child Status Protection is generally calculated on the later of either the first of the month when visa numbers are shown as available in the final action chart of the Visa Bulletin, or the date when the I-140 is approved. On that date, the child's age is reduced by the number of days it took USCIS to approve the I-140 Petition. For those chargeable to the India or China quotas, note that the final action date is backed up to Feb. 1, 2022. So, the longer it takes USCIS to process the I-140 petition, the longer the child could remain eligible for child status protection. In some situations, premium processing could adversely affect a child's eligibility to qualify for a Green Card with the parent.

More on Premium Processing

On Jan. 12, USCIS also announced other plans to expand premium processing. In March, USCIS will expand premium processing to certain F-1 students seeking Optional Practical Training (OPT) and F-1 students seeking STEM OPT extensions who have a pending Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization. In April, USCIS will expand premium processing to F-1 students seeking OPT and F-1 students seeking STEM OPT extensions who are filing an initial Form I-765. Specific dates specific dates for each group will be announced in February.

USCIS states that as they implement the expansion of premium processing in a phased approach, they will continue working toward premium processing availability of Form I-539, Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status. USCIS anticipates expanding premium processing for certain student and exchange visitors with pending Form I-539 applications in May and certain student and exchange visitors who are filing initial Form I-539 applications in June. That will be great news for those seeking to change to F-1 student status while in USA on another visa. Currently, many colleges refuse to issue I-20's to students who are seeking a change of status because of the long processing times at USCIS.

Dilip Patel a partner at the Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney Law Firm is a Florida Bar Board Certified expert on immigration law and can be reached at (813) 222-1120 or dilip.patel@bipc.com



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Indiafest

Handicrafts of India

Saturday, March 11th: 10:00am – 6:00pm

Sunday, March 12th: 11:00am – 5:00pm

Wickham Park - 2500 Parkway Dr, Melbourne, FL 32935

Adults: \$8.00 • Children under 12: \$4.00 • Children under 5: Free

****\$1 per ticket convenience fee will be charged for credit card transactions**

Cultural Shows, Traditional Indian Cuisines, Fashion Show, Music, Henna, Indian Cooking Demo, Arts & Crafts, Yoga Demo, Great Raffle Prizes, & More

Indiafest has donated over \$1,000,000 to various charities & assistance in disaster relief.



indiafestbrevard.org



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HYUNDAI OFFERS A VARIED 'ELECTRIFIED' CHOICE

Test-drive story by NITISH S. RELE motoringtampabay@gmail.com

That Tesla is a leader in electric vehicles is a given. But the frontrunner isn't going to be able to keep the position for long if Hyundai has a say. Or several says (i.e. EVs), for that matter. After all, the Korean carmaker can proudly claim its Ioniq 5 electric SUV as the 2022 World Car of the Year, as well as tout the Kona electric, Tucson PHEV (plug-in hybrid) and regular Santa Fe hybrid. To showcase and experience the diverse lineup, we were recently invited to drive the vehicles in the lush Coconut Grove/Miami neighborhood along the bay and surrounding areas.

The top 5 Southern region markets for electrified vehicles are Miami, Tampa, Orlando while BEV (battery electric vehicles) are again Miami, then Orlando and Tampa. It is no wonder that Hyundai held the 'electrification' media experience in 'The Magic City.' The strategy is to sell one million Hyundai electrified vehicles per year worldwide, revealed Loren Wong, assistant manager of Product Planning at Hyundai Motor N.A. Looking further, the auto manufacturer will produce 11 EVs by 2030. Toward that end, the company has planned a dedicated EV factory in Bryan County, Ga., with production to begin in 2025. And Hyundai is already offering a two-year complimentary charge at any Electrify America station.

Also present was Andre Carter of Hyundai

division Supernal, an advance air mobility company, that seeks to address congestion and pollution. Its aim is to develop a family of electric air vehicles such as a battery-powered and autonomous Electric Vehicle Take-off & Landing or eVTOL (4-5 passengers) for intra-city passengers by 2028. "We are taking the time to create a safe, light-weight commercial eVTOL that provides our future passengers with the security and comfort they find in their own cars," said Carter.

Supernal is aware that the novel electric air vehicle concept cannot be dropped into cities unless a system has been fashioned that works for everyone and effortlessly integrated into current transit networks. Why Miami? Because Mayor Francis Suarez has been receptive to public-private partnerships integrating into his city. Carter terms the air mobility concept as "subway in the sky."

While the Ioniq 5 can go up to 300 miles on a full charge, the Kona electric stretches to 258 miles, thanks to lithium-ion battery packs and electric motors. Fast charging times



range from just 18 to 55 minutes for 80 percent.

With an Electric Vehicle Take-off & Landing electric motor and battery pack, the Tucson PHEV travels in electric-mode only for about 33 miles before fuel kicks in. And the Santa Fe hybrid ekes out 37.1 mpg in city, beating EPA estimates of 33. As noted earlier, an array of hip Hyundai EVs is gearing up to hit the market – the midsize Ioniq 6 sedan and the larger Ioniq 7 SUV – are just two examples. It's only a matter of time before the Korean carmaker takes the lead in the EV market, leaving the rest of the rivals far behind!

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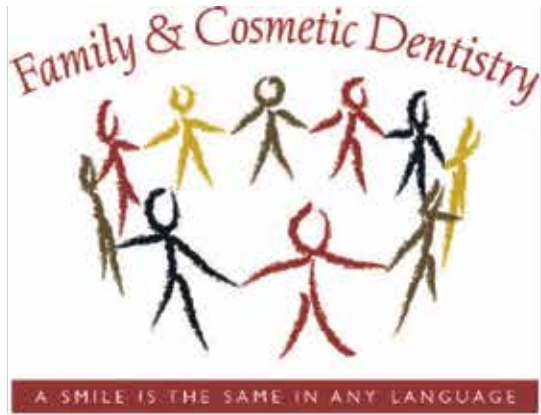
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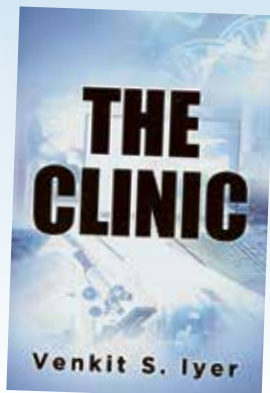
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by Venkit S. Iyer, MD, MS, FACS, FRCS-C



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WHAT SOPHOMORES (AND THEIR PARENTS) NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

By ROBERT LEVINE



Midway through grade 10, students and parents are starting to feel pressure about college admissions. Almost every family who consults with us begins with the same phrase: "I don't know how it works!"

Let's start with how it does not work.

First, disregard rankings when researching colleges. Rankings are created by companies to make money, and they are often created in concert with the colleges themselves. To say the least, rankings are unreliable. Look up the ranking for the University

of Washington (Seattle) in both the US News National Rankings and its Global Rankings. As of this moment, UDub is ranked No. 55 in the United States but No. 6 in the world!

Second, diminish that unfaltering, ubiquitous yearning for reputation. Instead, focus on how a student and college fit together. There are three factors defining "fit": the structure and flexibility of the academics and curricula (not the perceived "quality"); the on-campus culture; and the off-campus opportunities for learning (internships) and inspiration (recharging the body and soul).

Third, when it comes to high-level coursework like AP or IB HL, more is not better. Students should challenge themselves in areas that are relevant (either a true interest area or something to investigate) and "back off" on topics that are less interesting. This strategy tends toward a higher GPA, more time for extracurricular activities (and sleep), and a

better explanation of "who I am" to the admissions offices. Colleges are not picking based upon curriculum; they are selecting human beings. Using the rule of "better, not more" when it comes to academics, always embrace the exception: talk to your high school counselors and get their advice about coursework.

BTW – when picking between classes, remember that most classes have their syllabi posted online. Look before you leap!

Fourth, when deciding what to do beyond academics, know that admissions is not about checking boxes. Don't do things just to do things. Don't expect expensive summer programs to pave your way into top colleges. Don't count on hours and hours of community service to make a huge difference to an admissions office. Things matter to them only if they matter to you.

Fifth, get your highest grades and test scores, but do not think that being first or second in your class guarantees good admissions results. Being top of your high school does not make you top of the world.

So how does admissions work?

Admissions is not a linear process. A public university beyond your home state will evaluate you differently than will a public university within your state. Public universities and private universities have different purposes and admissions criteria. While public universities tend to focus more on objective materials like grades and test scores, private universities often use a more holistic, multi-faceted admissions matrix in deciding who gets in and who gets rejected.

In fact, for America's top colleges, great grades and scores are only the beginning of their inquiry. How a student may contribute to a campus community is much more important than their SAT score. That's why private schools emphasize extracurricular activities and also why they ask for so many essays, plus recommendation letters, perhaps also an interview. It's not just about whether you are qualified. It's about whether you are valuable to them, and "them" means the entire student body.

As for the SAT or ACT: Take the test (and prepare for it as well as you can). Everything on an application is an opportunity to impress a college. Take your shot! If you cannot achieve the score you want, consider applying "test optional" without reporting your best score. But don't avoid the SAT just because you think you're "not a good test taker." That's just fear (or laziness).

It is common for 10th graders and their parents to wonder about so many college-related things. "I know I should be doing something more, but I don't know what to do!" Yes, the process can be overwhelming, but a quality, experienced admissions professional can help. That includes your high school counselors, not just outside consultants like UCA. Get involved early, and things will be easier, less stressful, and more successful when the time comes.

Finally, manage your expectations of what you can actually accomplish. Achieving America's top universities is as challenging as making an Olympic team. Still, we don't believe in teaching young people to quit just because things are hard. Instead, let's reach for those "reach schools" that you covet, but let's be sure to find great options at all levels.

Let's do this!

Robert Levine is the founder and CEO of University Consultants of America, an independent educational consultancy assisting students around the world with applications to colleges, universities and graduate schools. For more information, call University Consultants of America, Inc. at 1-800-465-5890 or visit www.universitycoa.com

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FEBRUARY FORECAST

By PANKAJ KOHLI



ARIES / Mesha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (March 21-April 20) Mars Sign – Stars covered Ashwini, Bharani, Krittika (1st Part) Take full advantage of this spell. Overall progress in terms of a positive job change, happy domestic setup, rich financial gains and good health are on the horizon. Majority of the stars are favorable; however, count less on blessings and work hard.

TAURUS / Vrushabha (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Venus) - (April 21-May 21) Venus Sign - Stars covered

Krittika (last 3 parts), Rohini, Mrigashira (first 2 parts) Venus, your sign lord, is excellently placed, which means a green signal to execute planned projects. It is a positive period, especially for professional change in jobs, if you look to apply for one. Partnerships and cordial alliances are possible. Minor afflictions on domestic front can be controlled.

GEMINI / Mithuna (Air sign, ruling planet is Mercury) - (May 22-June 21) Mercury Sign - Stars covered Mrigashira (last 2 parts), Ardra & Punarvasu (first 3 parts) Finances on domestic front should be addressed early. One may have to be careful with all actions. Take care of health. Luck will shine on people who give their best. Do not take anything for granted, give it your best.

CANCER / Kataka (Watery sign, ruling planet is Moon) - (June 22-July 22) Moon Sign – Stars covered Punarvasu (4th part), Pushya, Aslesha

Your sign lord promises good luck because of the Jupiterian aspect. This may remove negative under-currents. Luck shines in terms of family, finance, domestic happiness, which is hopeful, barring slight health problems for you and spouse.

LEO / Simha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Sun) - (July 23-Aug. 22) Sun Sign – Stars covered Magha, Purva Phalguni, Uttara Phalguni (1st part)

This is a mixed period with high energy but, on the other hand, health and expenses take a back seat. For some, luck may shine but one may still have to work hard for satisfying results. Expenses could equal income. Proper medical care should be given at slightest provocation.

VIRGO / Kanya (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Mercury) (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) Mercury Sign – Stars covered Uttara Phalguni (last 3 parts), Hasta, Chitra (first 2 parts) This is a constructive time, thanks to the planets. Wealth, peace, prosperity is satisfactory. Overall, it is a good month. However, due precautions should be taken on health grounds.

LIBRA / Tula (Air sign, ruling planet is Venus) - (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) Venus Sign – Stars covered Chitra (last 2 parts), Swati, Vishakha

(first 3 parts) Librans! One stands to gain much in terms of finance and money. Personal success, peace, happiness, partnerships are promising and one may march ahead with full courage. However, be tough and you will achieve your goals.

SCORPIO / Vruschika (Water sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (Oct. 24-Nov. 22) Mars Sign – Stars covered Vishakha (4th part), Anuradha, Jyestha Commercially, this is a good month, Domestic and financial conditions, material comforts may improve for substantial gains. Matrimonial, spousal relations are on a high, enjoy it! Professionally, this may not be the most appropriate time for a change.

SAGITTARIUS / Dhanush (Fire sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Nov. 23-Dec. 21) Jupiter Sign – Stars covered Moola, Purva Shada, Uttara Shada (first part) It is a mixed time, with promise of great spiritual progress, maintaining a cheerful spirit, enthusiasm and happiness. On the other hand, it also creates somewhat adverse currents in terms of finance and profession. Overall, it is a decent month, but be careful with health.

CAPRICORN / Makara (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Saturn) - (Dec. 22-Jan. 20) Saturn Sign – Stars covered Uttara Shada (last 3 parts) Shravana, Dhanistha (first 2 parts) It is a gainful spell on most fronts. Some may feel enthusiastic, cheerful, bold and courageous as this may lift spirits. Luck is shining, march ahead with planned ventures. Be careful on health grounds and also some expenses are seen, so spend wisely.

AQUARIUS / Kumbha (Air sign, ruling planet is Saturn) – (Jan. 21-Feb. 19) Saturn Sign - Stars covered: Dhanishta (last 2 parts) Satabhisha, Purva Bhadra Pada (1st 3 parts) One may have to work hard to make it a gainful period, just keep a close watch on your actions. Practically, this is an auspicious time on family, wealth and domestic front. Love life is on the go, make best use of it. On one side, chance to grow income is seen; on the other hand, expenses may increase in different proportions as well.

PISCES / Meena (Water sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Feb. 20-March 20) Jupiter Sign - Stars covered: Purva Bhadra Pada (last part) Uttara Bhadra Pada, Revathi One may be happy in all respects as this seems to be a beneficial month for material comforts. Barring slight health issues, time is optimistic on most fronts. Domestic, personal, partnerships, wealth – all these channels are open and suitably placed.

For detailed horoscope analysis and chart reading, courtesy Pankaj-Astro Jyotish, call Pankaj Kohli at (905) 910-1441 or e-mail Pathofastrology@gmail.com



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TAX PLANNING

GETTING READY FOR THE 2023 TAX FILING SEASON

By TEJAL DHRUVE



Jan. 23 marked the start of the 2023 tax season and the date the IRS began accepting and processing 2022 tax year returns. More than 168 million individual tax returns are expected to be filed, with the vast majority coming before the April 18 tax deadline. Of note, this year is that there are three extra days to file this year due to the calendar.

While filing your 2022 tax return promises to be just as complicated as always, there are steps that taxpayers can take right now to ensure their tax filing experience goes smoothly. Let's look at what's new for 2022 and some key

items taxpayers should consider before filing.

What's New

No above-the-line charitable deductions. During Covid-19, taxpayers could take up to a \$600 charitable donation tax deduction on their tax returns. However, in 2022, those who take a standard deduction may not take an above-the-line deduction for charitable donations.

More people may be eligible for the Premium Tax Credit. For the tax year 2022, taxpayers may still qualify for temporarily expanded eligibility for the premium tax credit.

Some tax credits return to 2019 levels. This means that affected taxpayers will likely receive a significantly smaller refund compared with the previous tax year. Changes include amounts for the Child Tax Credit (CTC), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and Child and Dependent Care Credit.

- Those who received \$3,600 per dependent in 2021 for the CTC will, if eligible, get \$2,000 for the 2022 tax year.
- For the EITC, eligible taxpayers with no children who received roughly \$1,500 in 2021 will now get \$500 in 2022.
- The Child and Dependent Care Credit return to a maximum of \$2,100 in 2022 instead of \$8,000 in 2021.

Refunds may be smaller in 2023. Taxpayers will not receive an additional stimulus payment with a 2023 tax refund because there were no Economic Impact Payments for 2022. In addition, taxpayers who do not itemize and take the standard deduction won't be able to deduct their charitable contributions.

Gather 2022 Tax Documents

The best way to prepare for tax filing is to gather important tax documents – either electronic or paper – and keep them in one place. These documents include but are not limited to: Forms W-2 from employers, Forms 1099 from banks or other payers, Form 1099-K from third-party payment networks, Form 1099-NEC for nonemployee compensation, Form 1099-MISC for miscellaneous income, or Form 1099-INT if you were paid interest, as well as records documenting all digital asset transactions.

Typically, year-end forms arrive by mail or are available online mid-to-late January. Taxpayers should carefully review each income statement for accuracy and contact the issuer to correct information that needs to be updated.

Ensuring their tax records are complete before filing helps taxpayers avoid errors that lead to processing delays. When they have all their documentation, taxpayers can file an accurate return and avoid processing or refund delays or IRS letters.

Avoid Refund Delays and Understand Refund Timing

Many different factors can affect the timing of a refund after the IRS receives a return. Although the IRS generally issues most refunds in less than 21 days, taxpayers should not rely on receiving a 2022 federal tax refund by a certain date. As such, making major purchases or paying bills is not wise until the refund is received. Some returns may require additional review and may take longer to process if IRS systems detect a possible error, the return is missing information, or there is suspected identity theft or fraud.

Also, taxpayers should be aware that the IRS cannot issue refunds for people claiming the EITC or Additional Child Tax Credit (ACTC) before mid-February. The law requires the IRS to hold the entire refund – not just the portion associated with EITC or ACTC.

Tejal Dhruve, CPA, LLC, a full-service tax and wealth management firm with offices in Wesley Chapel, Florida, and Dublin, Ohio, can be reached at (614) 742-7158 or email info@dhruvecpa.com



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