

Dear Friends,

Hare Krishna!!!

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada!!

With the mercy of Sri Sri Radha Neela Madhava and the blessings of ISKCON founder acharya, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada, we all have had the great fortune of being part of another successful Ananda Mela.

Wohoo!!! What a show!! What a spectacle!! and What a response!!!

With contributions from each and everyone of you, we have hosted another successful Ananda Mela. On behalf of Vedic Cultural Center and Ananda Mela production team, I would like to thank you all for your time, effort and service to make this possible. I can say with great confidence that we couldn't have done it without you. If you are not already brimming with a sense of pride and joy for being part of this success, you should, as you thoroughly deserve it. Bravo!! for a job well done!!

The seeds for the present success have been sown many years ago. Like my made up saying goes..., *Every successful event is a brainchild of a great visionary.* Much of the credit for the inception, sustenance and success of Ananda Mela (and other festivals of its kind), goes to our beloved leader H.G. Harivilas Prabhu. With the primary mission of preserving and promoting *Vedic Culture*, he has opened up and utilized the facilities of VCC to encourage practice of authentic cultural and artistic endeavors. In addition, he has spearheaded a wave of free outdoor festivals in Pacific Northwest that positively portray our culture and provide a platform for us to share it with wider audiences. His legendary vision and relentless efforts are the primary force behind our success today. His leadership, guidance and the ability to inspire others around him are unparalleled. We are deeply indebted for his tutelage and association.

My attempt here is to provide you all with the highlights of this year's event. However, a succinct summary of an event like Ananda Mela is not easy and is probably a bit unfair too. I hope you all have enough interest (and time) to read on.

Too many to thank, but let me give it a shot!!

Volunteer effort

Like many at VCC, I have a tremendous soft spot for our volunteers. They are the real stars of our festivals. Let me first highlight their efforts. This year, over 400 volunteers have signed up for the 14 advertised services and numerous unadvertised services. Many more have walked in at the site to help. With most of the available shifts filled up 10 days before the event, we have had to open up some more. Such was the eagerness to be part of this event. **Age was no barrier**, families have opted to serve together, friends have joined hands, students have availed their service hours, VCC's bhimsen boys and blossom girls have been instrumental and even little kids were so eager to partake and be part of the festival.

400+ volunteers spending 4000+ hours over 40+ days, toiling in the heat, overcoming the fatigue, braving some sleep and yet managing to keep their spirit up, to man their booths and perform their tasks, all with a smiling face.... you get the drift.. don't you?? This is no mean feat!! This is beyond extraordinary, this is an unseen territory of cooperation, positivity, sacrifice and willingness to serve. Kudos to all such volunteers for coming together to make this a grand success!!!

One specific incident hits home for me, I was behind the food booth, where a little kid, perhaps 8 years old, comes up to me and says "I would like to help". I asked him to pick up empty cardboard boxes and pile them

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up. After 5 minutes or so, he comes up to me again and says, "I have finished much of it, I want something more..like putting the cut cabbage in a container and supplying it to the pakora booth". He was relentless, he wanted to be involved, he wanted to be in the thick of the action, and he wanted to do more than what I thought he was capable of. Such is the attitude of our volunteers. Going above and beyond to make it happen. Hats off to you all!!

[Click here for a full list of volunteers](#), their areas of contributions and some special teams that contributed. I am sure I have missed many names who have helped but have not signed up. Please know that all your involvement are immensely appreciated and I don't mean to diminish your contributions in any sense.

Visitor turnout

Here is a parallel story line to our success. While the volunteers have toiled so hard to present this event, the visitors have streamed to the City Hall in hordes, non-stop, on both days, to participate, mingle, experience and enjoy the wonderful show that we have put together. Bear in mind, they have braved the heat as well, in anticipation of something special and spectacular. After seeing their jubilant faces, I am convinced that they were not disappointed at all. Of the visitors that we have spoken to, many have expressed appreciation at the quality of the event, the ambience of the festival, the variety on display, the spirit of our volunteers and more importantly the arrangements we have made to alleviate the heat. The mist spraying tent and the spray fans have provided the much needed relief to the visitors and volunteers alike (credit to Vikas Pr., Sapan pr. and Venkat pr for the foresight). An american attendee has observed that this festival was filled with *peace, happiness and large heartedness*. Evoking such positive emotions from our visitors is a true reflection of our success.

Sponsorships

As you can imagine, an event of this scale costs a lot of money. This year, we have had the fortune of attracting many generous sponsors. Zee TV & Xfinity have joined in as title sponsor, Srinivas Kasam pr. of Kasam Estates has sponsored the Ganga stage, Uncle Harrys has sponsored the Yamuna stage, Instagolocal has sponsored the Competition area and Highbrow, Sakhi Style and Lakshmi Ram & Chandra have pitched in as the T-shirt sponsors. In addition, we are grateful for the generosity of City of Redmond for their sponsorship and support as well as to Experience Redmond for being a grant sponsor for our marketing efforts this year. Apart from the above sponsors, the 70+ vendors who have setup booths at our event have brought in a broad variety of information, shopping opportunities, services and glamour to our festival. We are appreciative of their participation and contributions year after year.

City Staff, contractors et al.

Also an integral part of our success are the City of Redmond staff who ensure smooth planning and conduct of the event as well as the many contractors who help us put together this show. Over the years we have established great rapport with the staff from City of Redmond, especially Jessica, Rachel, Austin (more recently) and personnel from other departments including the police, EMT, parks & recreation etc. We appreciate their time, effort and participation. A special shout out to our contractors, including Bret Wilk and team for stage & sound, Mangal artik pr and team for electrical setup, Bryon Dazey for photography, Best Made videos, Clowns Inc for bouncies, Eric the ATM guy, AA rentals, Waste Management, Honey bucket, night-time security personnel (Daniel & Adam), event day help crew and others that I may have missed.

Finally!!..moving on to event highlights!!!

VIP presence

This is the ninth year of Ananda Mela. Success definitely speaks louder than anything else. People have heard about our event, for that matter even the top officials around town. Many public figures, government officials and city staff have supported of our event. While inaugurating the festival of Saturday, Lt. Governor Cyrus Habib has expressed deep appreciation for VCC's service to the society and has shown great interest in visiting our establishment in Sammamish. Redmond Mayor Mr. John Marchione, instrumental in sponsoring Ananda Mela this year, has issued a special proclamation on Saturday. We have learnt that he has ascended to the top of City Hall to capture some aerial shots of the event that we are so eager to see. Special guest Senator Patty Kuderer has spent the evening shopping for some Indian apparel after the primetime introduction of Mayapuris on Saturday. Congresswoman Suzan DelBene has kicked off the Delhi2Dublin show on Sunday and has found time to visit the Vedic Village and try out the rotis made on the chula. Special mention to the efforts of Latha Sambamurti for bringing prominence for our events in the official circles of State of Washington.

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Primetime blast

The primetime performers are such a draw for Ananda Mela, and they have exceeded the expectations this year. The Mayapuris have returned to the stage on Saturday after their success last year. Boy!!! have they electrified the crowd or what!!! With their ecstatic, high energy kirtan and dance, they had everyone jumping on their feet, singing at the top of their voices. Like we did not get enough of them, we have asked them to perform at VCC on Tuesday for another houseful show. The Sunday's show featured Delhi2Dublin. Returning to Ananda Mela after three years, D2D were at their usual best charming the audience with their trademark songs and music comprised of a coherent melange of Bhangra, Celtic and hip-hop. **Interspersed with their performance was** the ever-exciting Aloha Bhangra dance contest that is so integral to Ananda Mela. The open dance floor and the drive to win one of the many exciting prizes including a trip to Hawaii brought out the best dance moves from the audiences.

Daytime class

We have had 15 hours of entertainment, in total, on stages apart from the prime time shows. The response for stage registrations this year was overwhelming. We have had so many high quality registrations that we briefly considered having a third performance stage. The quality and variety of the performers all from the Seattle metro is amazing. Be it traditional dances, folk arts or contemporary style, the talent the artists have brought to the stage was very inspiring. Some of the performers from Saturday were so overjoyed themselves that they have shown interest to perform on Sunday as well. We had a surprise addition to renowned Kuchipudi artist Haleem Khan on Sunday. The thematic presentation on cow and environmental protection by Bhargavi Bharatnatyalaya aligned well with the event theme this year. The grand finale of day time performances on Saturday was an enthralling Garba presentation which felt like a prime time performance at its peak decibel levels. We are very appreciative of all the stage performers, local art schools and other regional organizations for their preparation and participation.

Vedic Village

Vedic Village is the centerpiece of Ananda Mela each year. Through a novel thematic presentation, we share our beautiful culture with the festival attendees. This year's theme "Perfect Life through Vedic Culture - Body, Mind, Soul" has been effectively portrayed through a series of carefully crafted participatory activities, immersive demonstrations, artistic displays and learning experiences. The visual arts team has brought the Vedic Village scene to life with their innovation and creative acumen. By highlighting the aspects essential to lead a perfect life, and how they are implicitly embedded in the ancient Vedic lifestyle and outlook, the team has enabled the visitors to begin a process of introspection. The demonstrations of vedic cooking, natural spice recipes, aroma therapy, asthanga yoga have provided a superior alternative for physical health. Puppet shows, pot races, performance arts, handicrafts, garland making have showcased the fun activities that are integral for a balanced life. Through a series of personality tests, health counselor sessions, astrologist advice, the visitors could gain insight into their natural behavioral disposition. Beyond all these, the means for exploring the soul and the philosophical aspects of one's purpose in life have been facilitated through the information available in Vedic literature as well as the ancient mantra practices. The importance of living in synergy with the nature and especially the need for protecting cows has been demonstrated by providing an opportunity to interact with our adorable cows, Lalita and Govardhani from Goloka farm. Apart from these, the performances on the Vedic stage including puppet shows, melodious kirtan accompanied by lively instruments and various devotional dance offerings, ensured a vibrant atmosphere with continuous traffic on both days. Besides all this, many visitors have joined the blissful processions of Lord Jagannath on Saturday and Lord Balaji on Sunday.

Delicious cuisine

As always, the food court at Ananda Mela is a tremendous crowd puller. A variety of vegetarian delicacies from various regions of India have been prepared to satiate everyone's appetite. Meal menu such as chole bature, Idli pongal, burger and fries to street food such as manchurian, bhel and dabeli to snack menu such as pakora, dhokla to sweet bengali desserts to mango lassi, juices and water to ice cream, cotton candy and crushed ice and even the healthy watermelon slices were all on the offer. The never receding lines and ever burning stoves tell you the complete story. The visitors are always amazed to know that the food booths are run by volunteers and are impressed by the quality and taste of the food. In all this we have managed to keep our volunteers sumptuously fed and amply rested in a separate volunteer food booth area.

Other activities

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Apart from all that I have described above, there were contests, kids bouncies, flower mandala decoration, red carpet photo booth, sponsor recognition ceremony, volunteer shirts, foot massages, food truck and much more. So many to mention in this limited space, but all well received in the end.

Event in pictures

Did someone say *pictures speak a thousand words and videos a million??* Please checkout the event photos and videos on our website (<https://anandamela.org/photos-gallery/>, <https://anandamela.org/videos/>, <https://www.facebook.com/VCCFestivals/>). **Like!! Share!! Tag!!** as you please.

Please upload your own Anandamela memories to <https://tinyurl.com/anandamela-media>

Once again, **Thanks for being part of Ananda Mela**. Hope you had as much fun as we did. We hope to see you again at our next event.

Haribol,
Sai Marella
(On Behalf of Ananda Mela Production Team)