

25th anniversary of ZAC

August 30th “Twenty five years ago, on September 3, 1983, after years of dreaming, fundraising and hard work, a determined group of Zarathushtis accomplished what at times, seemed to be the impossible – our Darbe mehr was inaugurated.” so said the opening sentence of the 25th anniversary brochure of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago

Now 25 years later the Zarathushtis of Chicago, all dressed in their gorgeous traditional outfits proudly stood with their children and grandchildren in the very same hall, albeit with extensions, to celebrate the vision, commitment and dedication that brought the Darbe Mehr to life. The hall was lavishly and tastefully decorated in silver and gold with fresh flowers, all setting the tone for the three days of celebrations.

The evening was ably emceed by the Next Generation of Katie Weber, Cyrus Rivetna, Zenobia Tantra, Karl Grant and Shazad Mehta, and it opened with a Grand Jashan performed by 16 mobeds, with three father-sons pairs. The mobeds who had performed the inaugural jashan in 1983 were all invited of which 3, Toronto, Florida and New York, traveled to Chicago. All the priests were introduced by past president Dilshad Antia; and Dastur Antia was presented with a shawl as a token of appreciation by the community.

After the cocktail hour, the program started with the Opening ceremony choreographed by Farida Sharyari and performed by ZAC children. This was followed by America the Beautiful sung by Tina Siganporia, and a rousing rendition of the US National Anthem by Dr. Adi Tamboli on the keyboards. The Welcome by ZAC President Hosi P. Mehta was followed by reading of Congratulatory letters including one from Mayor Daley of Chicago. A Multimedia presentation “Our Darbe Mehr: The First 25 years” was very ably developed and narrated by Bomi Damkevala, a past President of ZAC featuring the highlights.

The Audiovisual Extravaganza ” Persian and Parsi Dress through the centuries “ was tastefully choreographed Farida Sharyari and Aban Grant, narrated by Houshmand Sharyari, Aban Grant and Rushna Patel. The beautiful traditional dresses which included the “jhablu” (embroidered garment for small children), gasas, with long Sudras were modeled by Zenobia Damania, and her young son Ness Damania, Neville Rustomji, Tenaz Jamsetjee, Jennifer Kavina, Tinaz Sevak, Persis Damkevala, Zarine Damkevala, Persis Driver, Parvine Mobed, Parvin Abadi, Arzan Lali, Dinsoo Rivetna, Yasmin Bhajiwalla, and Zenobia Tantra.

There was no dearth of musical and dance talent as demonstrated in the Hip Hop and Bollywood dance by Carmen Press and Tina Siganporia and Bhangra and Bollywood Dance Medley by Bakhtavar Press, Freya Dhunjisha and Delnaz Lali.

A three tiered marzipan Silver Jubilee Cake made by Roshan Rivetna was cut by the past and current Presidents of ZAC with champagne toasts by the first president Dr. Bahram Farhadieh and the current president Hosi Mehta. The celebration culminated with a delightful rendering of “Congratulations” by Dr Adi Tamboli on the keyboard and members of the ZAC choir.

The program closed with Chaiye Hame Zarhosti sung by four generations of Chicago Zarathushtis led by Bakhtaver Press.

A sumptuous Persian and Indian dinner featuring whole Lamb stuffed with Zeresht Pullav at the carving station, followed by dancing to the music of DJ Mac brought the festivities of the first day to a close at midnight.

The second day August 31st, emceed by Tina and Deepak Sevak, Hoshi Vazifdar, Carmen Press and Farrah Siganporia, started with a Tribute to Arbab Guiv, a song specially composed by the Chicago high priest Dastur Dr Kersey Antia, and beautifully sung by Mani Rao, to the accompaniment of Dr Adi Tamboli on the keyboard. It was indeed a very heart warming tribute followed by a prayer invoking Divine Blessings for the Progress, Prosperity and Perpetuation of the Chicago community by Dastur Antia and other mobeds.

The highlight of the second day was the inauguration of the FEZANA Office and the introduction of the first administrator Zenobia Damania (née Rivetna). This was preceded by the introduction of FEZANA presidents, past and current by Jim Engineer. Each President reflected on souvenirs during their terms of office. The ribbon cutting was done to the singing of Mubarak, Mubarak by the ZAC choir led by Freya Dhunjisha.

Of course no true Zarathushti event would be complete without a lavish buffet of Pullavdar, Sali-gos, Lagan-nu-achar, Kulfi and other dishes prepared by members of ZAC.

The afternoon started with "Recognitions and Honors" by members of the ZAC Board – President Hosi Mehta, VP and Treasurer Dinaz Weber and Secretary Roxana Dubash. A plaque of recognition was presented to Dr. Adi Tamboli "for sharing his musical talents so graciously and willingly, over the past many years." A panel presentation followed, led by Rohinton Rivetna and Hoshi Vazifdar ***on Vision and Goals for Zarathushtis in Chicago and North America for 2025***, The panelists Rustom Kevala, Hosi Mehta, Bomi Patel, Rita Balaporia, Afshan Barshan and Roxana Dubash each presented their thoughts, followed by a Community Townhall Discussion.

After the Tea Break, a hilarious Skit and Song written by Aban Daboo followed. The cast consisting of Bomi Damkevala, Neville Karanjia, Minoo Press, Aban Daboo, Bachi Damkevala, Freya Dhunjisha, Mani Rao, Zarin Press and Zarin Karanjia had the audience roaring with laughter.

And not to be outdone, Next-Generations Shazad Mehta, with Rita Balaporia, Tinaz Sevak, Delnaz Vazifdar, Hoshi Vazifdar and Neville Vazifdar had prepared "Zeopardy". This "Made in ZAC", game –show was impressive and innovative to say the least.

The ZAC choir led by Freya Dhunjisha sang a beautiful song -- "Tribute to Zarathushtra".

The evening ended with a musical hour, (which became several hours) provided by Maestro Adi Tamboli. He regaled the audience non-stop with a medley of old and new classics, Indian and Western.

Day Three September 1st A celebration of Zarathushti Business and Enterprise was sponsored by WZCC (Chicago Chapter) and ZAC. (see detailed report by Dr Yezdi Godivala on page xxxxx)

Throughout the three days of festivities well-deserved tributes flowed lavishly for the yeoman services provided by Rohinton and Roshan Rivetna to the Chicago community and indeed to the entire diaspora with their vision and their tenacity to turn that vision into a reality. The members of the Zoroastrian Association of Chicago outdid themselves in the execution of the activities for all three days with clockwork precision and co-ordination. They demonstrated that they were up to meeting all challenges, They showed in those few days how they dealt with the celebration of the life of their oldest member Rustom Billimoria, who passed away at 97 years on the day before the silver jubilee gala, and also how they can celebrate 25 years of Darbe Mehr life. All the funeral prayers were performed and members of the community participated without disrupting the planned event.

Co-Chairs for this gala event, Roshan Rivetna and Hosi Mehta need to be complimented for this event which was planned to the minutest details.

25 years ago I had participated in the inauguration ceremonies with my children and I was fortunate enough to participate 25 years later. Ahura Mazda willing I will be there at the 50 year celebrations, maybe on a wheel chair.!!

Prepared by Dolly Dastoor