

Help Rebuild An Adopted Village

The Tsunami Victims Need American Support



Local group to rebuild Indian village

By JOE LIVERNOIS
Herald Salinas Bureau

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- Contribute directly to a worthy cause
- All money spent for people needed to do the work and rebuilding the village
- \$400 rebuilds each house
- Contributions will be used to build houses with donated labor and discounted materials
- Global Uplift has rebuilt a village before from 2001 earthquake disaster

Peter Shah and his charitable corporation can't possibly undo the devastation caused by the Indian Ocean tsunamis, but they plan to rebuild a village.

As soon as he showed up for work Monday, a day after the earthquake and tsunamis, he got calls from people offering thousands of dollars to Global Uplift, the nonprofit organization he and his partners Jim Sloan and Wilbur Stevens established in 2000.

"I give all the credit to the people of Monterey County and America," said Shah, a certified public accountant in Salinas. Global Uplift rebuilt the Indian village of Kauran, which was destroyed by an earthquake in 2001, so donors knew that Shah probably had similar plans after the tsunamis.

"I didn't," Shah confessed.

But the money started rolling in anyway. And a building contractor, Eric Liittschwager of Salinas, showed up at Shah's office with an offer to oversee the reconstruction of a village. Any village. Preferably, the most devastated village on the Indian coastline.

"People were pumping money in and I didn't have any plans," Shah said. "It shows how the community and the world comes together during a calamity like this." So far, Shah has not determined which village will be rebuilt. He already has a team of 10 people on the ground along the coast to survey the damage.

Liittschwager plans to leave around Jan. 9 to determine the extent of damage to water supply systems, sewage systems and roads.

"We want to take the worst village and do the best job... and we want the entire village to be re-created by Americans," he said. (cont'd on next page)

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Contributions Payable to:
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Shah, the son of a former governor of the state of Madras (now Tamil Nadu), is insistent that he gets none of the credit. But Liittschwager and Sam Kumar, a Salinas physician, said Shah is the catalyst for it all. Shah is a self-professed tightwad and he wants whatever money he is able to collect to go a long way. Each of the 200 homes he intends to build in the devastated village will cost about \$400. The 200 homes Global Uplift built in Kauran went up for \$200 in less than six months. Those homes were dedicated in a ceremony attended by Salinas City Councilwoman Janet Barnes. Shah said he also wants to build a school, police headquarters and a medical clinic in the destroyed village. And he wants to restore the village infrastructure.

"They are on the up-and-up and Mr. Shah is a very nice guy," said Paula Herrera, executive director of the American Red Cross in Salinas. Shah said all money collected by Global Uplift is spent for people needed to do the work. There are no administrative costs, he said. "I do it all here out of this office," he said.

Herrera said Shah and Global Uplift were great generators of money after the Indian earthquake in 1971 and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. The group gave \$5,000 to the families of New York City police officers killed during the attack. On the local front, the charity donates blankets to the homeless at Dorothy's Kitchen at Thanksgiving.

Liittschwager said he is eager to get started. He has already received 15,000 pounds of donated medical material. "I've spent time in Third World countries and the disasters that happen there are twice as devastating," said Liittschwager. "The people there cannot wait six months." Shah said Global Uplift is able to build the homes relatively cheaply because all labor will be donated and he can get discounts on materials. Being the son of a beloved former governor in the region has its benefits, Kumar said.

Shah came to the United States in 1975 while his father was still governor. He said he wanted to make his own way in the world and believed the United States offered the best opportunities. But it is evident his heart is still in India.

"The people there are humble, poor and hardworking people," he said. "Everyone needs to know that. They are the finest human beings in the world."

Shah said all volunteers and contributions are welcome. For more information, call (800) 482-0383 or 424-2919. Liittschwager said he believes he will need plenty of technical advice and expertise, particularly with the restoration of water supplies and sewage treatment plants.