

Local News

Meru Foundation wins grant

By Andrew Green/Correspondent
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LEF awards funds

Beginning next fall, students at Lexington public schools will take part in educational workshops on the arts and culture of India. The Lexington Education Foundation awarded the Meru Foundation, a Lexington-based non-profit organization, \$4,700 to bring their programs into the Lexington school system.

The people that make up Meru claim to "have been profoundly touched by the arts, artists, literature, and philosophy of India" and seek "to bring the source of that deep joy to everyone."

Meru's programs will teach students about the ancient civilization, arts, culture and history of India through interactive experiences including celebrations of festivals, multimedia presentations and worksheets. The programs will be implemented for first and fourth graders at Bridge, Estabrook, Harrington and Hastings as well as at the high school.

Dr. Vanita Shastri, executive director of Meru, is very excited about the recent stipend.

"It is great to get this grant from LEF to launch our public school program here. It shows how much Lexington cares about diversity and integrating a multi-cultural curriculum."

Shastri also pointed out the importance of these new programs for Lexington's many Indian-American residents.

LEF member, Jeri Zeder, said yesterday she was excited to see this type of proposal come to the board.

"It clearly met our criteria for funding in the sense that it was innovative. It plugged into some of the goals of the public school system, especially diversity goals and respect for ourselves and others.

"And I love the way it draws on the strengths of our community. We have ... families in Lexington who are from India and we're taking a look at our own community and bringing out the strengths we have ... in a way that's very tangible to the students," she said. "For us to be able to make India more alive and real because we have this foundation in our town ... is really great."

In addition to school programs, Meru also runs summer camps for children and has programs for the general public, called Summit Meru. This summer marks the third Summit Meru and features a series called Creating Sacred Space. Workshops are offered in Indian architecture, classical dance and sculpture.

Various Summit Meru programs run until the end of September; the typical workshop lasts from one to three days. There is a summer camp for children running from Aug. 4-8.

Shastri does not want anyone to underestimate the value of Meru.

"We bring a program to represent Indian art and culture," she said, "thus enriching the public by understanding the heritage of Indian traditions. There is an emphasis on the grammar, theory and structure behind the art. We want people to understand why it evokes a positive image and feeling, to look at the source of it."

For more information on the Meru Foundation, visit www.merufoundation.org.