



# asti news

AMERICAN SERVICE TO INDIA • WINTER 2006

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### ASTI Marches into 2006

ASTI begins its 26th year with renewed determination to bring aid to women and children facing the injustices thrust upon them by the shackles of poverty and cultural abuse. Additionally, we salute those warriors

*It is said that the most difficult journey begins with the first step — and I am thankful we were able to take that first step a quarter of a century ago — for little did we realize, in so doing, the many giving and remarkable human beings we would encounter.*

in India combating these injustices: the individuals who utilize their expertise to help level the playing field by providing tools for young girls and women of lower caste so they may escape this cycle of misery.

Our donors designate funds to agencies that provide boys and girls in rural areas with school supplies, uniforms and scholarships. The programs also provide health education for their families.

Generous donors continue to provide scholarships to meritorious poor students pursuing higher degrees, enabling them to attend the fine universities available in India.

The need for medical care in rural

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

### Distinguished Guests Attend ASTI's Annual Board Meeting

Swami Nirmalatmananda head of the Ramakrishna Mission, Brazil; Dr. H.H. Sudarshan of Bangalore; and Narayan Gowda of Society for the Emancipation, Welfare and Advancement (SEWA), and Honorary Board Member inspired the board and guests at the 2006 Annual Meeting on Sunday September 10.

Swamiji and the devotees of Vedanta have created vital centers in three main areas Sao Paulo, Rio de



Swami Nirmalatmananda and President Piner.

Janeiro and Curitiba. Along with the expansion the Swami points out areas of need among the victims of poverty in Brazil. Consequently, an orphanage which began with two girls and some dedicated workers has grown to 10

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### Peter Pruce 1917–2006

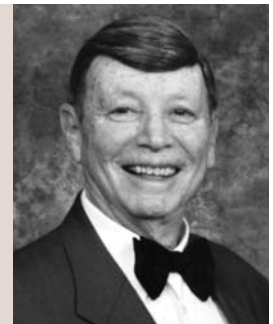
#### *ASTI Vice President Leaves Us*

It is with deep sorrow that we must announce the passing of Peter Pruce, ASTI's Senior Vice President, on August 23, 2006. Peter served India's needy with dedication and compassion for more than 20 years. He was 87.

Shortly after ASTI's founding in 1980, Peter joined as an active member of its Board of Directors. In a short time his aptitude for accounting came to the notice of the Board and he was appointed Treasurer, in which capacity he served for many years. Board members also have clear memories of his generous donations over the years to many of ASTI's projects.

Peter earned the affection of nearly everyone he met through his quiet good humor and deep devotion to God. Though a weakening of his body through Parkinson's disease in his last few years limited his activity, it never diminished the strength of his faith. His dedication to Vedantic ideals and his strong faith in service to God in man never faltered.

Peter's quiet presence and friendly smile will be greatly missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him.



**ASTI Board of Directors  
2006–2007**

Barbara Piner  
*President*

Daniel P. Haren  
*Vice President*  
*Director of West San Gabriel*  
*Valley Boys and Girls Club,*  
*Monterey Park*

Srinivas Murthy  
*Chief Financial Officer*  
*Controller*

Rajkumari Asrani, M.D.  
*Secretary*  
*Physician*

Bibek and Purnima Ray  
*Project Oversight India*

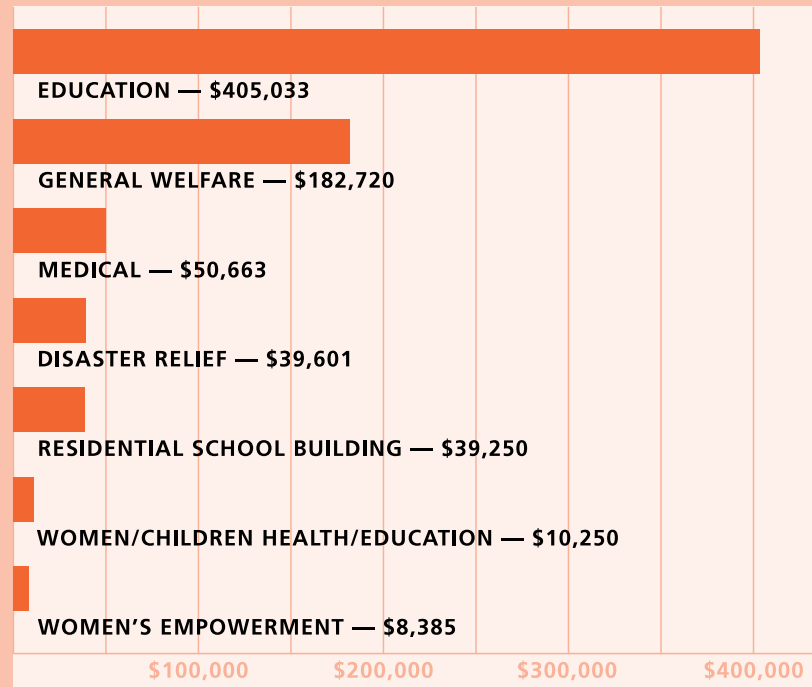
Cliff Johnson  
*Editor*

Ashok Ramnaney  
*Coordinator*

Bakul Zaveri  
*Project Cost Analyst*

# Thank You!

Total Funds Collected (Sept. 1, 2005–Aug. 31, 2006): \$873,880\*  
Funds Sent to India (2005–06): \$745,233



\*includes funds held for future distribution.

## Words of Wisdom

*"Miracles, cures — bah, humbug!  
The important thing is building  
character, living in truth, being  
desire less, showing perseverance  
toward our goals, and above all,  
maintaining purity of mind and  
soul."*

*— Swami Saradeshananda, of  
the Ramakrishna Order who  
spent his life in service to the  
poor.*

## ASTI's Funding Policy

Each organization funded by ASTI must be registered as a non-profit organization and have Foreign Currency Registration Act (FCRA) authorization, which is required by both the Government of India and ASTI.

ASTI sends 100% of all designated donations, and offers donors the advantage of a tax deduction for their donations.

ASTI's funding base is growing and needs your support for secretarial expenses and office supplies (2006 total: \$9,361).

### PLEASE HELP WITH OFFICE EXPENSES

\$500    \$250    \$100    \$50    \$25    Other

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

(AREA CODE) PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

# The Rays Charge Ahead with Sustainable Programs for Rural Population

Bibek and Purnima Ray might have coined the axiom, "where there's a will, there's a way." In eight short years, this amazing couple has created a viable, productive institution in a remote village — Gohaldanga, in North

Medinipur; their project was featured in our previous newsletter. But pardon us for bragging.

Gohaldanga village in West Medinipur is located in a potato-rich agricultural belt encompassing parts of four adjoining districts; West Medinipur, Hooghly, Bankura and Burdwan. In a normal year, about eight million tons of potatoes are produced, with only 60% being consumed within the State. The Rays thought, "what about utilizing the other 40%?"

They found a way to meet the

challenge through a Minneapolis-based nonprofit organization, Control Technology International (CTI), which has developed a method of efficiently producing sun-dried potato products.

During the 2006 potato-harvesting season, the technology was demonstrated to the farmers' and self-help groups from the neighboring area. In the training center, four farmers were equipped with the means necessary to convert some of their raw potatoes to dried potato products. Their products were sold immediately in the local market — at a considerable profit.

Many farmers' and self-help groups are adopting CTI's processing methodology. Starting in September, the RSV Sevakendra will teach the technology to the villagers.

For more information on this program go to: [www.grsvsevakendra.org](http://www.grsvsevakendra.org)



## *Kids Make a Difference*

Our 2005 newsletter celebrated kids who care. These children rallied to collect money for Tsunami Relief, and later to sponsor programs for disabled children. Again, we present to you children who care. If these children touch the future, it's in good hands.

Merry McElroy is a teacher at Summerfield Waldorf's 2006 Eighth Grade class in Northern California. She taught them to not only read, count, recite poetry and play recorders, but also algebra, chemistry and physics and the importance of a broader knowledge of our world.

During the past two years, her class worked both as a group and individually to earn enough money to travel to the Florida Keys and to pay for its graduation needs. Being frugal, they were able to accomplish these goals and more. They decided to donate to an international organization.

Merry sent us this moving tribute to her children. "As a Food Science graduate student in Laramie, Wyoming, I had worked for Dr. Bibek Ray. He has since retired from the University of Wyoming and now works to help the people of his homeland in India. Bibek sent my class pictures of the children and their teachers. He described the work Gohaldanga RSV Sevakendra is accomplishing there, and we found it inspiring. We are grateful to be able to participate in this important undertaking and we hope we have made a difference in the lives of others."

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. All who come in contact with noble acts are inspired and moved to respond to these acts. The future depends on such individuals.

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## Distinguished Guests

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girls in the last year and with support can help heal this universal problem.

Dr. Sudarshan oversees 65 villages where primary health care centers are efficiently operating. He has attracted many volunteers, professionals and others to his programs as contributors to the ideal of service. Dr. Sudarshan sits on the Karnataka State Health



Dr. H.H. Sudarshan

Ministry Board and evaluates the effectiveness of the work in primary health centers across the state. A tribal center, Sw. Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra, founded

in 1981 in the B.G. Hills, a remote area in Karnataka, is fully operational with hostels for 200 students and a school for 450 students. His objective of creating a self-sufficient center for the surrounding villages has been and continues to be realized.

Narayan Gowda is an activist for India and through Sewa in Northern California has been a generous fundraiser for ASTI.

# An Epiphany for Deena Bandhu Children's Home

ASTI's partner in Northern California SEWA is the primary fundraiser in the U.S for Deena Bandhu, one of the

*"Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity, female sex, not the weaker sex, it is the nobler of the two"*  
— Mahatma Gandhi

Action Committee members, Narayan Gowda, visits Karnataka at least once a year and is instrumental in guiding the work at Deena Bandhu.

Located in Chamarjangar South of Mysore, Karnataka, Deena Bandhu Trust Children's Home concern turns from its success with its home for boys to the problems of combating the domestic violence and sexual harassment of women in Indian society.

Due to a lack of adequate facilities for orphaned girls in that area Deena Bandhu has stepped up to the plate and is opening a home for orphaned and destitute girls.

At present the girl's Home is located only a few yards from the boy's Home. Voicing their concern for an

## ASTI Focus: Project Women and



exclusive campus for girls, a generous donor offered Deena Bandhu a piece of land about two miles from the existing campus.

Funds are needed for the construction of the campus for the girls. G. Jayadev, Director of Deena Bandhu has appealed to ASTI for help in constructing the building.

Please go to [www.deenabandhutrust.org](http://www.deenabandhutrust.org) for more details on the project, or contact SEWA.

### Back to Basics

## 45,000 Schools in West Bengal Have No Private Bathrooms for Girls and Boys

When Amar Lahiri, director of the Lahiri Family Trust, informed ASTI's President that enclosed bathrooms with running water for proper hygiene were not available to girls and boys in many primary and elementary grade schools, she was shocked. Due to this glaring problem, many girls drop out of school. The Lahiri Family Trust's focus is on programs that improve the quality of health facilities for children. They recently donated \$110,000 for a pediatric care unit at a major hospital in Kolkata.

After researching a number of agencies, Amar decided to direct a contribution towards the realization of a plan submitted by the director of the West Bengal Voluntary Health Association (WBVHA).

Thus, the Lahiri Family Trust donated \$14,000 to build bathrooms in Kakdwip, in South 24 Parganas District. The program's goal is to teach the children how to avoid illnesses related to a lack of sanitation, such as hookworm and diarrhea, a major cause of dehydration. The bathrooms, 20 in all, will afford clean facilities for the children, with fresh water for hand washing and other habits necessary for maintaining good hygiene.

ASTI is grateful to work with the Lahiri Family. Their goals and objectives are in concert with ASTI's: namely, providing the necessities of day-to-day living through the provision of such basics as latrines, clean water, good hygiene and the like.

It is Lahiri and ASTI's hope that others will join us in providing sanitary facilities for these precious children of India.



Mr. Lahiri and ASTI President enjoy the reception and the excitement of the children on their visit to one of the project schools at Kakdwip, 24 S.Parganas, Kolkata.



### SEWA Action Committee

Narayan Gowda (531) 756-1488  
Shankuntala Shankar

Dr. Giri (916) 488-8776  
(925) 939-6280

## Girls Rescued from Poverty and a Life of Slavery

In February 2006, ASTI President was introduced to the work at the Vivekananda Education Society for Children, VESC, located in two villages in the Kolkata suburbs, Jaggadal and Sonarpur.

The Society brings abandoned street children, born into a life of poverty, from a precarious existence, to a life of hope and security.

The Society's goal is to expand the activities to provide programs for children in these villages with medical care, school supplies and scholarships, allowing them the means to attend local schools where they are given the skills to break the chain of poverty.

After returning to the U.S. and reporting on this work and the need for more space to provide shelter for the children, the Lahiri Family Trust stepped forward again with funds for a second building in Jaggadal. Construction on the second building will begin this November.

We hope more generous donors will step forward.

Please visit our website [www.asti1.org](http://www.asti1.org) or contact us for more information.



**OUR GOAL:** Collect \$5000 per year for boarding expenses for 20 children or \$260 per child. Please donate what you can afford.



Women participate in discussions on the micro-credit program in Self-Help Groups (SHG) at Nishtha. Further they discuss the need of shelters for their less fortunate sisters, victims of family abuse.

## Empowering Women Caught in the Web of Poverty and Cultural Domination

*The Goal:  
Transcend all Barriers  
to Invoke the Dormant  
Power in Women*

Mina Das, the director of Nishtha, participated in a Solidarity Conference at the University of California, Riverside. Her theme was the empowerment of women.

The conference focus was abuses women encounter throughout the world and how to address them, sadly, India is no exception.

Mina was the only grassroots participant in the conference and was warmly received for her practical hands-on approach in solving the complicated problems affecting women in West Bengal India.

Mina finds education, which moves toward independence for women, must focus on their inherent rights. Born into a culture of servitude imposed on them by their society, many become victims of abuse and neglect.

Of the many programs initiated by Nishtha, ASTI would like to bring your attention to these immediate needs:

### Immediate Needs:

1. Sponsorship at Nishtha Home for the Elderly  
Room and Board: \$18 per month  
Rehabilitation into her community: \$8 per month
2. Long-Term Need: A Shelter for Young Destitute Women  
Cost: \$24,400
3. Plans for shelter include a training center, hostel staff, quarters and community hall for meetings.

**ASTI has pledged \$13,000 5 lakhs, if Nishtha can raise 6 lakhs. Please help us reach this goal.**

“Many women in these Bengal villages tread a muddy path of survival,” states Mina. “Most of them don't attend school, because schools are considered a ‘gateway to hell.’ They are malnourished; they are raised to sacrifice their food to the in-laws, husbands and sons.” Education and family support is the first step. If this fails, a shelter can offer security and hope.

## Massive Flooding Throughout India

The Ramakrishna Mission has appealed to ASTI for funds to alleviate the suffering caused by continuous rains and widespread flooding in India.

Disaster victims and their relatives report that the Ramakrishna Mission is one of the first Missions — if not the first — on the scene after a crisis.

It is also a fact that when funding surpasses a relief project's requirements, the Mission requests all donations be stopped. Funds donated specifically for a disaster must be utilized accordingly.

Now the appeal for flood relief has come for the 2006 disaster.

The following report was submitted by the Director of Relief efforts for the Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Srikananda:

1. "There are widespread floods in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan etc.
2. We are doing what we can with



our meager resources, compared to vastness of the calamity.

3. As is our practice, initially we distribute food items and provide medical relief. In the second phase of primary relief, we distribute cloths, blankets, tarpaulins etc.
4. At present, we do not have any plan of rehabilitation work.
5. The expenditure will be more than Rs. 1 crores (\$220,000) for the above work.
6. Until now we received donations of nearly 8 Lakhs only. (\$17,600) Please give what you can!

### TSUNAMI RELIEF: The Headlines Have Vanished, but the Need for Relief Continues!

#### *Sri Lanka: An Appeal from the Ramakrishna Mission Port Blair Orphanage*

ASTI donors contributed funds to restore the orphanage, which had been severely damaged by the Tsunami. The work is complete thanks to the generosity of donors both here and in India.

Nevertheless, the number of orphaned children continues to grow!

Ramakrishna Mission Port Blair is desperate for more funds. The need to provide a safe environment for these hapless victims of last year's tsunami continues; the construction of additional quarters will help provide a secure future for these children.

And so we appeal to our donors, again, to do what they can to help RKM Port Blair provide not only a safe haven now, but hope for the future of those most in need. —Barbara Piner



## Help Break the Chain of Poverty!

### *The Ramakrishna Mission Belgaum Appeals for Sponsors*

Many qualified young men and women coming from poor families miss out on the advantages gained in advanced studies. The RKM Belgaum provides opportunities for these meritorious students.

The cost of these sponsorships follows:

#### *Total Expenses for Continued Education*

\$1200 provides one year's medical course!

\$465 provides tuition for one year in engineering.

\$136 provides degree for Bachelor in Science Computers and Arts.

#### *Partial Cost for Continued Education*

The educational expenses (only tuition fees) for which we provide support are as follows:

1. Medical courses (MBBS) 4-year course cost \$1,110 per year.
2. Engineering courses (BE, BTech, etc) 4 year courses \$444 per year.

*Assistance provided other courses, partial or complete support, and the expenses for:*

3. Degree Courses (BSc, BCom, BA, etc.) \$110 per year — 3 year courses leading to a graduate degree
4. Pre-degree courses (equivalent to Std XI & XII) — \$66 per year — these courses are of 2-year duration
5. School students — an average of \$22 per year.

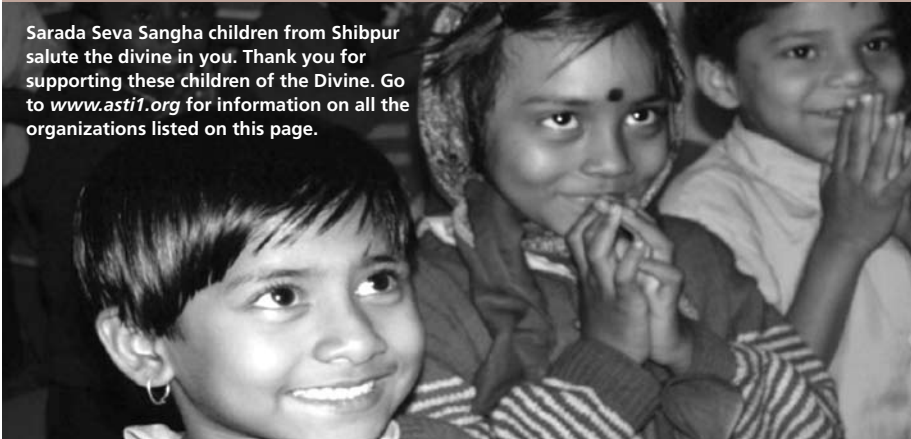
Students attending local school receive meals daily (\$110 per year)

— Swami Rhagaveshananda, Secretary

Read more at [www.asti1.org](http://www.asti1.org)

# ASTI Sponsorships Offer Americans Diverse Ways to Help

Sarada Seva Sangha children from Shibpur salute the divine in you. Thank you for supporting these children of the Divine. Go to [www.asti1.org](http://www.asti1.org) for information on all the organizations listed on this page.



*We at ASTI always feel inspired when we visit the organizations profiled in this newsletter and witness first hand the huge impact dedicated workers can make.*

All sponsorships are computed on a yearly basis. The following organizations score high on our list:

## Children's Residential School

Sri Sharadadevi Andhara Vikasa Kendra, Bangalore  
**Sponsor a blind child: \$235**

Sw. Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra, B.R.Hills, Karnataka  
**Sponsor a tribal boy: \$235**

Ramakrishna Pally Unnayan Sangha, Ramnagar, WB  
**Sponsor an orphan boy: \$250**

Ramnagar Vivekananda Seva Ashrama, Ramnagar, WB  
**Sponsor an orphan girl: \$250**

Deena Bandhu Trust, Karnataka  
**Sponsor an Orphan: \$235**

## Education

Chethana Trust, Mysore  
**Sponsor a mentally challenged or epileptic child: \$135**

Sri Ramakrishna Seva Sangha, Bangalore  
**Primary Education of a poor child: \$135**

Hijaldiha Vivekananda Seva Samity, Bankura WB  
**Daily meal for one child: \$30**  
**Fan for one classroom: \$50**  
**School supplies and transportation per child: \$30**

Bhurkunda School for Mentally Challenged Hooghly, WB  
**School supplies and transport one child: \$100**

## Medical

Sarada Seva Sangha Shibpur, WB  
**One cataract operation: \$150**

Swami Vivekananda Integrated Health Center, Karnataka  
**Leprosy and TB Treatment: \$150**

Nishtha, West Bengal Home for the Elderly  
**Room and board for one: \$216**  
**Rehabilitation into her community: \$96**

## President's Report

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

areas is usually provided by dispensaries and mobile units. Hospitals run by the Ramakrishna Mission and non-government organizations (NGOs) give much needed medical aid in rural areas and advanced medical care and surgery for poor patients.

Some organizations in India that provide models of effective planning with broad results are the Ramakrishna Mission and the Sarada Mission of Dakshineswar, located throughout India; Nishtha and Sri Sarada Sangha in West Bengal; and Karuna Trust and Vivekananda Foundation in Karnataka, to name a few. Recently we were introduced to Prerana, also in Karnataka, where the bar is being raised in terms of assessment and evaluation.

Although there are many providing unselfish service, the organizations mentioned above will be the focus of



President Piner and friends.

this annual report. One of the key factors leading to the effectiveness

of their work is that the monks, nuns and directors of these programs are graduates of some of the top schools in India and the U.S. Many are doctors and other professionals who would be managers in the private sector; yet, they have chosen a life of service.

This is an important fact, because charity isn't just about giving; real progress comes from good management, constant assessment, re-assessment and realistic evaluations of the effectiveness of a program.

The integrity exhibited by the leaders of the organizations ASTI sponsors is of the same integrity found in our departed leader Peter Pruce.

A full list of the organizations we serve, and the criteria for their approval, can be found on our websites: <http://www.asti1.org> and [www.americanservicetoindia.org](http://www.americanservicetoindia.org).



## *Peter Pruce: A Reminiscence*

When death takes a close friend, a part of you also dies. Not forever, of course.

Fortunately, the passage of time helps ease the pain of memory, but not totally.

There are always the sudden, sharp images of him that spring unbidden to mind that stab at the heart.

Peter Pruce was my dear friend for more than two decades. With great regularity (he was Swiss!) we met for lunch twice a month for nearly half that time. We would argue over what restaurant to choose, and I usually found his choice to be the right one. We never found it necessary to talk a great deal; the comfortable intimacy between the two of us seemed to take the place of words. I wish now that maybe I should have said more, asked more, learned more from this kind and good friend whom I had the blessing to know and love.

A few days ago, I came across a recording of a vision of Lakshmi Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's niece, shortly before her death in 1926: "I saw a mountain of dazzling mica. On one side were Lakshmi and Narayana, and on the other side was Sri Ramakrishna. I saw Holy Mother, Swamiji, Rakhai Maharaj and others surrounded the Master. I saw Yogin and Golap, and they told me, 'O, Lakshmi, here there is no problem of food and sleep or disease and grief. Living with the Master gives us uninterrupted bliss.'"

I am certain my friend is among them as well and enjoying that bliss in their company. — *Cliff Johnson*



***asti news***

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