



# Foundation For Excellence Newsletter (Vol 04-2017)

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## President's Message



Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays are around the corner and we are thrilled to be closing a highly successful year for FFE and it's scholars. On behalf of FFE board members and myself, we would like to sincerely thank all of our donors, volunteers and staff for raising the bar on events and fundraising throughout the year. Together we raised over \$1.93 Million in US and with funds raised in India we will be looking to support close to 5500 scholars for the year 2017-2018! Our local Silicon Valley Gala was a tremendous success with renowned artists making it a memorable experience for all our guests. Amazing progress overall and forward momentum for the organization. Look forward to connecting with all of you in 2018. Happy Holidays and best wishes for New Year!

Please take a moment to check out [FFE Facebook Page](#) where you can also support us through our social media initiative! And here is the big BONUS, Facebook will match your donations, as part of **#GivingTuesday**. 100% of your donations go to a scholar and is tax deductible.

## Events and More

One of the ways FFE engages with the community is by organizing events; a great way to mingle with other FFE supporters while at the same time having fun.

**Silicon Valley Gala, Sep 24th:** With the apt theme; "Journey of Transformation", the 2017 FFE gala in Silicon Valley raised over a million dollars in pledges and donations, to continue the process of transforming lives of needy students in India. The fundraising event was held on September 24th at the Crowne Plaza in Palo Alto. The total amount of funds raised will be distributed among 1,430 scholars. Noted professor, author, philanthropist and trustee of FFE, Rishiksha Krishnan, gave a thought-provoking keynote address focusing on employable graduates. In keeping with its tradition of excellence, FFE introduced an award to recognize exceptional individuals in Art and other fields. The trophy of excellence was awarded to The Leela Dance Collective whose techniques merge the lines between dance and music and traverse the depth and breadth of human emotions, to achieve pinnacles of success. An excellence trophy was also awarded to a world-renowned sand artist from India, Nitish Bharti; a dynamic entertainer, motivational performer and evocative practitioner of "sand-story". Regardless of age, his sand statements thrilled the audience. The stunning sand art performance used a combination of live performance and visual artistry. Apart from spellbinding performances by Rachna Niwas and her Leela Dance Collective team as well as Nitish Bharti, the entertainment was bolstered by a flutist who moved among the guests entrancing them with his pipe play. A video presentation and success stories of alumni who have benefited from FFE's scholarship program was also part of the program. [Click here for Event Photos](#).

**Yoga, Music and Laughter - FFE Awareness Event, Oct 15th:** Well known yoga guru, Yogi Mahendraj, organized a yoga event promoting and increasing awareness of FFE. The event was held at Milpitas Community center.



**Connecticut event:** FFE president, Mino Gupta, addressed potential volunteers and donors at the Greenwich Rotary event to promote and increase awareness of FFE. The event was made possible thanks to FFE volunteer, Sona Mehra.

## Upcoming Events In 2018

Jan	FFE Awareness event SFO
Feb	FFE Awareness at ICC Milpitas/Cupertino

April	YPAG/Alumni Meet
May	FFE booth at TiEcon
June	3rd FFE NY Gala
June	Yaadein
	FFE Family Get-together
July	FFE Awareness through Yoga
July	FFE booth at Sevathon
Aug	30th Annual Bonfare Golf Tournament
	FFE Awareness event SFO
Sep	12th FFE SV Gala
Nov	FFE Awareness event – Sangeet Ankur
Dec	Volunteer and Donor appreciation musical event

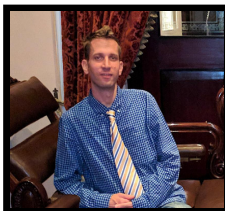
As and when the time approaches, dates will be published on the FFE website and communicated via email. For inquiries about any event, please email us at [eventregistration@ffe.org](mailto:eventregistration@ffe.org) or call us at 408.985.2001.

**Spread A Smile**

Why not support an FFE scholar this holiday season? You can now shop and spread happiness through Amazon Smile. Just go on the link and brighten someone’s future. Share the link with friends and family. <https://smile.amazon.com>



**Spotlight Interviews**



**Donor - Peter Pesti:** Philanthropy cuts across barriers because where there is a heart there is a way. Our latest patron donor personifies this philosophy. Hungarian by birth, Peter Pesti is a private investor based in Seattle. Starting with undergraduate studies in his home country, he studied in Atlanta for a Computer studies Ph.D. in Atlanta followed by a Seattle based internship with Microsoft where he finally settled as an engineer with Google. Through Google, he met FFE board member, Raj who exposed him to the work of FFE. As a college student, Peter benefited from scholarships given by organizations similar in nature to FFE. The GE foundation gave him a three-year scholarship to pursue undergraduate studies in Hungary followed by a scholarship from Naumann-Etienne foundation for his Masters at Georgia Tech. Though work life took over,

he never forgot the boost he received from those philanthropic gestures. He knew he would like to provide similar scholarships to a new generation of needy students. After a successful career, it was time to give back to society. Peter set up The Pesti foundation to manage long-term donations using funds from stock investments and began scouting for an organization which embodies his values. After going through reports on almost 400 non-profits, FFE fit the glove. What impresses Peter about FFE is the professional set-up and the engaged leadership. He also admires the volunteer network and corporate connections to help students all across India. The ability to reach out to needy students in India while receiving funds as a tax-exempt, US-based non-profit was a bonus. The fact that very little is kept back for overheads and students get most of the donation is also in line with research showing how cash grants are highly efficient. Impressed, Peter visited Bangalore and interacted with members of FFE India. He realized how each dollar donation goes so much further in India. In any case, individual spending on education is a high-return investment, and more so when India is the target market. Peter has traveled through India for the last four years and knew there is a financial need when compared to a global perspective. His familiarity with the country and his admiration of FFE’s methodology sealed the deal. The Pesti Foundation has pledged to support eight FFE students every year, until 2040.



**Alumni - Ranjith Kagathi:** FFE alumni scholar, Ranjith Kagathi, works for Google at Mountain View, California. In 2005, he received a B.E. in Electronics and Communications from NITK, in Surathkal. Ranjith’s father, Ananda Krishnaiah Setty, owned a bookstore and his mother, Radha, was a homemaker. A high school classmate introduced Ranjith to FFE in 2001. He was granted a full scholarship for the duration of the engineering program. During graduation, he was awarded the Engineering Gold Medal. Ranjith stood tenth at The Karnataka CET 2001 Engineering Entrance Exam and eighteenth at The Karnataka CET 2001 Medical Entrance Exam. After graduation, he sponsored his sister to pursue B.E. in Computer Science and has been contributing back to FFE to fulfill his commitment to sponsoring two FFE scholars.

**Donor and past Board member - Ron Mehta:** FFE got a substantial donation from a stalwart supporter and past Board member, Ron Mehta. Giving back is not an unfamiliar concept to him. Despite being an atheist, he believes in the Golden rule of Zoroastrianism, ‘good thoughts, good words, good deeds’. It was his mother who inculcated this value in him during his childhood in Ahmedabad. Her actions and charitable service influenced young Ron who continued with the practice even after he left his hometown and relocated to the United States.



Ron Mehta arrived in the US in 1970, after completing engineering at IIT Bombay. He pursued engineering degrees at various US universities before starting his career at a multi-national in 1975. Fifteen years later, he decided to chuck his career and become an entrepreneur. He started an industry manufacturing plastic products and went on to buy and sell plastic blow molding factories in US states like NJ, CA, PA, KY, NC as well as Canada. Finally, after selling his last company in 2012, Ron was ready to change focus. After a successful inning as a venture capitalist, he turned to the non-profit sector.

He is the current President of the alumni heritage foundation for his alma mater, IIT Bombay. The 8000 strong IIT alums across the US, routinely collect 2 million dollars and, over the years, have given back over 40 million dollars for various projects. Ron has himself been involved in a number of wonderful, not for profit organizations such as Dakshana foundation that trains bright students at a high school level, with a 60% acceptance rate at distinguished universities. He also heads the water vertical for Wheels foundation, founded by pan IIT alumni, to provide infrastructure support to India.

"I love giving back to India in any shape mostly to help young students get scholarships," he admits candidly. Luckily for FFE, board member Venk Shukla brought him into the fold a few years ago. Ron was a limited partner in Venk's early stage venture fund. He attended the California gala and was impressed by the premise and the work done by FFE. Hooked, he went on to chair the New York gala for two years. This year, he made a substantial donation of \$110,000 dollars at the gala in San Francisco with a promise of additional funds of \$55000 each over the next two years.

But there is a stipulation. Ron is unhappy there aren't too many deserving FFE Scholars going to IIT Bombay. He hopes his dollars will allow them to study at India's stellar institution. In order to make this possible, he has been working closely, as an enabler, with the FFE India trust as well as the IIT Bombay scholarship programs. He is also working closely with CEO of the IIT Bombay alumni association. Ron hopes 100% of the students supported by his donation go to IIT Bombay. However, of the total donation of \$220,000, he is fine with \$200,000 supporting students at IIT Bombay with the remainder going to IIT Gandhinagar, other IIT's and failing that, to non-IIT FFE scholars.

This man with a large heart is satisfied that his hard-earned money goes towards helping needy students. While he is longer active in the work force, he does play around with investing. However, he is level-headed, neither getting excited when it goes up or depressed when it goes down. He is also the unpaid treasurer for the medical practice of his family of physicians, which includes his wife of 45 years, a Hindu girl who stole his heart while they were in Ahmedabad. Other than that, he enjoys his down time with his grandchildren and driving his new toy, a Tesla Model X. For Ron, life has come full circle. The young Zoroastrian boy from Ahmedabad is learning to enjoy life and follow his mother's long ago implanted dictum of giving back.



**Volunteer - Rahul Sethuram:** This could be a typical immigrant kid's story. Rahul's parents are from Bangalore and moved to the US. Born and raised in Saratoga and Palo Alto, he studied Electrical engineering. His keen interest in cutting-edge technology and the start-up culture eventually led him down the entrepreneurial route, leading to the co-founding of a blockchains payments company in San Francisco. But Rahul is different. As a board member of FFE, his mother took him to the gala in 2016. That changed Rahul's outlook.

Having been the recipient of a privileged upbringing, he realized the importance of a good education. FFE's central theme of helping motivated, high-achieving, underprivileged children in India, touched a chord.

With family in India, he has visited Bangalore frequently and seen at close hands the desperate need for a helping hand. In his line of work, he has interacted with brilliant techies from India and knows the untapped potential if a student gets the right break. The right opportunities can make a huge difference. Rahul resonated with the cause and decided to throw his weight behind FFE's effort.

Over the years, Rahul has attended other non-profit events, organized and managed by a younger generation. Organizations such as Big Brother Big Sister were not just fun for his demographic but also raised an awareness and interest among his generation to donate for a cause. He realized the importance of passing on the baton. Younger generations can continue the vision of the older folks and bring new energy and fresh ideas. Lack of engagement by the younger generation could be a death knell for foundations. Rahul brainstormed with his mother and suggested FFE could do with a junior leadership group. Thus was born Y-PAG.

Y-PAG can become torchbearers for FFE. Future leaders can be groomed to don the mantle and continue the important work of attracting donors, volunteers and scholars, possibly using a new and modern approach. Y-PAG aims to create a formal leadership team that will plan events and meet fundraising goals, initially in San Francisco and then across the US starting with New York. As peers, they can become mentors to the Indian scholars and go forward to integrate more with the India-based team.

Since Rahul has just begun his association with FFE, he has not met too many scholars but at the 2017 gala, he spoke at length with Ranjith; a former scholar who now works at Google and is a member of Y-PAG. Ranjith made a personal donation to FFE to make a difference in someone's life. FFE changed the trajectory of Ranjith's life for the better and he wanted to pay it forward. Seeing his act moved Rahul immensely.

It is incidents like this that cement Rahul's deep desire to work with FFE and make a difference. He finds it an extremely rewarding experience, enjoys meeting the accomplished people he meets at the Foundation who are committed to furthering the cause. he considers it to be not just inspirational, but also an honor to be a part of the foundation.

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## How to get Involved

In addition to being a donor, we have lots of opportunities for volunteers in a variety of roles ranging from marketing, operations, event development and coordination. You can become a part of FFE's mission to make an impact in the lives of deserving students in India, enabling them to pursue their dreams. This would not be possible without the assistance of FFE's huge volunteer network. Please Visit [www.ffe.org](http://www.ffe.org) to learn more or send us an email at [vishala@ffe.org](mailto:vishala@ffe.org)

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## FFE Management Team

In 2017, the focus of the team was to increase awareness of FFE. In keeping with this aim, there were 17 events across the USA, since January 2017. The Management team plans to continue this awareness campaign into 2018. If you would like to organize an "FFE awareness Campaign" in your area, please do get in touch with us.

Another feather in the cap for FFE is the decision of Professor Shilpi Agarwal from UC Berkley's MBA Program, to include an FFE case study in her Social Media Marketing Strategy class. One of her students, Vrushali Malpekar, has been assigned the role of supporting and developing the social media strategy for FFE, as her project for the course.

Do visit our office and engage with FFE 's dynamic staff of Vishala Kumar, Vijaya Shivamani, and Surendra Bhargava. At the same time, learn about opportunities to make a difference.

## Editor's Note



It's been a busy period for FFE with the San Francisco Gala taking precedence. It was a super success and testimonials praise the effortless weaving of entertainment and information. FFE aimed high with this gala and raised a million dollars in funds. This will make education accessible to many needy children. Socrates has said. "Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel." Many flames will be kindled and many futures will be positively impacted, thanks to the funds raised. Apart from that, two generous gestures by patrons impressed by FFE's work, ensures a continuous influx of funds. One of the donors, Peter Pesti, was himself a beneficiary of scholarships as a young adult. He now finds himself in a position to payback and picked FFE as the beneficiary of his largesse. The other donor, FFE past board member Ron Mehta, has been a FFE stalwart for many years. Maya Angelou has rightly said, "One must know not just how to accept a gift, but with what grace to share it." Both our donors encapsulate her statement. Volunteers, alumni, FFE trustees and board members all came together to make the event a super success. Kudos to the joint effort. FFE has been engaged in increasing awareness all through the year. It is FFE's aim to continue the endeavor in the coming year.

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