

Auroville International USA News

Our focus, since our founding as the Association for Auroville, is to support this unique international experiment in Human Unity.



PHOTO CONSTANCE

A number of people including June, Constance, Jack and Mary, Vijay, Megan, Taranti and Nilauro have given a great deal of effort towards keeping the office up and running over the years.

We have a new team in place to share the work consisting of Charles Flores for AVIUSA, Julian Lines for our East Coast Branch, the Auroville Information Office, and Kalpana Patel coordinating accounts and donations. Nilauro Markus will help in our transition as a part-time consultant.

Our physical office, which has been housed at Talisman, a rug cleaning business in Santa Cruz owned by Board member, Constance, has moved North to the warehouse of Auromere in Lodi, California. Auromere's primary business is the sale of Sri Aurobindo books, classical spiritual literature, incense, and Ayurvedic body care products from India. Proceeds from sales support Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (SASP), a community dedicated to integral yoga. (visit www.auromere.com)

Bhavana, an American Aurovillian working on Village Action, spent a number of months at Lodi this past year. SASP has since been hosting Auroville weekends on a quarterly basis. Bhavana has returned to Auroville, but plans to continue an ongoing relationship with SASP and AVIUSA. This will manifest in the form of articles and updates from Auroville until her next trip to the States.

Photo left: Ed, Bill, Nilauro, Paula, Julian and Chandresh Gather for an AVIUSA Board meeting in Los Gatos.

Auroville Family Gatherings



PHOTOS NILAURO

Lodi

Auroville-born Auropuja, her son Ethan and outsourced Auroville greenworker Chris plant a tree at Lodi

Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham has already hosted two gatherings of our extended family on the West Coast and is planning a third for January. Bhavana and B. Sullivan were among those at the first, which included many friends from the Bay area participating in collective karma

yoga. June Maher attended the second gathering, inspecting the trees planted in her honor and connecting with old friends.

We are delighted to announce that Mary Alexander will return to the AVIUSA Board of Directors and help coordinate future gatherings at Lodi.

Matagiri

The East Coast Auroville gathering took place at Matagiri on the weekend of September 10th. To our great delight, a longtime supporter of Auroville, Suzanne MacDonald, came for the entire weekend. Suzanne has been deeply involved in building a conference center in the Pyrenees in the South of France with her husband, Dennis Meadows. She gifted us with a copy of his seminal work, "The Limits to Growth" in its 30th anniversary edition.

Suzanne is hoping to return to Auroville this winter. Her friend and mentor, Peter Callaway, is also making a return visit to Auroville. Peter was the founder of Merriam Hill Center, where we hosted our first All USA Meetings. He is currently involved with watershed environmental education in the Ozarks.

After focused work trimming hedges and vines around the Matagiri property, a contingent headed up the mountain for a hike, led by Shanthi, Julian and Wendy's

poodle. In the evening we saw the extraordinary new documentary "Towards a Sustainable Future" about Auroville's 36 years of work on reforestation and appropriate technology. We hope to make this wonderful documentary available to our members in the near future.

Jack the strolling minstrel entertains the Lodi gathering



California Institute of Integral Studies goes to Auroville

Founded by Haridas Chaudhuri, the California Institute of Integral Studies is a degree granting institution based in San Francisco. It has a new series of programs in Auroville starting in 2005. At the same time, Aurovillian Bindu Mohanty, is heading for the USA to study at CIIS. For details visit: www.ciis.edu/news/auroville.html

overview of the myriad meditation practices in India. Auroville residents will present talks on collective yoga and community transformation, and the class will visit Sri Aurobindo's ashram and various South Indian temples. The second week of the course includes a three-day attendance at the Fourth International Conference on Integral Psychology, held in Auroville. For more information, contact: Brant Cortright at 415.575.6226 or email bcortright@ciis.edu

New Graduate Courses in Auroville

Auroville: Spirituality, Community, and Multi-culturalism (CT7800)

This course will be taught by Jorge Ferrer and Mariana Caplan, professors in the School of Consciousness and Transformation, and held from January 5 through January 19. The first week of the course offers a guided introduction to Auroville and nearby Pondicherry, and a three-day stay in Tiruvannamalai, a traditional Indian village. The second week involves a deeper immersion in Auroville, as well as collective inquiry into selected topics related to integral spirituality and the Auroville experiment. For more information, contact: Mariana Caplan at 510.548.0379 or mcaplan@ciis.edu; or Jorge Ferrer at 415.575.6100 ext. 416 or email jferrer@ciis.edu

Indian Psychology: An Experiential course on India's Contribution to Psychology

This course will be taught by Brant Cortright, a professor in the School of Professional Psychology. Students will immerse themselves into India's unique approach to psychology and transformation. Each day will begin with a different meditation practice, and the course will encompass an

Alumni and Friends Travel Tour to Auroville

CIIS will be offering 20 alumni and friends of CIIS the exciting opportunity to spend two weeks (January 16-30) in Auroville and south India. Participants will spend time in Auroville, where they will practice yoga and meditation, visit nearby Pondicherry, engage in workshops leading to continuing education units (if desired), and enjoy vegetarian meals. The second week includes a tour of some of the ancient temples of south India, as well as an opportunity to shop for silks and statuary. The trip will be led by Richard Buggs, Dean of Students and Director of Alumni Services, and Nikki Lastreto, a former CIIS staff person who has traveled extensively throughout India and is an expert in Indian culture. The fee of \$1,400 includes most meals, lodging, and transportation within India. Participants arrange and pay for air travel.

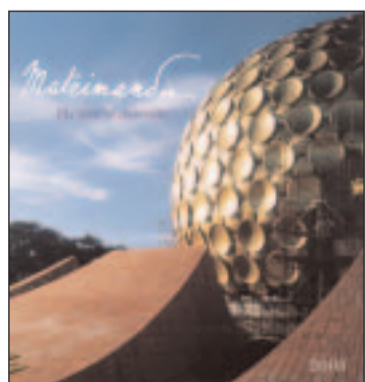
For more information about the tour, please contact Richard Buggs, Dean of Students and Director of Alumni Services, at 415.575.6116 or email rbuggs@ciis.edu

New Membership Program

Our office receives income from a percentage taken from donations and from memberships. In order to maintain our non-profit status, we have to keep good records and serve both America and Auroville as best as we can. The more you know about Auroville the better, so we are instituting a new membership program. Our suggested basic contribution is \$10 per month, though higher pledges and any act of support are always welcome. You can pay with one check or have your credit card billed automatically each month.

- What you get for .33 cents a day:
 - the monthly copy of Auroville Today 8-12 large format pages of articles, photographs, cartoons. Current subscribers will have their subscriptions extended.
 - the monthly AVIUSA UPDATE, two pages of news about AVIUSA, the American experience of Auroville and our work in the International Zone.
 - the annual Calendar from Auroville with photos
 - a special gift to remind you how important you are to our work.

Please take this opportunity to reflect on how important Auroville's

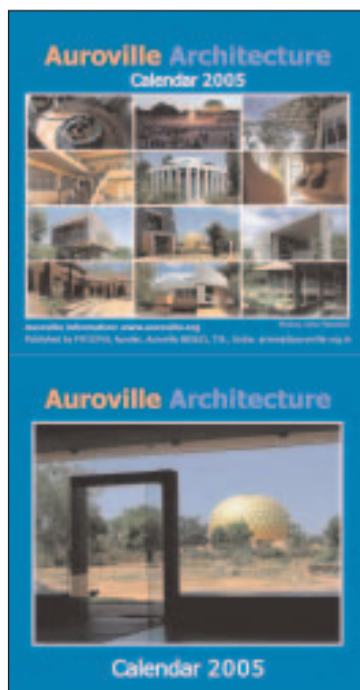


existence is to us and truly to the world. Please go to our website and join as a member. Be as generous as possible.

Donations

To donate online go to auiusa.org/donations_donatenow.html

You can send a check to Auroville International USA, P.O. Box 1534, Lodi, CA 95241-1534. Office phone: 831-425-5620. Toll-free donation line: 866-2-HELP-AV or 866-243-5728 email: info@auiusa.org



2005 Calendars

Members of AVIUSA will get copies of the Matrimandir desktop calendar which focuses on the twelve petals and of the Prisma desk calendar on Auroville Architecture.

Bhavana's Letter

It's been a while since I wrote to you, and there's a reason for that. Village Action has been going through major difficulties, and as you well know, during times of turmoil it is very difficult to know what to write - because it is changing so fast. In brief, AVAG did not get a major grant which we had been sure would come through, and that left us having to dismiss our staff. Due to a number of reasons, this resulted in two-thirds of the staff becoming furious and violent, demanding their re-employment by using all the conventional labor tactics: accusing us of corruption, prejudice, and even involving local political thugs and mob tactics to threaten us into taking them back. Unfortunately for them, they were trying to squeeze water out of a dry cloth - our financial situation simply cannot cover their salaries. However, in the meanwhile they disrupted the smooth developmental flow with the village groups - for a while the groups of women saving money collectively didn't know what to think, they were being so misinformed by these former employees. Also, it roused the ire of the ex-workers whenever we went ourselves to the villages - which they expressed in threatening phone calls and mob action at the office. This has been going on since February, flaring up hotly during May and July, and presently seeming to be smouldering to a close.

So, how are we doing now, with no Development Workers going to the villages and stimulating the process of community organization? It's looking a lot better than we would have thought. Eighty percent of the 104 women's savings clubs have continued or resumed their savings. Most of them regret having been misled by the former Development Workers, but ask us 'Please don't close down the program. We can organize by ourselves now. You've taken us out of our houses, don't abandon us and send us back into confinement!' The youth/men's clubs have continued meeting undisturbed. They saw all along that the Development Workers were making a mistake in vilifying the very organization in which they wanted to be re-employed.

Elected village leaders continue to come to the office to discuss development projects in their villages, offering sympathy and support in the storm of local politics. The school teachers, who had grown very appreciative of AVAG's genuine interest in improving the educational opportunities at the schools, are suggesting that we continue the program by helping to train assistant teachers who would be full-time in the school. - perhaps an educated member of the local women's club.

For one thing, we have had a moment to look up from our own huge array of programs in the villages

(women's clubs, men's clubs, parent-teacher associations and all their micro-projects and work camps, plus government projects for housing, income generation, women's literacy, and special programs for supplementary teaching in the schools and assistance to the indigent aged, handicapped and deserted or widowed women). Interestingly, now that we've had a chance to raise our heads and to look around, we see how much the scene has changed since we started our work in 1988. Many more of the village young people are getting educated and want to emulate lifestyles seen on TV and in Auroville; Auroville employment has much empowered village women who can be seen riding mopeds and calling the shots for their families; and there are many born-and-



Entrance of the Village Action building in Irumbai

raised-in-Auroville young people of Tamil origin who are spontaneously looking for ways to improve the relation between Auroville and villages, or to share the benefits of Auroville with their home villages. Furthermore, the Auroville planning department, faced with the presence of ten villages in the master plan site, is looking to us to plan seriously about including the villagers in the design of Auroville.

So, between the apparent ability and willingness of the village groups to organize themselves, and the new crop of young leaders in the villages ready to take up projects and educational programs for their people, and Aurovilians' new-found enthusiasm to relate to the villages, we see a new Village Action emerging. A Village Action which is less concerned with running its own programs (because that groundwork has been accomplished, successfully, and doesn't need to be enlarged) and is more concerned with guiding and advising a multitude of new, smaller development initiatives coming from Auroville and the villages.

How will that look? It is not completely clear yet, which is why I have been delaying writing you. One thing that seems to be emerging is an

enlarged and refined version of our 'Microproject Fund'. The essence of this program was that a group of villagers who had been meeting regularly could plan to take up small village self-help projects (for example, at first cleaning the streets, and then perhaps deepening a well, or, eventually, erecting a new school building). For each micro-project, 30% of the cost has to be put up by the group (in labour, kind or cash), and a plan for its maintenance has to be included. The great thing about this is that not only do the villagers get a much needed improvement or asset, but they also learn by working as a group how they can get things done. We see the next phase of Village Action building on this base because now the village groups are able to act without constant inputs from the hired staff.

Another area where we expect to continue working is with the local

schools, where we had been sending Development Workers twice a week with non-formal educational inputs. The local teachers are very keen that this continues. In the new spirit of opening to fresh sources of collaboration, we will be open to Aurovilians volunteering to attend the local schools as supplementary teachers.

Of course, AVAG will continue to help the village groups to relate to the local governmental development programs, which include subsidized loans for income-generating projects, grants for building house toilets, pensions for old people, and various other developmental programs. AVAG's role will be to train and support leaders from the local groups to make their own contacts, and also to band together through their Women's Federation and Men's Federation to cooperate for their mutual benefit.

The relation between Auroville and the villages becomes a major focus and we are cultivating contacts between the groups of Tamil Aurovilians (mostly from the local villages) which have grown up in the last years. There's a 40-strong group of young mothers, the wives of Tamil Aurovilians, who are meeting and searching for meaningful activities.

There are a couple of groups of Tamil young men who have been taking up work for Auroville - one of them calls itself the 'What Can We Do for Auroville Group'. We hope that we will be able to work together with these groups and other groups in Auroville, to bring village men's and women's groups on visits to Auroville, and also to arrange visit to the villages for the Auroville groups. We hope that the inter-cultural aspect of these exchanges will broaden, perhaps eventually involving Auroville communities in adopting and exchanging with a village community.

This is what I can say about Auroville Village Action Group right now. Although it is not 'going on as usual' it is still going on, and is in a most interesting transition phase. More than ever, with your moral support and financial help you can join us as we struggle through this passage. Letters can be written to me (bhavanadee@auroville.org.in).

I'd like to share something deep and impressive that's made a deep change in my consciousness since I've been back in Auroville. It has to do with right and wrong. While I was living in Lodi and immeasurably happy in the ashram setting and its simple daily round of tasks and devotions and friendly exchanges, I was in telephone connection with the AVAG staff and very aware of the problems they were facing and a call to return. But when I would check 'inside' I would get a 'no' to leaving. Even after I decided to leave sooner rather than later, visa problems prevented me from going. Coming back, I can see that my presence in Auroville would have helped a lot - but at the same time, the impressions come rolling in that there were important things for Auroville which are happening because I stayed: the coming of the UCSC students and fac-



Auroville's experiential education with an academic finesse, the helpful visits (to become annual inputs) of Jinendra, a skilled and dynamic communications facilitator who spread himself widely in Auroville, and very especially the Auro Family Reunion and the shift of the AVI-USA office to the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, which gives an important in-the-physical connection to the Ashram-and-Auroville poles in America.

From one point of view my staying on in California was irresponsibly wrong, from another point of view it was futuristically right. As the truth of this began to sink in, I could feel a deep revelation inside, about the relativity of conditioned mind, a quiet acceptance of 'this ambiguous globe', and great compassion for us all until we have moved into the higher consciousness which Mother and Sri Aurobindo could see so clearly coming, and gave us Auroville to practice in. The higher consciousness which, in its wholeness, will liberate us from blame, and usher in a new harmony on earth.

With all the love,
Bhavana



Inside the Village Action building in Irumbai

ulty which may result in Auroville being anthropologically researched and documented, the CIIS connection (only partially due to me) which will complete the "integral education" of

Donations for Village Action can be made through Auroville International USA. Please specify on your check or online donation 'AVAG'.

Celebrate the holidays with Auroville gifts

If you are planning to give a gift this Holiday season, why not give a gift from Auroville? Support the community and provide an opportunity to discuss their work. Here is a list of sources you should patronize now and throughout the year:

◆Give the gift of membership in AVIUSA (the gift which keeps giving all year long). www.aviusa.org

◆Maroma, makers of candles and incense and a tremendous financial support to Auroville, have online shopping and FREE SHIPPING within the 48 states. They also have a list of retailers carrying their products. Minimum order of \$25. Phone 888-376-3381 or visit www.maroma-usa.com/

◆Pondicherry is a gift shop in Woodstock carrying a number of Auroville handicrafts including leather boxes and briefcases, beaded lampshades, handloomed yoga mats, hammocks, rope chairs, hand-painted silk kaftans and

scarves. They also carry books by Alan (Savitra) Lithman and Georges Van Vrekhem. Call toll free at 800-815-1969 11:30-5:30 EST to place an order or email info@pondi.biz. All major credit cards accepted.

◆Mirabelle is located outside of Boston, MA and sells a wonderful collection of furniture and jewelry from the Ashram, Auroville and throughout India. Profits from their marvelous replicas of George Nakashima furniture designed for Golconde are donated to the Auroville Land Fund. Website www.mirabelle.com/, email info@mirabelle.com or phone 617-964-2999

◆Aromere sells wonderful soaps, toothpaste and incense from their own factory in Pondicherry, but besides their catalog of books on Sri Aurobindo, the Mothe and Indian philosophy, they distribute a number of important books and CDs on Auroville. They have a special section of Auroville Books on their website: www.auromere.com. Call 800-735-4691

or email books@auromere.com

◆Internatural, owned by Sri Aurobindo devotee, Santosh Krinsky, is one of the internet's most complete sources for health products, books, incense and related categories. Among their extensive incense lines, they carry Encens d'Auroville. Santosh set up a special portal for Village Action, where a percentage of sales go to support their important work: www.shop4avag.com/ or use the toll free fax line: 800-905-6887 or place your order with one of our customer service representatives at 800-742-5841 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM CST Monday through Friday, after hours and weekends orders may be left on our voice mail. Don't forget to mention Village Action.



Inside boutique Mirabelle

◆Matagiri has its our own humble list of calendars, books, videos and CDs hosted on the website: www.matagiri.org/avinfo.htm. All profits go to AVIUSA in support of our work in America. Email: aviny@aviusa.org with questions or comments.