

Affluent Chicago suburb to host India's Independence Day parade

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Naperville (US): The Chicago suburb of Naperville is to officially host the India Independence Day parade this year, making it the first city in Midwest America to do so.

The parade is organized in many American cities by private organizations like the Federation of Indian Associations. The parade will be held on August 16, a Sunday.

Naperville's Indian Community Outreach Organization(ICO) and the Alliances of Midwest Indian Association have jointly organized the parade and related celebrations which includes hoisting the Indian flag at the Naperville Municipal Center. The organizers said that they anticipated a large turnout, rivalling the Independence Day parade in Chicago's 'little India' Devon Avenue, traditionally the biggest such event in the area.

The India Day Parade will showcase India's rich and diverse culture, with several floats organized by Indian cultural, business and political organizations. Spectators will be treated to a rich variety of Indian cuisine, ethnic arts, apparel and jewelry.

At an event to announce the parade, senior city officials were unabashedly enthusiastic. Naperville Mayor Steve Chirico and Mayor Emeritus George Pradel lauded the contributions of the suburb's Indian American community. There was even a proposal for Pradel to be the 'parade marshal' attired in a traditional Indian attire.

"Indian Americans are now a significant part of Naperville's population in both numbers and impact," said ICO chairman Krishna Bansal. The community, which saw a dramatic growth since the nineties, now comprises ten percent of the suburb's total population. Moreover, with the recent influx of information technology workers and other professionals from India, over 70 percent are first generation immigrants.

Local observers see the parade as a symbol of the rapid growth of the Indian American community in the Chicago suburbs. Indian-Americans are the largest Asian ethnic group in Illinois, according to data from the last census. Demographers and Indian community leaders say they expect that the figures will increase even more as highly educated Indians continue to fill jobs in the computer industry and change the face of the suburbs.

Earlier, Indian immigrants chose to first settle near Chicago's Devon Avenue, and later moved to the suburbs as they prospered. In a demographic shift, recent Indian immigrants move directly to suburbs like Naperville, which has a highly regarded school system.

Naperville, ranked as one of the most desirable American cities to raise a family, is home to more than 10,000 Indian-Americans, making it the suburb with the largest population of the community in the area outside Chicago.

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