

# WestCoastNewsline

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## Temecula's post office named after Saund

KALYANI VASAN

Temecula, Calif

IT is a new landmark the Indian American community in Temecula, a small town about 80 miles from the hustle and bustle of Los Angeles, have been wanting for long. After years of lobbying for a symbol of their pride, the community got one last week: the town's main post office has been re-named after Dalip Singh Saund, the first Asian elected to the US Congress in 1956. The decision is also a shift from US government policies from the past: no other government building in the country has been named after any Indian American.

Temecula was within the parameters of Saund's Congressional district about five decades ago, and now comes under Congressman Darrell Issa's district. Presiding over the renaming ceremony, Issa hailed Saund as a pioneer who overcame several barriers to enter a political



(L to R) Congressman Darrell Issa, Anaheim City Councilman Harry Siddhu and Rajveer Virk displaying the plaque that will be on the post office building named after Congressman Dalip Singh Saund

office. In spite of his Republican leanings, Issa claimed that he had campaigned for Saund, a Democrat, because he was a "true American hero". His concerted efforts, from the introduction of the bill to the eventual renaming the post office, led President George Bush signing the bill into a law last July.

Temecula city mayor Ron Roberts said that it was a matter of pride for the town. Speaking on behalf of the Indian American community, GOPIO president Inder Singh said: "Saund made history in 1956 when he became the first Asian to be elected to the US Congress. Saund entered the same Congress which a few years earlier had passed Asian exclusionary laws to bar those (Asians) from owning property, marrying a US citizen etc." As an expression of gratitude, the local Indian community raised \$10,000 for Congressman Issa.

The ceremony was organized by former El Centro mayor David

Dhillon and attended by mayor Ron Roberts and prominent Indians including Inder Singh, Anaheim City Councilman Harry Siddhu, President of FIA Southern California Kewal Kanda, GOPIO Temecula President Paul Toor, and Baljit Toor, president of the India Association of Inland Empire.

Saund's achievements have led to many petitions for recognition, initiated by the Indian American community and US Congressmen. Joe Wilson introduced HR 753, a bill that called for the placement of a portrait of Saund in the US Capitol Building. California Assemblyman Rudy Bermudez moved Resolution AJR to become a law wherein September 20, Saund's birthday, was dedicated as an annual day of recognition. A petition drive to campaign for a postal stamp honoring Saund is currently being worked on. The government of India named a conference hall after Saund at the first Pravasi Bhartiya Divas in 2003.

## Divine justice: Doc dead, 188 fraud cases closed

SAM RAO

Oakland, Calif

IN WHAT is being termed as a one-of-its-kind judgement, US District Court Judge Lowell recently dismissed all the 188 charges of healthcare and mail fraud against Indian American physician Dr Dilbagh Chattha in view of the defendant's sudden demise. The 53-year-old Fremont physician died of a heart attack while staying at a relative's house last month. Incidentally, it was only last month that Dr Chattha was released on a \$500,000 bail.

Said defense attorney Jeffrey Niesen after the judgement: "It is the first time in our careers that we've had a defendant die during a trial. Therefore, the Judge ruled that the case was without merit given Dr Chattha's death."

The government believed that it had a solid case against Dr Chattha noting he was

indicted twice by a Federal grand jury, first on January 8, 2004, and then again on January 20, 2005. In the 2005 hearing, Dr Chattha was charged of defrauding the government of at least \$135,000.

Dr Chattha's charges rose from complaints by the US Postal Service, a federal entity, which claimed the doctor was ordering too much paid time off for postal workers and giving them too much billable medical treatment. The 2005 indictment accused Chattha of submitting bills for reimbursement by the US Department of Labor, the US Department of Health and Human Services, and the State's Workers' Compensation Program in which he claimed he performed higher levels of service than he actually did.

According to the indictment, Dr Chattha prepared and submitted special reports, including more information than is included in typical medical billing forms, and claimed to

have conducted tests that he either did not perform or conducted fewer times than he billed for in claiming to treat several patients.

In another case with similar leanings, Pakistani American Mohammed Zarin Khan (41) was sentenced to five years in state prison in December 2004.

Dr Zhan was sentenced in connection with the back injury he claimed to have received when he fell on the job at a South San Francisco printing company, in November 2002. He was convicted of perjury and falsifying testimony after investigation by the authorities. Dr Chattha was the practicing Physician in that case, although he was not charged in that particular case.

"I am sure (the heart attack) was the result of the extreme stress the doctor suffered as a result of the government's case against him. Nothing in his life is as stressful," said defense attorney Jeffrey Niesen.

## Sonny Dhaliwal in Lathrop's Planning Commission, again

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Stockton, Calif

INDIAN American Sonny Dhaliwal has been reappointed to the Planning Commission in the city of Lathrop, in San Joaquin County.

In the last city council elections held in November 2005, 44-year-old Dhaliwal had come in second, polling 35.53 percent of the votes, to eventual winner Kristi Sayles getting 45.18 percent of the total votes cast.

Dhaliwal has served three years on the Lathrop Planning Commission already and had left the post to pursue his City Council ambitions.

The current vacancy was created by a resignation by one of the sitting planning commission members Leroy Griffiths, due to illness. The city of Lathrop is in the Central Valley of California, about 30 miles east of Livermore.

This special appointment is within the purview of the sitting city council, currently headed by Mayor Glory Ann Rhodes. The appointment normally carries a four-year term and term limits kick in after the incumbent has served two terms.

Although Indian Americans elected to public office are very few in California, even for smaller city wide offices, there are several appointed officials across the state, county and city government commissions.

"We are pleased that following the trend for Indian Americans in California, the city of Lathrop has again welcomed their own Indian American person to an important commission appointment" said Vijaya Aasuri, Human Relations commissioner of Fremont city in nearby Alameda County

Sonny Dhaliwal has a degree in political science from Guru Nanak Dev University in Punjab, and works for the Santa Clara County transit system.

## Anupam Kher is best actor at Riverside fest

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Riverside, Calif

THE 2006 Riverside International Film Festival (RIFF) screened a record number of five Bollywood/Indian American made films with South Asian and mainstream viewership at a record level.

Bollywood veteran Anupam Kher won the best actor award for his role as a professor in *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara*. Dee Wallace Stone, who starred in *American Blend* was conferred the Lifetime Achievement Award. Now in its fourth year, RIFF is becoming a major event

on the social calendar of the Inland Empire and surrounding counties as well.

This year the Indian films screened were *Parineeta*, *Bluff Master*, *Maine Gandhi ko nahin mara*, *The Gold Bracelet* and *American Blend*. "We had a good mix and this is what I have always hoped for, this year we were lucky enough to have representation from 10 or so countries, all showcasing a good mix of themes, acting prowess and cinematography. Anupam Kher's superb candid portrayal of a man who is a prisoner of his own mind won hands down with our judges for best film and best



Dee Wallace Stone and Dhillon

actor," said Dr Harkeerat Dhillon, founder of the Riverside International Film Festival.

"Riverside lacked this kind of entertainment, despite being one of the fastest growing areas of California," Dr Dhillon added.



Maine Gandhi ko nahin maara still

Nancy Douglas, member of the board of directors of RIFF, and a librarian at the University of California, Riverside selects the films along with her team. These films are then viewed by the Board and chosen for screening.

