

“Think India, Think Texas – Leverage Houston,” IACCGH’s theme for the year was spotlighted at their 19<sup>th</sup> annual gala held on August 11<sup>th</sup> at the Hilton Americas downtown. The event saw a cross-section of over 800 plus business leaders, top-tier professionals, and elected officials. The Keynote Speaker was Texas Governor Greg Abbott while the Guests of Honor were Consul General Dr. Anupam Ray, Judge Ed Emmett, and Mayor Sylvester Turner. Megha Chandna, Serene Kaggal, and Ishya Kachru rendered the American, Indian National Anthems, and the State Song of Texas respectively.

Past President and Director Sanjay Ramabhadran, who served as Emcee, set the tone for the evening by highlighting Governor Greg Abbott’s recent trade mission to India. He stated that the visit, which was covered by abc13, not only brought “Incredible India” to the living rooms of Texans but went a long way in deepening economic and cultural ties between Texas and India.

Describing the Chamber as a “community dream in 1999 and now a significant reality” – Executive Director Jagdip Ahluwalia emphasized the Chamber’s efforts in collaborating with over 30 Chambers of Commerce and economic agencies in promoting economic activity in Houston, many of whom were present in the room. He thanked the City of Hempstead for choosing IACCGH to introduce itself to the Indo-American community in its drive to attract investment in Hempstead.

A “household name” in Harris County, Judge Ed Emmett lauded the “ordinary people who did extraordinary things” during Hurricane Harvey and stated that the evening was celebrating not just the achievements of the Chamber but also those individuals who are “truly making a difference.”

Mayor Turner referred to his upcoming delegation in October to build a stronger relationship between Houston and India and the \$12 billion trade that currently exists between the two. The diversity of its people, he stressed, has helped Houston overcome many challenges and pledged to build a city that will be “a shining example of diversity and inclusion.”

President Swapan Dhairyawan offered an update on the year’s events and highlighted the Chamber’s Outreach efforts to help small businesses affected by Hurricane Harvey rebuild. A recent decision by the Chamber Board to make the Presidency a two-year term was put into effect this year making him the first President to continue serving the Chamber in 2019. He expressed his willingness and stated that this decision would “allow for greater continuity” in initiatives and programs.

“India brings everyone together” was Consul General Dr. Anupam’s Ray’s opening remark. India, he noted, is on an upward trajectory, an emerging power, the fastest growing economy in the world, and the fastest growing market for companies like Amazon, Walmart, and Netflix. Dr. Ray also did the honors of introducing Keynote Speaker Governor Greg Abbott who he described as “a remarkable man on an extraordinary journey.”

In a nod to the Chamber’s mission of impacting economic advancement in Houston, Governor Abbott appreciated the vital role of the Chamber in the economic success of not only Houston but for “elevating the Texas economy.” He also spoke at length about his successful trade mission to India in March this year. The first Governor in the country to do so, he described India’s economy as “dynamic” and the “tremendous sense in aligning economically” with India. Governor Abbott held meetings with business leaders like Anand Mahindra of Mahindra and Mahindra, Sajjan Jindal of JSW Steel, and Azim Premji of Wipro who all have sizable investments in Texas. He also met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a rare honor, for over an hour to discuss future possibilities between India and Texas.

The evening also recognized accomplishments in innovation, economic impact, and entrepreneurship. The award for Innovation was presented to the Pumps and Pipes Society, technology giant Wipro was awarded the Inbound Investment award and the Entrepreneur of the Year award went to President of Karat 22, Chitranjan Aku Patel. The Women in Business: Making a Difference award was presented to Carlecia Wright, Director of the City of Houston – Office of Business Opportunity, Jewel Smith, Supplier Diversity Manager at CenterPoint Energy, and Aruna Viswanathan, Chief Operating Manager at Alphax Decision Sciences.

A special supplement highlighting the Chamber achievements over the past 19 years was released by Houston Business Journal’s publisher Bob Charlet. A fusion dance performance from Frank Sinatra, Beatles to Bollywood by Infused Performing Arts provided the entertainment for the evening. The program ended with many accolades from the attendees.