



May 2026

# IACCGH NEWSLETTER

Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston

1 Riverway, Suite 1700 Houston TX 77056 E: info@iaccgh.com

## In this edition

### Interviews

#### New Members in Focus

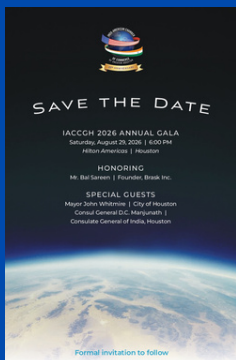
Rashmi Sheel  
AI Operations Strategist

Craig Howard  
Partner and Event Manager  
The Ballroom at Tanglewood

## Events in May

IACCGH Small Business Series  
Luncheon  
Featuring Office of Business  
Opportunity | City of Houston  
Elite Restaurant, Sugar Land  
May 20, 2026 | 11:00 AM – 1:30 PM

Open Forum IACCGH Business Hour  
Tune in FM 103.5 HUM FM  
Featuring Charles C. Foster, Foster LLP  
May 30, 2026 | 4:00 PM – 5:00 PM



27th IACCGH Gala on August 29,  
at Hilton Americas, Houston

**OPEN FORUM IACCGH BUSINESS HOUR**  
Saturday, February 14, 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm on FM 103.5

**Topic: Immigration Enforcement & Risks to H-1B and EB-5 programs**

**Charles C. Foster**  
Chairman  
Board Certified - Immigration and Customs Law - Texas Board of Legal Specialization  
Foster LLP

Veteran immigration attorney Charles C. Foster, Chairman of Foster LLP, returned for his fifth appearance on the IACCGH Business Hour on Open Forum on February 14. The program, titled "Immigration Enforcement and Risks to H-1B and EB-5 Programs," covered the growing pressures on both employers and immigrant families amid today's enforcement climate. Foster, with over 50 years of practice, warned that legal immigration pathways are increasingly strained. "They are undermining legal immigration across the board," he said. Despite the challenges, he urged listeners to stay informed and resilient: "The bark is worse than the bite. Don't give up." Read [here](#).

**WALLISBANK** **CenterPoint Energy**  
www.iaccgh.com | info@iaccgh.com | (713) 621-7331

**Tuesday | 05/20/26 | 11:00 AM - 1:30 PM**  
**Elite Restaurant**  
1941 Highway 6, Sugar Land, TX, 77498

**Topic: HCC Executive Entrepreneurial Program**

**FEATURING**  
**HOUSTON**

On February 24, 2026, the IACCGH Small Business Series was convened at Elite Restaurant in Sugar Land, spotlighting Houston Community College's expanding entrepreneurship resources. Led by Dr. Maya Durnovo, Associate Vice Chancellor for Entrepreneurship, HCC's delegation highlighted over 17 years of programming, including the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses initiative, which has graduated 1,200 businesses and contributed \$2 billion to the local economy. Directors April Felton and Connie Leon previewed an upcoming AI-powered accelerator for growth stage businesses. Click here to read the full article.

**OPEN FORUM IACCGH BUSINESS HOUR**  
Saturday, March 21, 4:00 pm - 5:00 pm on FM 103.5

**IACCGH Member in Focus**

**Dr. Rima Adil**  
Vice Chancellor of Strategic Communications and Marketing  
Houston City College

On March 21, Dr. Rima Adil, Vice Chancellor of Strategic Communications and Marketing at Houston City College, joined the IACCGH Business Hour on Open Forum 103.5 HUM FM. From the institution's historic rebrand to its first-in-the-nation Bachelor's degree in AI & Robotics, Dr. Adil unpacked how Houston City College - now a Tier 2 institution with partnerships with Tesla, SpaceX, and Apple - is redefining community education. With tuition at \$33 per credit hour and 80% of students on financial aid, opportunity has never been more accessible. Learn [more](#).

**IACCGH Small Business Series**  
Co-Sponsored By

**WALLISBANK** **CenterPoint Energy**  
www.iaccgh.com | info@iaccgh.com | (713) 621-7331

**Tuesday | 03/31/26 | 11:00 AM - 1:30 PM**  
**Wallis Bank Community Room**  
1041 W. San Jacinto Hwy N, Houston, TX, 77060

**Topic: Navigating SBA Programs for Business Success**

**FEATURING**  
**SBA**

**Mark Winchester**  
District Director, Houston Office  
U.S. Small Business Administration

On March 31, the IACCGH Small Business Series at Wallis Bank Community Room featured Mark Winchester, District Director of the U.S. Small Business Administration, alongside Deputy Director Winston Labbé and Bobby Bilberry. Co-sponsored by Wallis Bank and CenterPoint Energy Foundation, the session unpacked SBA's 7A and 504 loan programs, \$2.3 billion in Houston federal contracts, disaster preparedness - and a candid conversation about the impact of recent SBA policy changes on green card holders. A masterclass in resources that too many small businesses leave on the table. Click [here](#) to read the full article.

**OPEN FORUM IACCGH BUSINESS HOUR**  
Saturday, April 18, 4:00 pm - 5:00 pm on FM 103.5

**What do Mummies have to Tell you About the Heart Health Insights for a healthier life?**

**Jagat Narula MD PhD**  
President, World Heart Federation  
Distinguished Guest Professor of Coronary Disease  
Executive Director, Cardiovascular Research Institute  
UTHealth Houston

World-renowned cardiologist Dr. Jagat Narula of UTHealth Houston and President of the World Heart Federation joined the IACCGH Business Hour on Open Forum for a compelling conversation on heart disease - and why South Asians are disproportionately at risk. From ancient mummies to modern Houston commutes, Dr. Narula traced how genes designed for survival now collide with sedentary lifestyles and sugar-laden diets. His message was both sobering and hopeful: "Most of this disease is preventable if we respect our biology." Know your numbers. Move more. Start earlier than you think. Click [here](#) to read the full article.

**WALLISBANK** **CenterPoint Energy**  
www.iaccgh.com | info@iaccgh.com | (713) 621-7331

**Wednesday | 05/20/26 | 11:00 AM - 1:30 PM**  
**The Ballroom at Tanglewood**  
250 Westwood Dr, Houston, TX, 77060

**FEATURING**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**Trina Reynolds-Hawkins, PCEC**  
Executive Director  
Harris County Department of Economic Equity & Opportunity

At a packed IACCGH Small Business Series luncheon co-sponsored by Wallis Bank and CenterPoint Energy Foundation, Harris County Commissioner Lesley Briones and her DEEO delegation delivered a clear message: Harris County's \$5 billion in annual projects across 70+ departments needs more small and diverse businesses. From the \$5,000 Harris Hub grant and \$250,000 Opportunity Fund loans to MWBE certification support and tax abatements up to 50%, the opportunities are substantial. "If you do it, we need it," said Purchasing Agent Kimberly Williams. Click [here](#) to read the full article.



## Craig Howard Redefines Houston's Event Landscape with Accessibility and Innovation

Houston (Texas) - In Houston's vibrant event landscape, few venue operators have built relationships and a service philosophy as intentionally as Craig Howard, whose growing portfolio, including The Ballroom at Bayou Place and The Ballroom at Tanglewood - has become increasingly intertwined with the city's business and nonprofit communities. Howard traces a pivotal turning point back to 2022, when his team opened The Ballroom at Tanglewood and began collaborating with the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston (IACCGH).

**CRAIG HOWARD**

"Jagdip was so nice to take us under his tutelage and introduce us to very important people who would do business with us," Howard said, reflecting on the early days of the partnership. "We are so grateful for our relationship with IACCGH." What began as a professional connection has since evolved into a meaningful alliance, helping establish his venues as trusted spaces for high-impact events.

“We pride ourselves on working with nonprofits to save them money, thereby generating more revenue for their programs and scholarships.”

A defining feature of Howard's approach is accessibility - an uncommon priority in an industry often driven by exclusivity. "We work with everyone regardless of budget," he explained. This philosophy is particularly impactful for nonprofit organizations, where cost efficiency directly influences mission outcomes.

"We pride ourselves on working with non-profits to save them money, thereby generating more revenue for their programs and scholarships."

At a time when corporate event strategies are shifting, Howard has observed a clear trend toward smaller, more focused gatherings. "Corporations are now conducting smaller trainings to maximize efficiency," he noted. Large-scale sessions, once the norm, are increasingly seen as less effective for engagement and retention, prompting companies to rethink how they structure internal events.

Another differentiator lies in Howard's integrated business model, which combines venue, entertainment, and décor services under one umbrella. This "one-stop shopping" approach not only simplifies planning but also reduces costs and logistical friction. "Utilizing our services saves you money and ensures a seamless event," he said.

Looking ahead, Howard's ambitions remain firmly rooted in both growth and inclusivity. "We strive to be the number one venue in Houston by working within everyone's budget and helping them maximize their ROI when hosting a gala," he shared. In a competitive market, it's a vision built not just on scale, but on service - one event at a time.

## Rashmi Sheel : On AI, Purpose, and Putting People First

There is a phrase you hear constantly in the technology world, AI first. Rashmi Sheel hears it too. And every time she does, something doesn't sit right with her.

"For some reason it doesn't resonate with me," she says. "AI should support people, not replace judgment." It is a distinction that may sound subtle, but for Sheel, it is the difference between technology that genuinely serves humanity and technology that merely impresses it, and it is the philosophy that has shaped an entire career.

### FROM FORTUNE 500 TO FORT BEND

Sheel spent nearly two decades in corporate IT, working inside systems most people never see. At Oracle's retail division, she built the predictive algorithms and supply chain engines that helped retail giants like Best Buy, Macy's, and Kohl's make data-driven decisions at scale. "I loved the problem-solving part," she says. "Dealing with data, building systems that helped these businesses run better."

When her family relocated from Atlanta to Houston in 2018, Sheel used the transition deliberately, enrolling in AI and machine learning programs through Stanford and Udacity. After briefly joining HPE in Houston, she made a decision many professionals quietly dream about. She went out on her own.



In 2019, she launched a franchise with CMIT Solutions of Sugar Land, bringing IT support and cybersecurity to small businesses across the region. Alongside it, she built MyAssistant365.ai for AI automation consulting, and later FlowGrant.ai, a platform that helps students, nonprofits, and small businesses find and apply for scholarships and grants using AI-guided tools.

### RASHMI SHEEL

Three businesses. One thread connecting all of them: the conviction that small businesses deserve the same sophisticated technology that Fortune 500 companies have always taken for granted.

### AI THAT KNOWS ITS PLACE

Sheel's human-first philosophy is not a tagline; it is an operating principle. When she designs an AI automation, her first question is never what can the technology do, but where are people overloaded? She uses a quietly powerful analogy to explain AI's place in the world. "When email came in, we didn't wait two weeks for a letter anymore. Work got done faster. Expectations changed. People adapted." AI, she says, is that same shift, not a displacement, but an acceleration. "What we're delivering in months will be delivered in weeks or even days. That will be the new normal."

Her most vivid example of this philosophy in action is her work with Fort Bend Family Promise, a local nonprofit helping families in crisis, particularly those with school-age children facing housing instability. Sheel, who also serves on the organization's board, saw firsthand how overwhelmed the staff had become managing intake calls, paperwork, and follow-ups, time that could have been spent directly supporting families.

She brought in an AI receptionist, a website chatbot, and a fully digitized intake portal, transforming a process that

once required families to book two-hour in-person appointments into a streamlined digital experience. "The staff now spends time actually supporting families instead of managing spreadsheets," she says. Staff feedback since has reported less burnout, faster response times, and more capacity for the relationship-building that no algorithm can replace.



That same conviction shapes the work Sheel is doing now in agentic AI, autonomous AI systems that can take action on a user's behalf. She has been authoring cybersecurity skills built specifically for these agents. When an AI agent is managing email for a small business, she argues, the agent itself needs the instincts of a security analyst: the ability to scan links, vet attachments, and flag prompt-injection attempts hidden inside incoming messages. "An AI agent without guardrails is just a faster way to repeat the same mistakes," she says. She is a vocal proponent of responsible and safe AI, with human-in-the-loop designs by default. "Autonomy is useful. Accountability is non-negotiable. The human stays in the loop, especially when the stakes are real."

### ADVICE FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

For small business owners curious about AI but unsure where to begin, Sheel's advice is refreshingly grounded. Start with your bottlenecks, not the technology. Talk to your staff and reassure them first. "The first thing is to give assurance to your staff that AI is not there to take their jobs," she says. "Tell them we are bringing AI so that you don't do your boring stuff anymore."

As a new IACCGH member, Sheel is eager to share what she has learned with fellow entrepreneurs navigating the rapidly changing technology landscape, not as an expert talking down, but as someone who has lived the journey herself.

"AI is a tool of growth and efficiency," she says. "Not a threat. Not a mystery. Just a very powerful assistant, if you keep the human in charge." Her brand carries that same conviction in four words: Human First. AI Assisted.

**Houston's most celebrated Indo-American gathering returns – and this year, the milestone runs deeper than ever.**



There is something particular about a twenty-seventh year. It is not a round number. It carries no obvious symmetry. And yet, for the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston, the number 27 means something quietly profound – it means that for more than a quarter century, this community has chosen to show up, year after year, for one another.



On the evening of August 29, 2026, that tradition continues. IACCGH's Annual Gala returns to the Hilton Houston, an evening of celebration, recognition, and community that has become one of the most anticipated events in Houston's Indo-American business calendar. The setting is familiar. The occasion is not. Twenty-seven years is a lifetime in the making.



**27**

YEARS OF LEGACY

**1999**

FOUNDED

**AUG 29**

IACCGH GALA NIGHT

A QUARTER CENTURY OF COMMUNITY



Founded in 1999, IACCGH was built on a simple but powerful premise: that Houston's Indo-American professionals and entrepreneurs deserved a dedicated platform – one that understood both their cultural roots and their business ambitions, and that could bridge those two worlds with intention. What began as a gathering of a few determined leaders has grown into one of the most dynamic business chambers in the region, connecting thousands of members across industries, creating pathways for growth, and placing Houston's Indo-American community firmly on the city's economic map.



*"Every year, this gala reminds us why we built IACCGH – not just to do business, but to build community, lift each other, and leave something lasting behind."*

- IACCGH Leadership

The Annual Gala is where that story comes alive in the most vivid way. It is an evening where deals are not the point – people are. Where the entrepreneur who launched her first company last year sits alongside the industry veteran who helped build Houston's South Asian business ecosystem three decades ago. Where recognition meets reflection, and where the next chapter begins.

AN EVENING TO REMEMBER

This year's gala promises an evening of elegant celebration – a carefully curated program that honors the individuals and organizations who have made an indelible mark on the community, paired with the warmth, energy, and connection that IACCGH events have always been known for. Expect distinguished guests, meaningful recognitions, and the kind of conversations that change the course of careers and companies alike.

Whether you are a longtime member or joining us for the first time, the 27th Annual Gala is an experience that belongs on your August calendar. As Houston continues to grow as a global city – diverse, ambitious, and deeply rooted in the communities that built it IACCGH's 27th year is a reminder that the most enduring institutions are those that hold community at their center. This gala is not simply a celebration of what has been built. It is a promise about what is still to come.



SAVE THE DATE

## 27th Annual IACCGH Gala

August 29, 2026 · Hilton Americas, Houston

REGISTER AT [IACCGH.COM/EVENTS](https://www.iacCGH.com/events) →

