

## Sai Public Meeting in St. Louis, September 11, 2005

On September 11, 2005, the Sathya Sai Baba Organization of America, Mid-Central Region, held a Public Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, about Sathya Sai Baba, His universal teachings, and His humanitarian works. The program was held at the 1904 World's Fair Pavilion, a magnificent open-air shelter in the center of Forest Park. The 1300-acre park, considered the "Crown Jewel" of the city, was a picturesque setting worthy of a public program about Sathya Sai Baba, the Divine Crown Jewel of the universe.

Of the 500 people attending the program, over 350 were guests who previously knew little or nothing about Sathya Sai Baba. On this sunny, hot 90-degree St. Louis day, the Pavilion provided pleasant shade. Guests welcomed the comfort when gentle, cooling breezes made their presence known. And devotees felt the pleasing breezes as Sai Baba making His presence known. Cold bottled water, served to attendees throughout the program, offered physical comfort that added to the spiritual comfort the speakers' words provided.

Before introducing the speakers, Dr. Jack Feely, regional president, asked the guests to join in a silent prayer for those who lost their lives, were hurt, or lost loved ones during the tragedy of 9/11 four years earlier. He asked that they add to their prayers those who lost so much in the recent hurricane along the Gulf Coast of the USA.

Dr. William Harvey, a member of the Prasanthi Council, was the first speaker. He focused his talk on the life and teachings of Sathya Sai Baba. He began his presentation by explaining to the attendees, *"It is our belief that viewed from a cosmic prospective there are no accidents and that everything happens for a reason, though it is often not obvious to us at the time. Hence, we can assume that everyone present here today is destined to be here and to be a part of this event."* After sharing some of the miracles he has witnessed, he added, *"Yet, I consider that the even bigger miracle that Sai Baba performs is His ability to turn people God-ward. Turning God-ward in the sense of inspiring one to begin to recognize and accept that an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, and all-loving Unseen Force controls his or her destiny and the events that occur in the world."* Concluding his talk, Dr. Harvey said, *"More and more, I am coming to realize that loving God means loving God's creation – all people and things in this wonderful world."*

The second speaker was Dr. Anu Diwakaran, a pediatrician who works with children of underinsured families through SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital in St. Louis. She described how her work reflects Sai Baba's teachings. She said, *"When one visits the newborn nursery, each and every baby is perfect and beautiful. One tends to focus on how similar they are, how fragile, what soft skin, what perfect little fingers and toes. Their ethnic background, their family's financial status or level of income, their religious background, none of these details matter. But as the children grow up in a world where the focus is on differences, not similarities, attitudes are caught and taught, so instead of continuing to see what unites us we start to focus on what divides us."* She added that Sai Baba teaches us that our own illusion causes us to see the diversity of the world. Sai Baba says, *"When you make an attempt to fix your attention on the divine aspect which is one not many, then the diverse names, forms and figures will no longer trouble you."*

Months of preparation by the planning committee evolved into a significant grass roots effort by devotees in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. Personal letters of invitation went out to 49

professors of philosophy and theological studies of the major universities and colleges in the area, followed up with telephone message reminders. Press releases went to the major TV and radio stations, along with the major newspapers. Quarter-page ads promoting the meeting were put in a widely distributed spiritually oriented newspaper. That same paper accepted a 700-page article about Sathya Sai Baba and His teachings. A devotee spoke about Sathya Sai Baba and the public meeting to a gathering of a local Rotary Club, part of a worldwide organization of business and professional leaders that provides humanitarian service to the community.

One month prior to the public meeting, 100 laminated posters advertising the program were placed at strategic locations such as health food stores, coffee shops, and yoga studios. Attached to each poster was a clear plastic pouch containing take-home cards with concise information about where and when the meeting would take place. Devotees checked the posters regularly to replenish the information cards. During the week prior to the meeting, 50 devotees participated in a “poster blitz,” traveling in teams of two along designated routes in every direction of the St. Louis Metropolitan area. During this blitz, they placed over 500 non-laminated posters in every appropriate store or shop or public area for which they were given permission.

Individual letters were sent to city and government officials providing information about Sai Baba and His humanitarian works. The letters contained a personal invitation to the meeting, with an encouragement to visit the local website designed specifically to supply more detailed information about the event and directions to the site.

Devotees transformed the majestic 100-year old World’s Fair Pavilion into a gloriously inviting public sanctuary with classical music playing in the background and 500 chairs set up to invite any and all guests. Teams of devotee ushers and information-providers had rehearsed their roles designed to make every attendee comfortable and feel welcomed. Gift packages, containing the DVD “His Works” and the booklet “His Message” along with contact information about the local Sai centers and a list of community service projects, were assembled for distribution after the program.

At the conclusion of the meeting, an Official Proclamation issued days before by the Mayor of the City of St. Louis, Missouri, was introduced. The part of the Proclamation read aloud to attendees contained the following words:

WHEREAS, The City of St. Louis is pleased and honored to recognize Sri Sathya Sai Baba for all of his humanitarian work and extends best wishes to him for good health, peace and happiness as he continues his journey along life’s path.

Now, therefore, I, Francis G. Slay, Mayor of the City of St. Louis, do hereby proclaim September 11, 2005, as:

“SRI SATHYA SAI BABA DAY”  
IN THE CITY OF ST. LOUIS

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the seal of the City of St. Louis, this 11<sup>th</sup> day of September, A.D. 2005.

At the reading of the Proclamation, unanimous applause arose from devotees and non-devotees alike. The final words of this most successful public meeting, successful due to Sai Baba's grace, included a wish for all attendees to have a happy Sri Sathya Sai Baba Day in the City of St. Louis.

~Dr. Jack Feely  
Regional President, Mid-Central Region