

CRRA Resettles Its Oldest Refugee in Charlotte

By Karen Brodsky

Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency resettled its oldest refugee with her Bhutanese family—a son, daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren.

Kanchi Chhetri, approximately 99 years old, has surprised CRRA staff with her lively personality, mobility and good humor.

Kanchi and her family are the beneficiaries of a program from the Department of State and the President, who determine how many refugees will be admitted to the U.S. each year. The Refugee Act of 1980 created The Federal Refugee Resettlement Program to provide for the effective resettlement of refugees and to assist them to achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible after arrival in the United States. The CRRA program exists to do just that.

After applying for refugee sta-

tus, the family had interviews with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and other agencies. The family was approved for travel and soon left the Khudunabari refugee camp in Southern Nepal. The International Office of Migration (IOM) made the flight reservations from an airport in southeastern Nepal to Kathmandu, Nepal, to Hong Kong, to JFK in Queens, NY, to Charlotte-Douglas Airport. IOM arranged and rearranged travel plans several times until the family's needs could be met.

Kanchi is now settling in, living with her family in apartments furnished and rented on their behalf by CRRA. With the guidance of CRRA case workers the family has been taken to the Department of Social Security, the Department of Social Services and the health department. Members of the family who are able to work have been

assessed by the employment staff to learn where their talents lie.

Last year in the camp, Kanchi told her family, "I feel like I would die soon, but now I'm feeling better." This is an example of her humor, says her grandson. "When we all went for the Department of Homeland Security interview, Kanchi spoke to everyone and made them all laugh. The interviewer said to Kanchi, 'I love you, you look so cute.' Then Kanchi told the interviewer she looked kind of old."

Born in Nepal sometime in 1913, Kanchi probably migrated to Bhutan when people from Nepal—an ethnic group called Lhotsampas of which Kanchi and her family are members—were invited to populate the lowlands of southern Bhutan in the 1920s. Paper records from that era are not available, and Kanchi's memory has faded over time. Despite living in Bhutan for up to five generations, the Lhotsampas retained their highly distinctive Nepali language, culture, and Hindu religion and coexisted peacefully with other ethnic groups in Bhutan until the mid-1980s, when Bhutan's king and the ruling Druk majority became worried that the growing Lhotsampa population could threaten the majority position.

By the late 1980s and early

1990s, a crisis had developed. Human rights violations, including detention, imprisonment without trial, and torture, were becoming more commonplace. The Bhutanese adopted a number system; those with lower numbers were allowed to stay in the country; those with higher numbers—like the Chhetris, who were classified as number 7—were exiled to the camps in Nepal.

The rest of the family lived in the camps for 19 years; the grandchildren grew up there and have no memory of leaving Bhutan.

To date, more than 100,000 Lhotsampas had fled or been forced out of the country, mostly into refugee camps in Nepal. About half have left Nepal to be resettled in the West under the auspices of foreign governments. The lion's share has been resettled in the U.S.

Bhutan has the dubious distinction of being one of the world's highest per capita generator of refugees. One-sixth of its citizens live in exile, and many have come to the U.S. Since the spring of 2007, CRRA has resettled more than 400 refugees from Bhutan, making them its newest refugee population. It is estimated that some 700 Bhutanese are living in Charlotte.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for



Kanchi Chhetri (Photo courtesy Thakur Mishra)

Refugees (UNHCR), many Bhutanese refugees in the camps said they wanted to return to their homes in Bhutan. Despite this desire—and despite numerous high-level meetings between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal to resolve the refugee crisis—Bhutan has not permitted a single refugee to return home. The Nepalis are eager to close the refugee camps. Thus it is hoped the remainder of the Lhotsampas will find homes in other countries.

While Kanchi is the oldest refugee resettled by CRRA, her story is one shared by many.

For more information about how you can help Kanchi or other refugee families call the office at 704-535-8803 or visit www.carolinarefugee.org. ♣

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The JCC Is Your Summer Place

Attention! Calling all families: Your destination place this summer is the Levine JCC.

Read all about the fun activities and events planned at the Levine JCC this summer just for you as a Levine JCC member

End of School Party – Join us to celebrate the last day of school with a big party on Friday, June 8 from 4-5:30 PM. DJ Curious George will be playing cool tunes, \$1 pizza slices and refreshments will be served. Not to be missed.

Father's Day, June 17 and July 4 Party – Come celebrate these two holidays with your friends at the J. There will be a DJ, fun games and contests, pool activities, arts and crafts and lots of prizes.

Pizza by the Pool – We begin our Thursday pizza nights starting June 28 until July 26. There will be \$1 slices available and pies can be ordered in advance at our Customer Service desk. Now

there is no reason to leave the pool!

Family Fun by the Pool - Every weekend starting in June there will be Sunday family fun activities starting at 1 PM by the pool for ages 5 and up. We will have a blast playing family Bingo, games, water activities, and arts and crafts. Every new member will receive a special summer fun package filled with goodies for the whole family.

The JCC JAWS Swim Team Summer Schedule – Swim team will operate on a two day per week swim team combination. With practice ranging from 45 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes depending on age and ability. Sportsmanship, teamwork, accountability, and perseverance -



courts and expansion of staff, there is ample opportunity for you to take lessons, join a league or play tennis with your friends. Some of the fun events currently being planned for the courts this summer; a Memorial Day Round Robin, Member Appreciation Clinics, a 4th of July Round Robin and a Back 2 School Bash (junior/adult social). Details will be available in the next few weeks.

Registration for Summer Camp is on! Camp Katan (2 years – preK), Camp Mindy (K-5), Teen Camps (grades 6-10), Full or Half Day Tennis Camps for Juniors (ages 6-11) and Teens (ages 12-16). Sports Specialty camps include Ethan Horton Flag Football Camp (ages 7-9), Turn and Burn Lacrosse Camp (ages 7-14), Girls' Turn and Burn Lacrosse Camp (ages 7-14), Dell Curry Basketball Camp (ages 6-10), and Levine




Summer fun at the Levine JCC.

JCC Soccer Skills Camp (ages 7-10). Sessions start June 11 and run thru August 17. Register today at charlottejcc.org/camp.

And there is more good summer news. The outdoor pool is going to be open for two extra weekends this Summer, September 7 and September 14. More fun at the J! ♣

all while having fun are the main concepts we teach. Join us for the JCC JAWS Summer Swim Team Championship Meet at MCAC on Tuesday, June 26 and the JCC JAWS Summer Swim Team Awards Banquet at the JCC Lerner Hall on Thursday, June 28.

Tennis - With the addition of our three new Har-tru class tennis




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