

9th annual Ganesh Festival draws 12,000 to Montgomery Township

By Kimberly Flanders Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, September 9, 2013 11:00 am

Vibrant colors and the festive cultural atmosphere of India came to the Bharatiya Temple in Montgomery Township on Sunday, marking the first day of the ninth annual Philadelphia Ganesh Festival.

The Hindu festival lasts 11 days, and it's held each year to celebrate the birthday of Lord Ganesha, widely worshiped as the god of wisdom, prosperity and good fortune.

"Ganesha is the god of well wishes; basically whenever there is a new venture, we pray for the Lord Ganesha. It's to unite all of the community together," said Mandar Joglakar, a coordinator of the celebration.

According to Ani Potnis, another coordinator of the event, the mission of the festival at the Bharatiya Temple is to provide an opportunity for Indian Americans from diverse backgrounds to unite and develop awareness of Indian cultural heritage, traditions and values.

"It's very reminiscent of times in India. Lord Ganesha has power to truly bring all communities together, and the kids are learning all these values, the cultural heritage that we grew up with in India, without us thrusting them upon them," he said.

According to Joglakar, the celebration has grown over the past nine years, and throughout the 11 days, more than 12,000 are expected to visit the temple.

The festival began Sunday with a grand procession of Lord Ganesha amidst Indian drums called Dhol-Tash and dancing.

Potnis said the reason for the drumming is to "invite the gods with resonating sounds" to spend the next 11 days.

"We invite the gods, entertain them — it's very emotional actually, it's almost like meditating, it's surreal," he said.

"India is so diverse, we have people from the north, the south, east and west. (This celebration) appeals to every part of India, that's why you see so many people. It's like going to India for 11 days."