

GLEN COVE

Money's no good at Sikh fest

BY VERA CHINESE
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Serving trays of curried vegetables, samosas and naan were replenished as quickly as hungry celebrants could empty them at Sunday's Vaisakhi Mela festival, an event in Glen Cove marking the inception of the Sikh religion.

But not one of the thousands of revelers reached for a wallet or swiped a debit card after piling their plates.

"Everything is on the house. You don't pay a dime," said volunteer Ravi Singh, 45, of Muttontown, who was handing out slices of watermelon to guests sweating under a brutal September sun. "It's a way to give back to the community."

The event, now in its 14th year, was expected to draw 5,000 attendees to the Gurdwara Mata Sahib Kaur temple grounds on Lattingtown Road. Sunday's mela, a one-day event, also included an opening ceremony for the temple's new extension, a second-story prayer room known as a diwan hall.

The mela, Sanskrit for "gathering" or "fair," featured dancing, music, vendors and children's carnival rides. But the



Ranjit Singh of Ozone Park cooks bread pakora during the Vaisakhi Mela festival in Glen Cove Sunday.

main draw was, undoubtedly, the feast.

Sikh temples offer free food to everyone 24 hours per day, said event organizer Gurinderpal Singh Josan, but they usually don't feed thousands at a time.

"We feed our family and distribute what's left," he said of

the Sikh philosophy.

The all-vegetarian dishes, which included grilled corn, roti, vegetable "meatballs" and more, are prepared by local restaurants and volunteers.

Jasmin Kaur, 27, of Ozone Park, Queens, along with about 15 members of her family, spent the past week gathering ingredi-

ents to cook 1,000 servings of bread pakora, a fried dish. Her husband, Ranjit Singh, 30, bent over a cast iron pot filled with corn oil while stirring bread slices dipped in a garlic and spice batter.

The couple, who have a 19-month-old daughter, own four cellphone stores in

Queens and are doing well, she said. They did not calculate the cost of buying ingredients for the event.

"It feels good to feed people," she said. "In our culture, if we are earning and we have that much money, we should feed people."

The event also drew many non-Sikhs, with some wearing turbans tied by Sikh volunteers.

Rachel Solomon, 48, of Glen Cove hopped on a bike and came to the festival to learn more about the temple in her community. As a teacher in Astoria, Queens, where there is a sizable Sikh community, she hoped the event could offer an added connection to her students.

"I'd always been curious, and I saw it was open to all," she said.

Organizer Jagjit Singh Bedi, 58, of Ozone Park wore a white turban bearing an American flag, a garment he's worn on special occasions since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

An American citizen of 20 years, he wears it to display patriotism, as well as honor his religion.

"I look different, but inside I'm the same," he said.

SMITHTOWN

Market shifts force rethinking on recycling

BY NICHOLAS SPANGLER
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An upheaval in the global recycling trade could send Smithtown officials scrambling to find a new destination for 230 tons of plastic, paper and other materials town residents generate every week, they said.

The town now sends those recyclables to Brookhaven, which processes recyclables through a vendor for Southold, Huntington and six smaller communities. For years, much of that material found its way to China, where manufacturers repurposed it for new products, in an arrangement that benefited all the Long Island parties: Green Stream, the vendor, earned money off its Chinese sales, and paid a per-ton fee to Brookhaven; Brookhaven paid a

fee to its municipal partners.

Smithtown earns \$15 per ton of unsorted or single-stream recyclables, about \$180,000 annually, an amount that partially offsets the millions the town pays to dispose of its solid waste. To address that cost, each single-family home in the town is assessed a \$350 solid waste fee.

But China, a recycling giant, has stopped accepting some used plastic and fiber and increased standards for the material it does take. Now Smithtown officials say that if Green Stream can't find buyers or can only find them at drastically lower prices, the town may have to look past its agreement with Brookhaven, due to expire at the end of 2019.

"It has the potential to be a crisis," Smithtown Supervisor Edward Wehrheim said in an in-

terview, after he showed an aerial photograph from August of Brookhaven's overflowing facility to startled town council members at a recent work session. Mountains of material sat outside because Green Stream hadn't been able to find buyers, though Brookhaven officials said the situation has since improved.

Christopher Andrade, Brookhaven's commissioner for recycling and sustainable materials management, said that the town had anticipated market instability when it signed a 25-year contract with Green Stream in 2014. "We expect them to honor it and we plan on honoring our contract with Smithtown."

A Brookhaven spokesman said he could not comment on possible subsequent contracts with Smithtown.

Will Flower, vice president of Winters Bros. Waste Systems, part owner of Green Stream, said Brookhaven's agreements with other municipalities and Green Stream's own contract with Brookhaven would need to change.

"This is a true 'force majeure' situation," he said. "It no longer makes sense to recycle at current levels. There needs to be changes that take place to pay for recycling."

Winter Bros. in July announced it would renegotiate its single-stream contract with Oyster Bay. The town will go out to bid for 2019 and beyond, a town spokesman said.

Russell Barnett, Smithtown's top environmental official, said the roughly 18 Long Island municipal waste managers he's spoken with have concluded

that "we've got to make this material more desirable to end users." That could mean identifying new markets, focusing on high-value plastics or public education about what can and can't be recycled.

Barnett and Wehrheim said they hope to continue to partner with Brookhaven but are exploring options including re-opening Smithtown's mothballed dual-stream processing plant.

This would be expensive. But under the new economics of recycling, so might every other alternative, so much so that recyclables, once a municipal revenue item, turn into an expense. Whether that forces an increase to Smithtown's solid waste fee is too soon to tell, Barnett said. "We have to see what happens with the markets."