



Dancer Jennifer Jones demonstrates both athleticism and grace with the Bollywood Jammers at the Bama Theatre.

drishṭi

A vision of life for Tuscaloosa

by Margaret Clevenger

Drishti is a charitable organization founded in 2009 by Dibya Singh, her husband Dr. Sanjay Singh, and their friend Nate Patel. The word Drishti means “focus, a vision of life,” in Sanskrit, and the Tuscaloosa organization’s goal is to provide a more uplifting life vision for those in need.

“Our families are from India, but we live here,” said Dibya Singh. “And I said wouldn’t it be nice to give back to the community we live in, so that’s how we started.”

Each year Drishti chooses a couple of organizations and directs fund raising efforts to help those organizations. The two groups that will benefit from this year’s efforts are Project Blessings that helps low-income families repair their homes, and No Limits Kustoms, a car club that provides Christmas for needy families.

Drishti raises money every

year by holding “Tuscaloosa’s Got Talent,” a show featuring the varied talents of 80 or so singers, musicians, comedians, and others eager to perform for the enthusiastic crowds at the Bama Theatre. All proceeds from tickets, except for one dollar which is designated for the Bama, goes into the pool for the charities. No one takes a salary.

“We have auction items as well,” Singh said. “One year we had two footballs signed by Coach Saban, and we had a watch from Hudson Poole. It is a silent auction set up in the gallery at the Bama. That money also goes to the charity.”

Singh said that last year the talent show and auction raised \$14,000, and she hopes that this year’s event will raise even more. “We know we can do better,” she said.

This year’s Tuscaloosa’s Got Talent will be held April 12

at the Bama Theatre in downtown Tuscaloosa. The show is scheduled to begin at five o’clock and a panel of judges will decide the winners. A first place win will net someone \$1000, second place is \$500, and third place is \$250. The prize money is donated by local merchants.

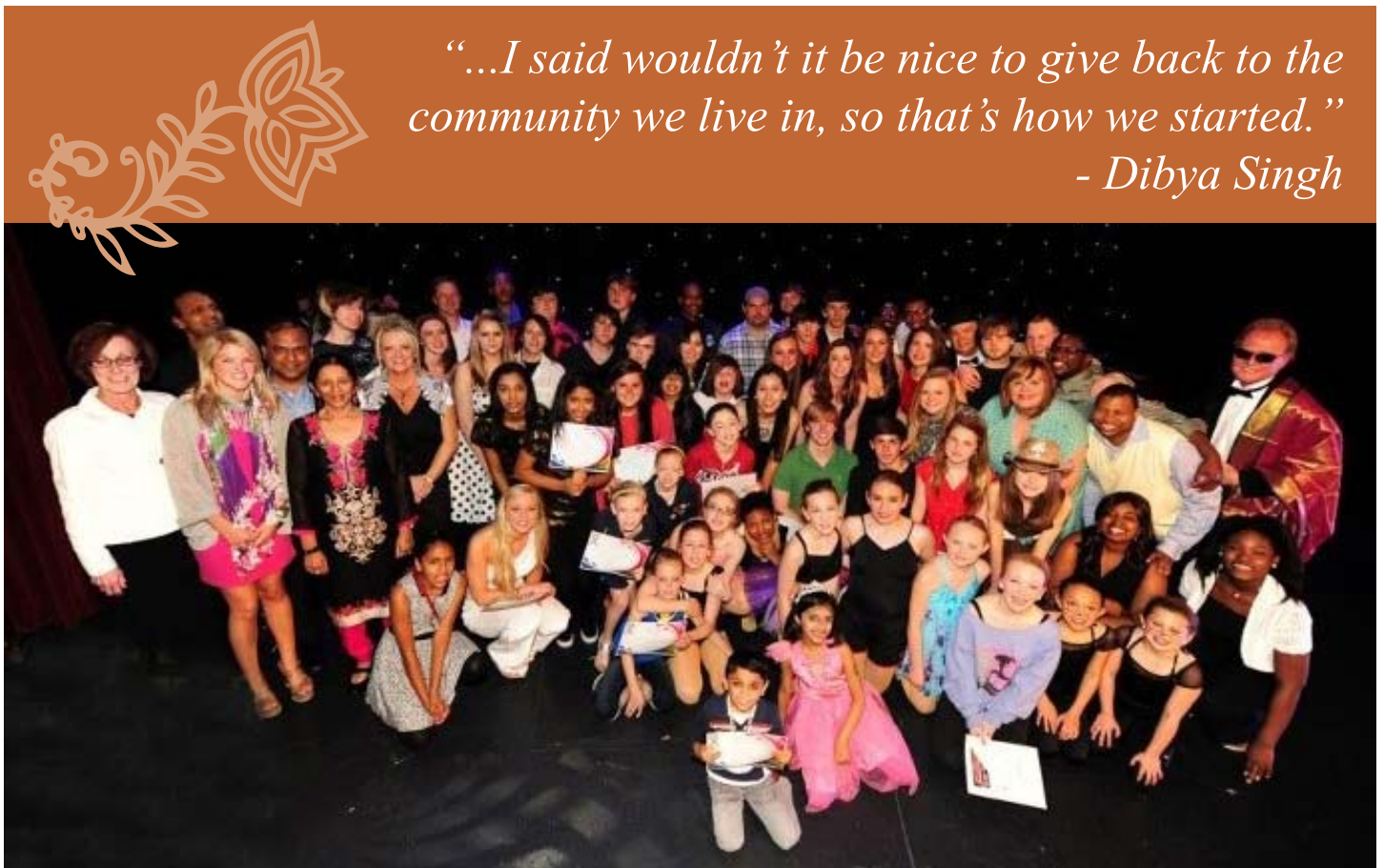
Auditions for the talent show are held at Dibya Singh’s dance and yoga studio, Bollywood Groove, at 661 Helen Keller Blvd. All ages are invited to tryout. Steve Jones is one of three people who will be selecting the acts who will appear on stage. Jones is an old hand at the process.

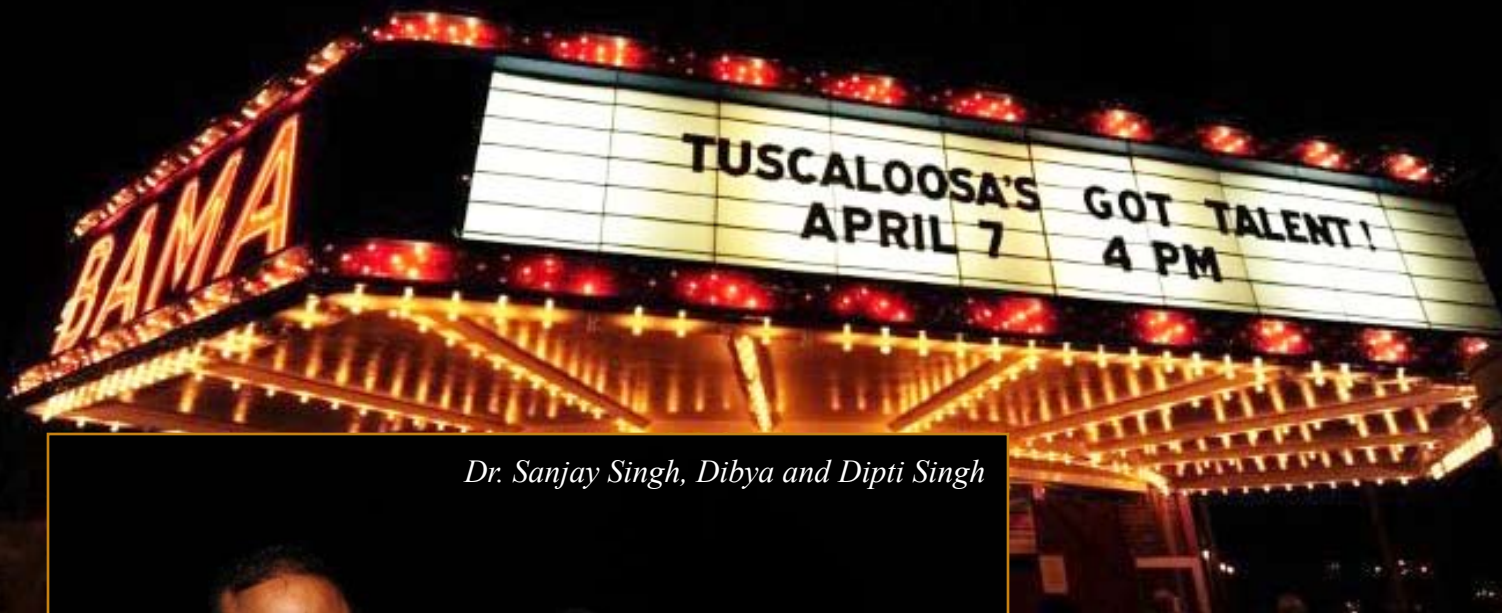
“This will be my fourth year judging the auditions,” he said. “We are looking for talent, certainly, but the acts must also be family-friendly. That’s the biggest thing.”

Jones said the auditions always bring out a variety of acts and are open to almost any kind of performance. “We’ve had a lot of singers, a few bands, a magician,

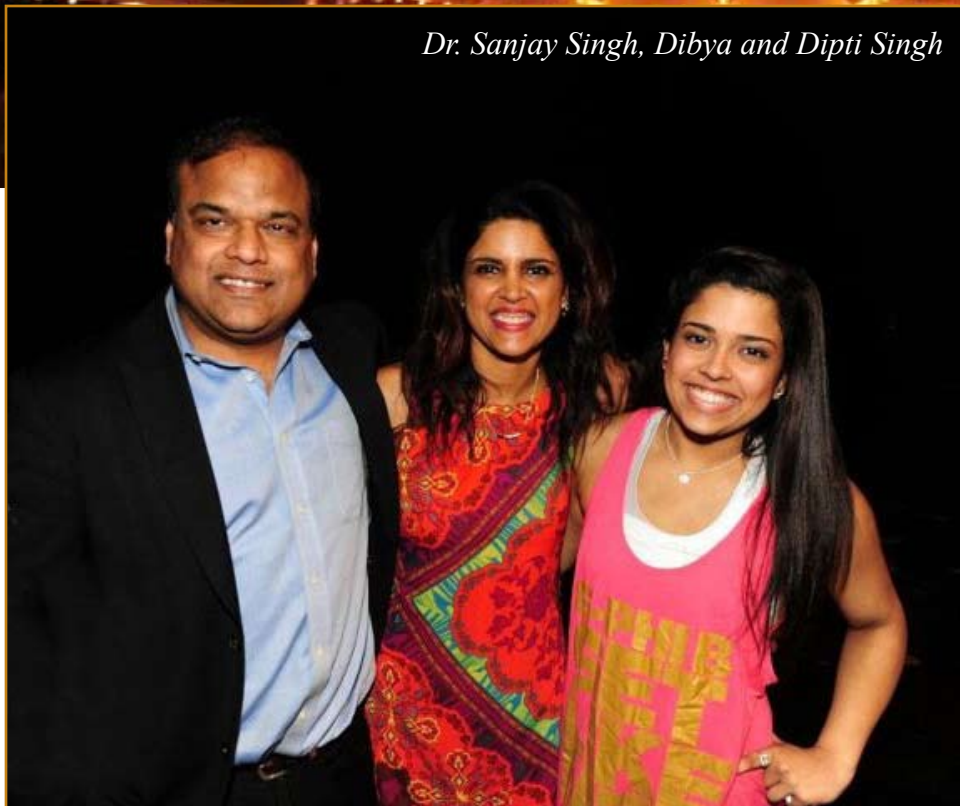
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Dr. Sanjay Singh, Dibya and Dipti Singh



some comedians. We've had to reject some comedians because they were not family-friendly."

Musicians bring their own musical instruments to the auditions and Drishti personnel provide a microphone. Singers bring a CD of the music they are using and a computer is available to play it.

Project Blessings is one of the two groups that will benefit from Drishti's fundraising efforts this year. Project Blessings was founded in 2009 by Marsha Sprayberry. According to the non-profit's website, the group is "dedicated to helping low-income and underprivileged homeowners repair their homes and achieve a better

quality of living." This is the third year in a row that Project Blessings has received funding from Drishti.

The group selects each project based on a case-by-case situation and makes a home visit to determine what work needs to be undertaken. Project Blessings was involved with helping many homeowners rebuild after the April, 2011 tornado devastated much of the city of Tuscaloosa.

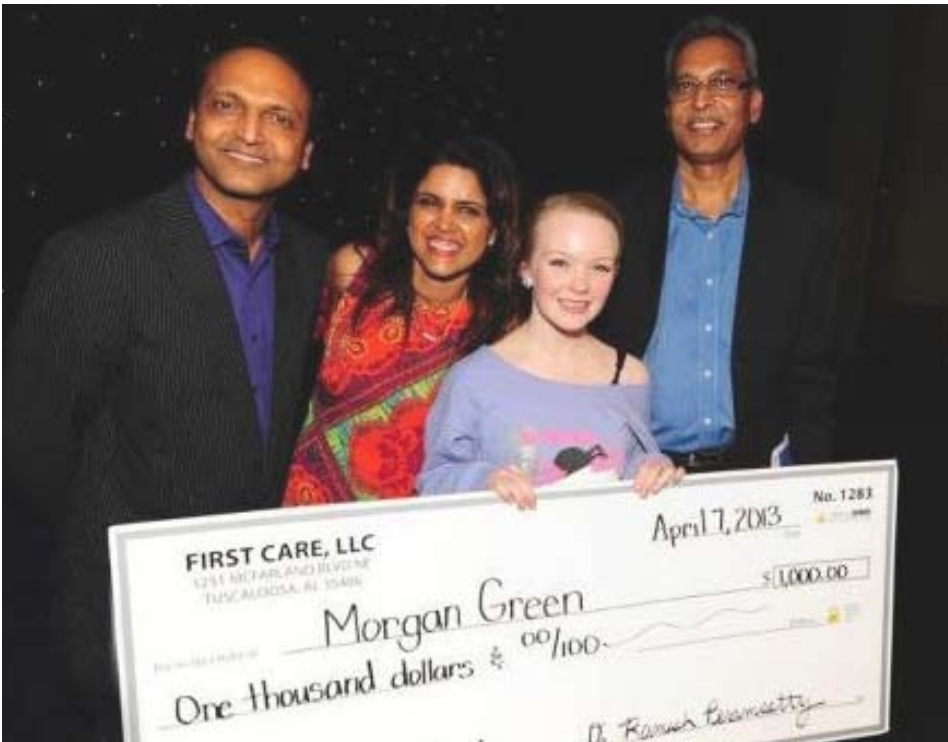
The volunteers with Project Blessings do minor repairs like painting, and major renovations such as the kitchen overhaul they recently completed, all at no cost to the homeowner. The group finished its 65th project in 2013.

The other group that Drishti has chosen to help this year is No Limits Kustoms, a Tuscaloosa car club whose members have been reaching out to help those in need since 2001.

"About ten of us got together because we liked the same hobbies, building cars," said Tommy Swiney, a founding member of the car club. The group now has 28 members.

"We began to help with different things for people in the community, like cutting grass for the elderly," Swiney said. "Back in 2006 we got together with the Salvation Army. They do their Christmas Tree (Angel Tree) every year for the children. Children desperately need Christmas, and I believe you should let your children be children for as long they can. But we said the Salvation Army does so many magical things for children for Christmas, but who's doing Christmas for the parents?"

The group created the Adopt-A-Family Program in cooperation with the Salvation Army where they provide Christmas presents not only for the children, but also the mothers and fathers. "And in some cases the grandparents because they are the ones who are taking care of these children," Swiney said.



From left, Dr. Ramesh Permasetty, Dibya Singh, Morgan Green and Nate Patel.

After the car club screens applications, the families who are chosen provide a “need list” and a “want list.”

“Everyone needs underwear, shoes, essential things,” Swiney said. “And everybody has something they want. We have never not been able to provide the need and want list.”

This year the car club adopted two families and provided Christmas for both. But the club members didn’t limit their generous spirit to just Christmas.

“One of the families was so bad off we also provided Thanksgiving for them,” Swiney said. “They didn’t have money for a Christmas tree, so we provided it. They have teenage kids who needed and wanted a lot of things, and we got it all for them. They had gone so many years without. We felt if we can do this for them this one year, they will remember it, and down the road they can give back. Our big goal is to pay it forward.”

Throughout the year the club raises money by holding car

shows, car washes, and yard sales. The group also works for Strike Hard Productions, a mixed martial arts promotion company.

“They are doing a MMA fight for the Spring Bash that we are having May 30-31 at the Belk Center at Bowers Park,” Swiney said. “They’ll have their fight that Friday night and donate a portion to the Adopt-A-Family Program. We do this every year and we love doing it.”

On Saturday, May 31, the club’s car show will feature all sorts of custom vehicles dating from the 1920s to brand new off the showroom floor. There will also be a pin-up girl contest that day for all ages from infant to eighteen years old and older.

“It is family-oriented,” Swiney of the contest. “They have to keep the style within the 1950s and 60s. The more skin you cover up, the better your chances are to win.” All the contestants will be given sashes and the winners will receive prize money. For more information you can follow No Limits Kustoms

on Facebook.

“We keep in contact with the families that we adopt,” Swiney said. “They actually come to our car shows. It is kind of like we are building a family with all these people. Once you help someone, you are a part of their lives, and then they want to help someone.”

The Drishti organization is careful in choosing which groups to assist every year, and deciding where the money is directed can be a difficult decision.

“It can be tricky,” said Singh. “We’ve had to turn people down this year. We want to know they really need it and where the money is going. Like with Project Blessings we know our money is going toward fixing somebody’s house because they show us pictures, and we can go out there. And the guys at No Limits Kustoms do such good work. They go out at Christmas time and provide gifts for an entire family.”

For more information about Drishti or for tickets for Tuscaloosa’s Got Talent (April 12), contact Dibya Singh at 792-5476 or dibya1@aol.com. Tickets can also be purchased at the door the day of the show. ■

Margaret Clevenger’s work has appeared in many newspapers and magazines including Alabama Heritage, Mississippi Magazine, Pennsylvania Magazine, and Southern Lady. She has a story, “Whistling Past the Graveyard” in the anthology Tuscaloosa Tales: Stories of Tuscaloosa and its People. She is a regular contributor to Jubilation.