Designer’s annual ‘Sudha’s Treasures’ sale benefits area nonprofits

By EMILY LAVIN 
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Sudha Pennathur remembers her father placing an emphasis on sufficiency over excess as she was growing up in the family’s native India.

“He always said, ‘Think about how much you need to eat and stop at that time, think about how much money you need and stop there,’” Pennathur says. “To me, that always remained in my head.”

Her dad, who served as a general in the Indian army, lived by example. Pennathur recalls her father once traveled to Turkey to aid disaster-relief efforts after the country was struck by massive earthquakes. He was paid for his two weeks of work, but he promptly gave the check back.

“He said, ‘You people need it more than I do,’” Pennathur says. “I thought, ‘OK, that’s my role model.’”

Pennathur, 72, has built a successful career designing and manufacturing jewelry, gifts and home textiles that are handcrafted by artisans in India and sold in major catalogs and department stores across the U.S., including Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue and Bergdorf Goodman. But she’s also dedicated a significant portion of her business to helping others.

For the past 14 years, the longtime Tiburon resident has organized the annual “Sudha’s Treasures” sale, offering up her specialty pieces at wholesale prices. Pennathur donates all of the proceeds from the sale to Bay Area nonprofits.

Her most recent sale, held in a vacant storefront at Town Center Corte Madera in October 2017, was the biggest yet. Over 16 days, the sale generated about $65,000 for that year’s chosen recipients, San Francisco-based Equal Rights Advocates, Whistleshop in San Rafael and the North Bay Children’s Center, a preschool in Novato. Since the sale began in 2003, it has generated more than $250,000 for charity, Pennathur says.

“To me there is nothing more wonderful than to see this little wealth multiply and spread through philanthropy,” she says.

Climbing the corporate ladder

Pennathur moved to the U.S. from India in 1963 to earn a degree in business administration from Pace and Columbia universities in New York City. She then headed west to Seattle, where she obtained a double master’s in marketing and computer science at the University of Washington before starting work as the head of systems and programs at the department store The Bon Marché.

After a stint working for a couple of other department stores, she moved to Tiburon in 1978 to become the business information services director at Levi Strauss & Co.

Pennathur then moved to the merchandising side of the company, and in 1981 became the merchandise manager of the company’s women’s tops division.

In that role she forged positive relationships with the 300 or so merchandisers who reported to her, says Jim Prigoff, the then-president of Levi’s womenswear division who is currently the board chair of Pennathur’s company, House of Pennathur.

“She’s the kind of person they related to, they could work with, and she was very effective,” Prigoff says.

Pennathur displayed a self-reliance that underscored her entrepreneurial spirit, he adds.

“She was just self-motivated and didn’t require a lot of help or direction or assistance,” Prigoff says.

In her early career working in retail, Pennathur was often leading teams of mostly men who were several years older than her, requiring her to prove herself to be taken seriously, she says.

“They’d say, ‘She’s a foreigner, what does she know?’ She just came, what does she know? She just came, what does she know?”

‘Floral Fling’ supports at-risk youth

Guests gather at Marin Charitable’s ‘Floral Fling’ held in March at the Marin Country Club in Novato. The event raised $50,000 for at-risk youth in Marin County.

Tiburon’s Sudha Pennathur displays one of her designer necklaces during the annual ‘Sudha’s Treasures’ sale in October at Town Center Corte Madera. For the pop-up sale, Pennathur offers her designs, which are handcrafted by global artisans, at wholesale prices and donates 100 percent of the proceeds to Bay Area nonprofits. Since its inception in 2003, ‘Sudha’s Treasures’ has generated more than $250,000 for charity, Pennathur says.

‘Floral Fling’ supports at-risk youth

WHO: Marin Charitable
WHEN: March 21, 2017
WHAT: Marin Charitable’s annual “Floral Fling” event, held at the Marin Country Club in Novato, featured boutique shopping, a fashion show and a succulent arrangement presentation.

Attendees and supporters include Tiburon residents Jennifer Barnes, Kathleen Bradley, Courtney Finnegan, Kiki Pescatello, Debra Roberts, Victoria Pong, Elizabeth Held, Lander Hynes, Kathleen Masneri, and Elizabeth Ury; and Belvedere residents Lucía Whitney, Christina Decker, and the late Janet Pasha.

BENEFITING: The luncheon raised more than $50,000 for at-risk youth. The volunteer membership of Marin Charitable fundraises year-round to provide grants to local nonprofits offering critical support, education and enrichment for underserved students in Marin County.

VISIT: marincharitable.org

DID YOU KNOW? The organization is 100-percent volunteer run and managed, meaning all of the money raised annually is granted to more than 60 Marin nonprofits.

Community group helps underserved kids

WHO: All In
WHEN: Year-round events included a summer shoe drive, a back-to-school fair, a Thanksgiving meal drive and a fundraiser to send underserved Tiburon Peninsula kids to summer camp at Belvedere-Tiburon Recreation.

WHAT: The mission of All In, a program of Adopt A Family of Marin and initially sponsored by the Tiburon Peninsula Foundation, is to create an inclusive community in Tiburon by helping local families in need. All In aims to level the playing field by helping underserved children gain equal access to enrichment programs such as summer camp, after-school classes, tutoring and sports.

Local contributors include the Tiburon Peninsula Foundation, the Reed Union School District, Belvedere-Tiburon Recreation, the Foundation for Reed Schools, and the Tiburon Police Department.

BENEFITING: Families on the Tiburon Peninsula.

VISIT: communityallin.com

DID YOU KNOW? All In came about in 2016 after community members joined together to provide Thanksgiving meals for more than 35 Tiburon families in need.