

Giants earn first win
under Tom Coughlin

SPORTS, C1



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By EVA LOAYZA
Lightning bolts
of success to Pa.



Chai and conversation

By CHRIS STURGIS
Special to The Times

Fair offers a touch of southern India

WEST WINDSOR — At the weekend's second annual Indo-American Fair, the community tied to southern India revealed in its culture while demonstrating a willingness to tweak it to suit American taste.

The event at Mercer County Park was a fund-raising effort sponsored by Shirdi Sai Dham, an organization striving to build a community center and house of worship dedicated to the Hindi saint Sai. It hopes to open the center in five years or so, said Ramesh Anand, the group's founding chairman.

"The purpose is to have the whole community involved in the event and to show our culture to our American friends," said Arun Anand, a trustee in Shirdi Sai Dham. "In spite of the rain, a lot of people showed up" on Saturday, she said.

The white tents popping up across the expansive park were filled with anything made or sold by South Indian people, including art, clothing and food and other more practical offerings, such as mutual funds and financial advice.

Entrepreneurs abounded. Anand's daughter, Priyanka, 19, has her own business selling Indian clothing from home and at outdoor festivals while

working as an assistant to a financial advisor at Merrill Lynch and going to Mercer County Community College part time.

Her sister, Dimple, 27, who is earning a master's degree in business at New Jersey Institute of Technology and working on computer networks for Lehman Brothers in New York, modeled one of the fashions, a blend of American sportswear with Indian fabric and decoration.

She paired black slacks in a gauze-like fabric with a long black tunic, pulled together with red embroidery and sparkling beads.

Across the grounds, Hari Nayak of Hari's Bake Shop and Atul Jain, Personal Chef and Custom Catering, said they were chefs in their native India, but also studied at the Culinary Institute of America.

The creations they make borrow from many ethnic traditions under the umbrella of Fusion Indian and New World Cuisine. As the chefs hustled their wares out to the sales tables, they said Indian food is often thought to be extremely oily and spicy, so they use a lighter, milder touch for American clients. As for pastry, Indians prefer the light and wispy, while Americans prefer a cake that sticks to the

ribs, they said.

On display were paneer, a baked pastry stuffed with a vegetable mixture or cheese, cups of creamy mango mousse over strawberry jello with saffron and a Black Forest cake.

Along with the butter, cream and sugar, the treats came with considerable enthusiasm.

"You have to try this cookie, it's a homebaked jumbo chocolate," Nayak told a customer, holding out a dark, rich confection.

Meanwhile, another trio of entrepreneurs was saying it was time for chai, a rich mixture of tea, milk, sugar and spice. Chitavan Pandya, Nisu Gohel and Tanvi Denicola are hoping "Chai Pe," the booth they've been taking around the outdoor festival circuit, will have made enough money to turn into a permanent cafe in six to eight months.

Are they aiming to do for tea what that Seattle-based coffee chain does on every street corner and bookstore?

"Don't say it," Pandya said, laughing. "We want to be the ethnic Starbucks, but with more individuality — where you can get a wonderful cup of chai and a really good conversation."

COMMUNITY
tion 2004: How will New Jersey
Vote and Why?" on Oct. 1.

The forum will take place at the Conference Center on the college campus, 1200 Old Trenton Road.

Organizers hope the program will provide different perspectives on the issues, as well as assessments on how successful the candidates have been in reaching state voters.

The program received a grant from Public Broadcasting Service's "By the People."

A panel of experts will present opinions, analysis and debate. Ingrid Reed, director of the Eagleton New Jersey Project, will moderate.

The panelists are: Miguel A. Centeno, Princeton University sociology professor and director of the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Affairs; Joseph J. Seneca, professor at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning & Public Policy at Rutgers University and chairman of the New Jersey Council of Economic Advisors; Roger A. Bodman, senior partner with Public Strategies Impact and Republican political analyst; and Julie Roginsky, political and public relations consultant with the Comprehensive Communications Group and Democratic political analyst.