

Diwali attracts attention of businesses in Texas

Many mainstream businesses in Houston, Texas are catching on to Diwali -- the popular Hindu festival of lights -- and marketing to the area's growing Indian population.

Companies are busy building rapport with the many Indian American clients and employees, just as they have for Christmas.

The Houston area is home to about 75,000 people of Indian descent, according to the latest census figures, though some community leaders put the figure at more than 100,000.

For the first time, Houston-based Reliant Energy plans to send Diwali cards to more than a thousand small-business owners of Indian descent this year, the Houston Chronicle reported.

Hilton Corp's Hampton Inn is also sending greeting cards and sweets to its Indian-American franchisees.

Hewlett-Packard, Reliant Energy and Anderson Cancer Centre will hold annual Diwali celebrations at their local offices, which will include traditional Indian snacks and sweets like samosas and ladoos.

'It's a grand event, but we try not to put a focus on the religious aspects, because that's not the intent,' said Paul Joshi, head of the company's IndusHP employee resource group, which helps integrate new and visiting employees of Indian origin into the local workforce.

Greeting card maker Hallmark has launched special Diwali cards; porcelain figurine maker Lladro has launched a line of Hindu deities.

'With the number of Indians growing, it was just a natural extension,' said Hallmark spokeswoman Deirdre Parkes.

Wells Fargo and Citibank are running special promotions. This year, both are sponsoring local Diwali celebrations, placing special ads in local South Asian newspapers and pushing their remittance services.

On Oct 29, legislators in the US House of Representatives approved a resolution recognising the significance of Diwali. More than two million people celebrate Diwali in the US.

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