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Special Issue

Standing on the shoulders of giants...



"We shape our buildings and thereafter, our buildings shape us." These words were spoken by an expert brick layer who loved to build when he found time off from running the country. On the 20th of January, 2017, a month after the turning of the sod, many septuagenarians, octogenarians and a centenarian got a taste of Churchill's passion when they gathered together for a bricklaying ceremony.

The bricklaying ceremony for the trauma centre - a first of its kind in the State - and 1500-bedded multispecialty hospital and teaching facility at Kannigapuram was conceived for various reasons.

One reason was to make sure that the buildings that we are shaping today and that will, undoubtedly, shape us - as an organisation and as a community in the

coming days - are touched, blessed and shaped by the hands and minds that have given of their best to CMC Vellore.

Another was to acknowledge the giants on whose shoulders we have stood to see into the future.

Brick laying ceremony at Kannigapuram

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“This event is a tribute to their lives, to their struggles and I’m delighted that they are part of this event,” said Dr Sunil Chandy, Director, CMC Vellore. “I want to welcome all of you – dear teachers, senior faculty, most of whom have retired from active life but remain extremely engaged, interested and burdened about the way our institution is growing.”

Even by the turn of the century, it had started to become obvious that the resources at our main hospital campus at Thottappalayam were not adequate to meet the challenges brought about by patients that were increasing by the thousands. However, it took us ten years to get here; ten years after the need for a new campus was first addressed.

While talking about the story and significance of Kannigapuram, Council Chairman, Dr M C Mathew, touched upon the three driving factors that went into the decision to set the wheels in motion – the need for “space creation, people’s comfort and a healing ambience” which was also “the need for quality health care for all, whether someone can pay or cannot pay enough.”

Talking to the students attending the event, Dr Chandy said, “You are the beneficiaries, you are the workers who will carry this dream forward” and invited them and the others in the audience to take part in the “continuum of the story that began 117 years ago” by leaving their hand imprints on slabs of fresh, wet cement. The excitement evoked by this invitation was obvious when every able-bodied person made a beeline to the slabs. The slabs with the handprints, and the bricks laid by the elders will, at the time of construction, become a permanent part of the structure of the new hospital.

The evening, compered by Jalaz Rahmi, a PG registrar, and Praneet Chitre, an intern, also saw the handing over of 5000, personalised stamps, featuring CMC Vellore, by Ms Radhika Chakravarthy, Post Master General of the Chennai City Region, to the Director and various past and present members of the Council.

The event seamlessly threaded together the past, the present and the future of CMC Vellore by inviting representatives from all three dimensions of time. They included former Council chairs,

directors, principals and others who were involved in the administration of the institution at various levels; Council members currently holding office; representatives of various Friends of Vellore; medical and non-medical retired staff; members of the clergy; current staff and students; the builders, architects, engineers, workers and security men involved in the project, and prominent citizens in and around Vellore.

Some of the citizen leaders in attendance were Mr P Karthikeyan, Vellore MLA, Mr C Gnanasekharan, former MLA, Mr J Lakshmanan, Arcot, Dr Yezhil Christudas, Principal (IC), Voorhees College; Dr Anbu Suresh, Medical Superintendent, Scudder Memorial Hospital, Ranipet; Dr Shirley Chacko, Deputy Director, SIHRTC, Karigiri; Mr Chandrasekharan, President Udhavum Ullangal; Mr Maninathan, Secretary, DKM Trust, and Mrs and Mr Pattabhiraman, businessman and philanthropist.



Dr Sunil Chandy, Director, CMC Vellore, hands the first brick over to centenarian alumna, Ms Anna Jacob.

In an event where great care was taken to ensure that everyone felt equally welcome, Ms Anna Jacob, 102-year-old former Nursing Superintendent of CMC Vellore, was wholeheartedly acknowledged by all present as the guest of honour.

It was an emotional moment for many in the gathering when Ms Jacob, who was trained and mentored by Aunt Ida, was wheel-chaired forward, and laid the first brick with frail but ready hands and a proud smile.