

Visionary

WITH A CLEAR, COMPASSIONATE VIEW.

TEXT BY SHERRI K. OOSTERHOUSE

When Rakesh Agarwal travels back to India, he has more in his suitcase than most people in his hometown have in a lifetime. He considers himself blessed in so many ways – first and foremost for the education which helped him build a successful business in North Carolina. It's that business that allows Rakesh to do work he never thought he'd be doing.

"In India, we didn't learn how to do volunteer work; most had nothing to give," said Agarwal, CEO of Rug and Home. "By living here, I've learned to care."

He was raised in large family with meager beginnings in a region

outside Varanasi (Benares), India, home to roughly seven million people. Because education was important to his parents, they sent him to a boarding school which set the foundation for acceptance at India Institute of Technology, the equivalent of MIT.

Rakesh came to the U.S. in 1985, working two jobs for nearly ten years, eventually becoming the CEO at World of Clothing – his evening job. After a series of jobs, and a shared interest in business with his wife, they opened their first Rug and Home store in 1995. "This is the only country where I could have done what I've done," said Agarwal.

Growth and success followed, along with two additional stores, and the Agarwals settled into their community and participated in giving back locally. "People step up to the plate in this country and help those in need—I've seen it time and time again."

The Agarwals were instilling the concept of caring in their daughter and wanted to make an impact back in India – where the need was so great. "I didn't



Rug and Home CEO Rakesh Agarwal's mission is to restore sight and, one day, eradicate blindness among Indian women

know how or what to do, I just knew I wanted to do something to help," said Agarwal. "We take so many things for granted – like flipping a switch to turn on a light and having access to clean drinking water."

The Agarwal family founded Vision Express in 2011, after funding a health camp in a small village where conditions in third world countries are difficult for all, but especially women. Initially, they weren't sure of the most pressing needs so they brought with them antibiotics and medical supplies to treat a variety of illnesses. When thousands of women showed up at the first camp, it was overwhelmingly apparent that one condition clearly needed correction. Blindness from cataracts.

"Women work in tough conditions, the dust and dirt compounds the problem," said Agarwal. "We treat women as young as 40 with cataracts."

Today, Vision Express treats more than 2,500 women each year in rural India. Agarwal's mission is to restore sight and, one day, eradicate blindness

among Indian women. The surgery, which is costly in the U.S., can be performed for as little as 25 dollars per eye.

BUILDING BRIDGES

Rakesh donates time and money to change lives in India – but also to touch lives in this country. Each year, he takes 8-10 people who have never been to India along for a life changing journey. People apply, and a select few who have the right heart and are open to this life changing experience are invited to join and work at the camps.

Rakesh departed in February on his fifth trip to India, taking with

TODAY, VISION EXPRESS TREATS MORE THAN 2,500 WOMEN EACH YEAR IN RURAL INDIA.

him travelers open to long hours assisting nurses and doctors and immersing themselves in a country where the culture and living conditions are a huge departure from the comforts of the Carolinas.

Rakesh says the mission is evolving, as women feel empowerment from renewed health they feel stronger, empowered. Helping women become entrepreneurs and start their own business feels like a natural next step for Vision Express.

"If people would tell me I'd be doing this I'd never believe it," said Agarwal. "My purpose is to build bridges and change lives."

Rug and Home stores are located in Kannapolis, Asheville and Gaffney, SC. Visit rugandhome.com or call 1.877.784.4663 for more information.



Each year 8-10 volunteers travel to India with Rug and Home for a life changing experience working in the Vision Express health camps.



Rakesh Agarwal and his wife opened the first Rug and Home store in 1995, and the Agarwal family founded Vision Express in 2011.



Friends of the Animals
www.FriendsOfTheAnimals.net

You can help us find their **HAPPY PLACE!**

You are invited to:
For the Love of the Animals
a Festive Evening of **FUN**draising on
Thursday, April 14th from 6:30-9:30 pm

- Where:** The Pearl, 19501 West Catawba Ave, Cornelius
- What:** Dinner, Music, Friends, Auction, FUN!
- Why:** Your support will help Friends of the Animals build a Pet Education & Adoption Center to serve the greater LKN community.
- How:** Tickets can be purchased via paypal at www.friendsoftheanimals.net/events/for-the-love-of-the-animals/ or checks can be mailed to: Friends of the Animals, PO Box 3937, Mooresville, NC 28117
*a portion of your ticket purchase is tax deductible

Who: Event organized by **East LKN Women's Networking Group**

- Each \$50 Ticket Includes:**
 - Appetizers
 - Dinner
 - Music
 - Silent Auction
 - Basket Raffle
 - Artist Vendors
- Event Questions/ Sponsorship Opportunities: Info@FriendsOfTheAnimals.net
- Friends of the Animals is a local 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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