It’s that time of the year again, when the sun shyly starts peeking out, and those freezing temperatures don’t seem that freezing any more. Yes folks, winter’s coming to an end! Time to start putting away that bulky winter wear, and bring out our shorts and sunglasses. Could there be a better time than this for us to bring some cheer into the life of the Drexel Desi? I will take this opportunity to introduce myself, the editor, Kali Prasad, and my co-editor, Priyadarsini to the Drexel Desi community.

As I write this piece, we’re now well into 2006. The previous year has been a really eventful year, especially for us on Pragathi’s working committee. Earlier boards have done their jobs exceedingly well, and the desi community has high expectations of us. So far, the working committee has been going great guns! Watch this space for more news about Pragathi!

Even though we editors feel that this newsletter must be the best thing that has ever happened to the desis in Drexel, there are still some people out there who don’t know much about us yet. We are the Indian Graduate Student association at Drexel University. Our chief objectives are to increase the awareness of Indians on campus and in Philadelphia and to preserve and promote the rich cultural heritage of India. This newsletter is meant to be a voice for the Indian community, and a means for us to increase awareness among Drexel students about India and Indians.

On behalf of Pragathi and all of us here on the editorial board, I would like to welcome all of you to a wild and rocking year ahead of us. We wish all the desis out there good luck for the midterms. This newsletter is for you, folks! All you people rock, and this newsletter rocks too!

January 25th, 2006: Hamas wins Palestinian elections. Palestinian militant group Hamas scored an upset victory over incumbent Fatah in the parliamentary elections. As Hamas is a militant group proscribed by the U.S, trouble lies ahead for Palestine.

January 28th, 2006: Upset in Karnataka. HD Kumaraswamy is all set to form the government in Karnataka after he engineered a surprise split in the Congress-JD(U) coalition, causing the alliance to fall.

February 2nd, 2006: Iran in UN trouble. Iran has been referred to the UN Security council following its refusal to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Iran faces potential sanctions in the future if disagreement persists.

February 4th, 2006: Egypt ferry disaster. At least 1000 people are feared dead after the sinking of an Egyptian ferry carrying 1400 passengers, supposedly caused due a fire and explosions on board.
Coffee!
By Sameer Kalghatgi

My very first encounters with coffee, as far as I can stretch the precious few neurons in my overworked brain, remind me of the lazy Sunday mornings at home and the warm aroma of freshly brewed MR coffee spiced with nutmeg powder. This once a week affair was the only time I was allowed to drink coffee. Other requests to drink coffee were politely turned down with not so polite reasons: “You’ll turn black if you drink too much coffee!” - Can you believe that?, “Coffee is not good for health” - How could I be so naive? Research has proved that 3-4 cups of coffee a day is good for health, and the mother of all reasons, “Coffee is bad for small children” - Ok mom. Now I am big enough. So coffee is good for me now! Baah! The ill thought of reasons which parents give to us children! I graduated from coffee once a week, to coffee thrice a week and finally to coffee twice a day. At one time I was so addicted, that I used to have severe headaches with one missed cup of coffee. But being a coffee worshipper, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. Don’t believe me? Drink a cuppa and you’ll know what I am talking about.

I think coffee is man’s biggest discovery or should I say invention. I can’t imagine studying for those engineering exams without cups of coffee drunk nine to the dozen. Or for that matter the numerous cups of coffee drunk with your buddies in the college canteen while bunking as many lectures. The best way to break ice between you and a new acquaintance (the cute girl in your class, or the hot babe in office) is “You wanna go for a cup of coffee?”. Ok, I think I am old-fashioned, but it still works. Nothing like a hot cup of coffee on a rainy day, or a cold coffee on a hot and humid day.

Once I hit the road, post graduation, in the land of salaries, company coupons, credit cards, I started exploring the fascinating world of coffee. I, at this point, while working in TATA Motors happened to meet an ardent coffee lover, Arun Kamath. I must say he is a connoisseur, when it comes to coffee, and he is as eccentric as his coffee drinking habits are. We used to make fun of him for the sheer amount of coffee he used to drink and still manage to stay sober. A person who can drink 3 shots of neat coffee, without changing the expression on his face, in 15 minutes is one crazy coffee drinker.

I still reminisce the days we used to haunt Barista and Cafe Coffee Day in Pune. Each weekend jaunt used to revolve around unwinding in these cafes. Drinking insane amounts of coffee and getting high on it was an altogether different experience.

(Continued on Page 3)
(Continued from Page 2)

My knowledge of coffee is attributed to “Mr. I am so high on Coffee all day long”. I was introduced to the aromatic, intoxicating and flavor filled world of coffee by Arun. I got to know the many different blends, flavors, colors, aromas and last but not the least the various temperatures at which coffee is served. Cappuccinos, mochas, lattes, espressos were all experimented with and I drank coffee in all different colors and textures, brown, creamy, frothy, milky while slowly graduating to flavors like Irish cream, Hazelnut and Caramel and risked some international blends of coffee, the best being the ‘Ethiopian Coffee’. Check out the range of coffee available at Coffee Bean.

The range of temperatures at which coffee is served is a sure indication of how good the coffee maker is. We drank coffee scalding hot, hot, warm, lukewarm (this is when we asked for a replacement, you can't possibly serve lukewarm coffee when you charge Rs. 35/- a peg) cool, cold, chilled, ice cold bone chilling coffee (this is when you can't possibly talk). The coffee drinker’s club was formed when we managed to splurge Rs. 200/- on coffee in a single day and were rewarded with a personalized Cafe Coffee Day Discount coupon, valid all over India. No one apart from us would have had a more worn out card. I still have that card as a souvenir. The next time we met was only after 4 months and coffee was once again the uniter. This time it was Delhi's Connaught Place Barista. We haunted that place so frequently that we were on first name basis with the host there. I guess the next time I am in India the rendezvous would be at some coffee place in aamchi Mumbai.

On coming to the USA I completely changed my outlook towards coffee. Back home in India, I neither liked nor relished the prospect of drinking black coffee. Who knew my outlook would take a 180 degree turn? Circumstances had a lot to do with my switching over. One freezing winter morning cut from the rest of the civilization due to a blizzard, it dawned upon me that we were out of milk. Faced with the prospects of getting no coffee, I was staring into the dire consequences of skipping coffee. I could feel a dull throbbing in my temples, foreboding of something bad to happen. This spurred me into action, whipping out my favorite coffee and coffee mug, I brewed myself a cup of strong black coffee. I had never ventured so far in my coffee drinking career; I was treading into forbidden territory. Its coffee's way of saying: “Enter at your own risk”. The aroma of fresh coffee in its basic form was overpowering. I simply couldn't resist taking a swig. The first sip of black coffee was enough to shock me pleasantly. I was instantly awakened, all my senses sharpened. I was feeling light and heady. Since then, if its coffee it's black, else its not coffee "no cream, just sugar". It's almost time for my coffee break. Until I brew another post lets take a break.

The Drexel Desi

We would like to hear from you!

What did you like about this newsletter? What did you not like about this newsletter? Would you like to have your voice heard by all our readers out there? We would like to hear from you. If you have an article, an opinion or a suggestion, please email it to hpn23@drexel.edu or priyazzz@gmail.com. We promise to put your contributions in the newsletter in forthcoming editions. And for all you people who feel their English isn’t up to scratch, well not to worry folks! That’s what we’re here for! So keep them contributions coming in!

“No man is free who is not master of himself.” - Epictetus (Greek philosopher, 100 AD)
The Drexel Desi

Picture Gallery

Pragathi’s Graduate Student Orientation

Dandiya

Diwali Dhamaka
The Drexel Desi
www.pragathi.net

Picture Gallery

Diwali Dhamaka and Penn Skating Rink
In September 2005, when Steve Jobs unveiled the new iPod video, along with millions of other iPod enthusiasts I vowed to lay my hands on one as soon as possible. Now I am admiring the sleek black model in my hand, yes my new iPod. It's awesome. It's even smaller than the palm of my hand, but can hold much more than my closed fist. I am now one of millions of music freaks enjoying listening to music on an iPod. How did this all happen? Read on.

A complete gadget freak, I couldn't imagine myself without the new iPod. After debating in my mind the feasibility of going in for the new iPod vis-a-vis my meager PhD stipend, finally I decided to order the new iPod with a custom engraving and Apple informed me that my iPod would be shipped within two weeks. In a few days I got an email telling me my iPod has been shipped and I could track its status via FedEx. What a wonderful world it is! I click a mouse somewhere, bits fly through fiber optics, go to some unknown destination, money electronically changes hands and then atoms in useful arrangements are flown in airplanes and hand carried to my doorstep. This is sort of miraculous.

Then I wonder where my new iPod is. Can I expect it tomorrow, or will I have to wait for the next week? I am surprised to discover from FedEx that my new iPod is in a pick up station in Shanghai, China and just missed the pick up deadline. Well, seems like I am going to have to wait for a while.

Two days later there is new tracking information from FedEx. My iPod is on the move, but now it is in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. I have to look this up to find where it is, and I discover it is marginally closer to Philadelphia than it was in Shanghai. I am resentful. What is my iPod doing in Uzbekistan?

A few days later my iPod reaches London. I know where this is, and I am encouraged. Still later I get good tidings that my iPod has reached Memphis, Tenn. - the center of FedEx's universe. In my mind I see the plane landing and unloading its contents and one of them being my iPod. It is practically home. After two days of limbo, I am delighted to find that my iPod is in a truck 8 miles away. Within an hour my iPod is on my doorstep.

Now I am admiring my new iPod and realizing that in the new world economy the earth is truly flat. In Philadelphia I order an iPod from a California-based company, but it is assembled in China. Some of the integrated circuits are probably fabricated there too, while other chips might have come from Japan, Korea or Taiwan. A lot of design must have been done in California by brilliant American, European and South Asian minds, but where did the ideas come from which made this machine possible? Just consider some of the brilliant and complex concepts that are embedded in this little box. It can play music, screen videos, display pictures, organize contacts and calendars and store tons of gigabytes of data. It must have been made possible by the millions of lines of code, computer-aided design tools for the integrated circuits; and by sheer brilliance of some technically advanced minds from all over the world.

This iPod epitomizes the world of technology today - designed by brilliant minds, ordered electronically, assembled with worldwide parts, delivered via a sophisticated logistics system and replete with ingenious ideas. Yet in a world of commodity products, this brilliance is largely unappreciated. And if this iPod dies on me one day, I'll stop appreciating it too.

Sudoku

Sudoku sometimes spelled Su Doku, is a logic-based placement puzzle, also known as Number Place in the United States. The aim of the canonical puzzle is to enter a numerical digit from 1 through 9 in each cell of a 9×9 grid made up of 3×3 subgrids (called “regions”), starting with various digits given in some cells (the “givens”). Each row, column, and region must contain only one instance of each numeral. Completing the puzzle requires patience and logical ability. Although first published in a U. S. puzzle magazine in 1979, Sudoku initially caught on in Japan in 1986 and attained international popularity in 2005. (Source: Wikipedia)

Instructions: Just fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9.
A day in Drexel
By Sameer Kalghatgi

6:30 Wake up and lie awake in bed.
6:31 Realize you spent $18 on last night's dinner, means no eating out for the next 6 weeks.
7:00 Wake up suddenly with heart in mouth when you realize you didn't hit the snooze button--you turned it off.
7:01 Fall asleep again.
7:44 Wake up with heart in mouth again.
7:45 Ready to go to school, will shave tomorrow, bathe day after, will eat early brunch at (Taco's/John's/Daily Deli/Mike's whatever cafeteria).
8:03 Arrive at school. Realize your lab mate arrived earlier today as usual and must have got more work done.
8:04 Pass by Advisor's office, chat with Secretary to find out if he is coming in today. He is, darn. Need to start work on the draft due this afternoon.
8:15 Read electronic mail.
8:20 Delete mail from prospective students regarding questions about the funding, courses, profs, univ. Darn these inquisitive freshers. Depression: too much work to do today.
9:00 For jumpstart: go to Pepsi machine.
9:05 Kick Pepsi machine; promise yourself to call up the company and ask for your money back. Wonder why they would believe you.
9:33 Start printing out loads of stuff that may be vaguely related to your work.
9:41 Early morning stupefaction. Mutter racist comments to yourself about your officemate.
9:43 Curse your officemate in a low tone he would not comprehend. Feel good about him not grasping English well.
10:19 Feel sleepy, should not have stayed late writing this post last night.
10:43 Make a daily schedule to be followed from tomorrow, which means never.
10:59 Drop in at advisor's office and borrow something you don't need & and kinda make him aware you are working hard on your project.
11:05 Perverted day-dreams
11:11 Read electronic news. Mid-morning yawn time.
11:34 Start typing junk at a very high key-in rate to pretend you are working hard as your advisor passes by from outside.
11:35 Press the Backspace key for one and a half minutes until all the garbage you typed in is erased. Realize that you can type more than 256 characters per half minute.
11:41 Flirt with the new girl in the department.
11:45 Print out some slides for afternoon's draft + presentation.
11:47 Print them again, you forgot to change the date from last presentation.
12:15 Hunger pangs.
Ganapati Pujan
By Sameer Kalghatgi

Far away from home, four roommates, one amateur priest with lots of devotion, on the eve of Ganesh Chaturthi decided to conduct aarti at home to invoke lord Ganesha's blessings. What follows is a narration of the sequence of events. Read it just for fun and it is not meant to hurt anybody's sensibilities.

Two of us, me and Sriraj got busy in making prasad. Saurabh, the priest was busy learning the shlokas and the fourth guy, Shubham, started downloading Anuradha Paudwal's Ganapati aarti. Just then we realized we did not have semolina to make the prasad, after frantically rummaging in a never opened cabinet, we found some semolina used for making idlis, big difference, and so we decided to test our skills at making prasad. Sometimes you just go by instincts. After struggling with the semolina and adding sugar countless times the prasad finally was made and looked yummy. It was time for the aarti and all of us were really hungry.

We lighted camphor and asked Shubham to wrap it up fast. Anuradha Paudwal's melodious aarti soothed our senses and we were lost in the aarti until a loud alarm shrieked and made us jump out of our skins. We suddenly realized the holy smoke from the burning camphor was too much for the fire alarm to handle. All of us attacked one fire alarm each and managed to stop it from screaming. Whew! Guess lord Ganesh saved us and we did not have to evacuate the entire building.

Before we could partake the painstakingly prepared prasad, Saurabh stopped us and asked us to chant Lord Ganesha's names after him. He took out a tattered piece of paper with all the names scribbled on it in a hardly legible writing. Here he goes “Om Ganpatay Namah”, “Om Gauriputraya Namah”, “Om Vinayakaya Namah”, “Om Gajananaaya Namah”, till this point our amateur priest managed to pronounce all names and we obediently chanted after him, “Om Skanda”, “Om Skaandaraj”...ye kya likha hain?“...Om Skandaraajay Namaha,"Om Sarva...Om Sarvasidhh....yeh kya likha hain?"Om Sarvasiddhantaya Namah"...after stuttering through another 5 names we all burst out laughing. We just couldn't take it anymore. Saurabh's stuttering recitation of Lord Ganesha's names was drowned in our laughter. Finally good sense prevailed and we asked him to recite the names in his mind and we would wait till he finished. Within five minutes he was done. I am sure he was stuttering even when he was saying the names silently and I bet he did not go through the entire list. Till today we tease him for his miserable take at reciting Lord Ganesha's names. He is never going to ever ask anybody to chant after him.

The day ended on a sweet note with all simply loving the prasad and then we enjoyed 'Shudh Shakahari Bhojan' prepared by Shubham, to the strains of Lata Mangeshkar's melodious aarti. I am sure Lord Ganesha would never forget such a memorable aarti. I believe the Lord Ganesha just loved the aarti and helped me in clearing my qualifiers! Ganapati Bappa Morya!

NASHA 2006
April 8th, 2006
Main Auditorium, Drexel University

Watch this space for more. Coming Soon....