

A Grateful Realtor's Gift

George Joseph in New York | November 29, 2005 | 19:33 IST

Though Raxit Shah and family left Liberty Township in Youngstown, Ohio, three years ago, he has not forgotten the town where he started his businesses a quarter a century ago.

As a token of his gratitude to the town that saw his growth as a real estate magnate, Shah recently contributed \$800,000 worth of prime property to the town to develop a much-needed central fire station.

"We have a duty to the local community which contributed to our growth. So I thought it was nice to give back something to the town which gave so much to me and my family," said Shah, who owns several hotels and is a leading developer of waterfront condominiums in Florida.

He took the business name, Liberty Group from the name of the town.

"Building temples or facilities for the Indian community are good. But we have to remember the mainstream community too. When we benefit from the community, we have a responsibility to give back too," said Shah who now lives in St Petersburg, Florida.

"We are very grateful to the Shahs for the donation and their generosity. This is their way of giving back to the community and it will not allow us to expend taxpayers money for the project," Town Trustee Jodi Syoyak said.

The township's current main station is a logistical problem and the new location will improve response time to all areas of the township. The donation is a patch of land measuring 1.16 acres and includes a building, appraised at \$800,000.

The new fire station will be a 9,785 square feet facility with room for 10 vehicles, eight bunks, offices, a gym and includes dining facilities. The project costs \$1million. Township officials plan to seek a federal grant to build the fire station. To get the grant the town has to invest part of the expenditure

"This property can act as our in-kind donation to help us secure a grant and will save us money no matter what," Trustee Jack Simon said.

Once the central station gets going, the town will do away with the two stations currently it operates, said Patrick Ungaro, the township administrator. Already two buyers have shown interest in the buildings.

With the donation of Shah the central station can be built without grants, Ungaro said. But he is confident of getting a grant, even in the wake of the donation.

Shah, a native of Godhra in Gujarat, has been doing philanthropic work in India also. He and his wife Ketki have been instrumental in developing and maintaining an eye hospital in India where the needy get free treatment. He also opened a primary school for disadvantaged students in Godhra.

On a recent visit the Shahs provided medical supplies and purchased an ambulance and a hearse for residents of Godhra.

Shah, 55, came to America three decades ago. He lived in Canada for 10 years and later moved to the US.

He has two sons, Punit, also a real estate developer in Atlanta, and Prem, a medical student.

URL for this article:

<http://www.rediff.com/news/2005/nov/29us1.htm>