

OBITUARIES

Belur Krishna 'Rad' Radhakrishnan turned his morning commute into community car service

BY RACHEL HATZIPANAGOS

Belur Krishna "Rad" Radhakrishnan knew what it meant to arrive in a new country with nothing.

Radhakrishnan moved to the United States from India in 1957 — a time when there were no Indian restaurants or temples or grocery stores in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

"He had no landing pad," said his granddaughter, Anjali Belur.

So he made his own community, starting an Indian students association at the University of Michigan, where he studied engineering. That formative experience is what inspired him to make a home for everyone he met. While Radhakrishnan, who died in August at 98, did impressive things like participate in the March on Washington in 1963, it was his ability to serve as a landing pad for others that stuck with people the most.

"I can't tell you how many people have said at the funeral or in the weeks afterward, 'When I first moved to America, I stayed at Rad's house,'" Belur recalled.

Radhakrishnan and his wife, Premalatha Radhakrishnan, settled in Bethesda in 1961. There, they were founding members of the Sri Siva Vishnu Temple, which began construction in 1988 in nearby Lanham. He and the group of founders sponsored visas so soapstone carvers could travel here and help shape the temple, which has grown to become one of the largest in the United States.

In the 1990s, on his way to work, Radhakrishnan noticed people standing, waiting,

at bus stops. He started offering them daily rides at no charge from a set spot in his neighborhood to the Bethesda metro station about three miles away, sometimes picking up stragglers on the way if he had room. The service soon became known as the BK Express.

Over the years, Radhakrishnan picked up semi-famous figures, such as the ambassador to Egypt, but mostly his passengers were just ordinary people. In a video interview for a high school student's class project, Radhakrishnan described why he did it: "I used to drive all by myself, which is boring to go all by myself. This is exciting because I spend a really enjoyable time with all my friends."

Lawrence Soler, a passenger on the BK Express on-and-off since 2000, said Radhakrishnan "wasn't always a huge talker. But he always had something interesting to say because he had an interesting life: He was just super caring about his community members."

Radhakrishnan missed only one day, Belur said: the day his wife died 20 years ago. The rides continued until the covid pandemic, when he stopped due to his age.

Radhakrishnan remained energetic long after he stopped offering rides. He would wake up every morning at 4:30 a.m. to do yoga, well into his 90s. Then he'd sit down with the newspaper and read it cover-to-cover over a cup of coffee.

"Above all," Belur said, "my grandfather was a very disciplined, reliable person."

Belur Krishna Radhakrishnan was born June 24, 1927. He lived in Bethesda and died Aug. 27.



FAMILY PHOTO



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LEFT: Premalatha and Belur Krishna Radhakrishnan settled in Bethesda in 1961. **ABOVE:** Radhakrishnan, who was 98 when he died, knew what it was like to come to a new country and feel alone. In the 1990s, he started offering people in his neighborhood free rides to the Metro, which became known as the BK Express.