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## Tamils celebrate new year with children's programs

BY THAYUMANASAMY SOMASUNDARAM • SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE • APRIL 29, 2010

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For the 11h year in a row, the Tallahassee Tamil Sangam celebrated the Tamil Puthandu (New Year) on April 17 at Alumni Village in Tallahassee.

Around April 14 of every year in the Gregorian calendar, Tamil people (the Tamils) worldwide celebrate the Puthandu with reverence and importance.

Tamil, one of the ancient languages of India is spoken by 66 million people worldwide in India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, Fiji, and other countries. The antiquity and relevance of Tamil can be seen by noting that Tolkappiyam, a grammar book was believed to have been written around third BCE and that the language has been in continuous usage to the present time.

Tamils are proud of their language and have created great literary works both during ancient and modern times. Tamils are also pioneers in incorporating its usage in electronic media such as computers and Internet. Addition of Tamil characters as early as in 1988 to Computer Unicode88 Standard as one of first South Asian languages was testament to its importance. In mid twentieth century the Tamils spread to various parts of the globe and took their passion for the language with them.

So it is only natural for Tamils in the US to keep using the language at home and with friends. One of the obstacles to proficient usage comes when children are born and raised entirely in the U.S. with very little exposure to the Tamil language outside their homes. So Tallahassee Tamil Sangam was established in 2000 to promote the usage of Tamil among youngsters. The Sangam (Association) found volunteers to teach the language to kids, organized festivals where children and adults sing songs, narrate stories in Tamil, and participate in dramas written entirely in Tamil.

This year's celebration included staging of children's Tamil drama, songs, stand-up comedy, mimicry, and a dance program in Tamil. The families who attended the celebration were happy to be part of this great experience. The Sangam will continue this endeavor so that the children will recognize the connection between the native tongue, and their habits, heritage, and culture. To learn more, visit: <http://sites.google.com/site/tallahasseeamilsangam>.

**Thayumanasamy Somasundaram** and his family are residents of Tallahassee since 1993.

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A children's song is part of the Puthandu celebration. (Special to the Chronicle)

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