

[EVOLUTIONS](#)

Category : [April 1998](#)

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CELEBRATED: Jayanti birthday bash for Swami Bua Ji Maharaj, attended by 150 devotees at his New York Vedanta Center. Though Swamiji doesn't divulge his age, devotees place it around 106. At his biggest birthday party to date, Indian instrumental and bhajana performances were lively. Swamiji then left for Panama on a lecture tour.

AWARDED: Legendary South Indian carnatic vocalist M.S. Subbulakshmi, 82, with the Bharat Ratna ("Jewel of India"), the country's highest civilian honor, on January 14, 1998, the only musician so honored. Taught first by her mother and later music guru Shanmugavadivu, she gave her first formal recital of bhajanas at age 13 and later enthralled audiences around the world with her enchanting soulful voice.

RETIRING: Sgt. Maj. Chaturbhuj N. Gidwani, 60, from a 25-year military career in the US Army Reserve. An avid supporter of Hinduism Today, Gidwani began as a private at the unusually advanced age of 35. Enduring boot camp training with a platoon of teenagers, Gidwani quickly found a niche providing needed guidance to the youngsters and earned the nickname "grandpa." A refugee from India's violent 1947 partition and now a staunch follower of Gandhian philosophy, he says, "I believe my military contributions helped resolve conflicts without bloodshed." His career-long desire to see a Hindu

chaplain in the US armed forces has yet to be realized, but he and others have successfully convinced the Department of Defense of the need (see "Call for Military Chaplains," March, '98). Gidwani's family, members of the Vedanta Society of Portland, Oregon, believe that "upholding the sacred Vedas in the West will bring unity among all faiths."