

## COLLIERVILLE

# Indian community helping change the face of Collierville



February 10, 2016 - Laila Dharani laughs as she and her husband, Amirali, look at a house with realtor Nasreen Valiani (not pictured) in Collierville. Valiani specializes in finding houses for clients from India. (Yalonda M. James/The Commercial Appeal)

*By Daniel Connolly of The Commercial Appeal*

*Posted: March 05, 2016*

The husband and wife from India have periodically searched for a house for years, and they've seen about 50 so far, helped by their real estate agent, who's originally from Pakistan.

Many of the houses simply cost too much, or they had other flaws. More than once, the couple made an offer on a house, only to have another buyer snap it up first. But on this February morning they're walking into at spacious two-story home in Collierville decorated

with New Orleans Jazz Fest posters and fleur-de-lis symbols, a house they like so much they have come for a second visit.

Maybe, just maybe, this is it. The first house they will own in America. The house that will let them leave their apartment in unincorporated Shelby County and settle in Collierville, where they want their two children to go to school.

The couple's visit to the house illustrates the economic, social and demographic forces rapidly changing Collierville, once a sleepy country town east of Memphis. Between 2000 and 2014, the town's population grew from 32,000 to about 47,000.

In 2000, the Census estimated almost no Indians lived in the majority-white town. Now, about 1,200 Indians, or about 3 percent of the population, live there. It's a small minority, but an increasingly visible one: the local movie theater shows first-run films from India; Indian businesses, including a grocery store, have sprung up; and many children from Indian families go to local schools.

Many Indians came to Collierville for computer jobs at the FedEx World Technology Center, which opened in 1998. Like many other people, some Indians choose Collierville because they like the town's schools, which now form an independent district. The sheer number of people moving to Collierville — Indians and everyone else — is boosting housing prices and spurring new construction.

As the couple starts their tour of the house, they've just come from the doctor's office. Laila Dharani, 34, is coughing and sniffing, as is her husband, Amirali, 40, who says he feels awful. Their 4-year-old daughter Aliza is also sick. Laila's brother-in-law, Mike Sarfani, 33, carries the little girl draped over his shoulder. Helping the couple is real estate agent Nasreen Valiani, who often serves

clients from India.

First, Laila talks in the kitchen with the agent about another option: custom-building a home.

The women switch between English and Hindi as the men remain mostly silent. (Amirali says later he's not much of a talker.) Laila has discovered that custom-building a house will cost well over \$400,000 — and they'd have to settle for a smaller one. "That's a bummer, right?" Valiani says in English.

"That's a big bummer," Laila says. The house they're visiting now is listing at Crye-Leike's website for \$393,000. They'll focus on this option for now.

The couple comes from Hyderabad in southern India. Amirali said his father and other family members emigrated to work in convenience stores in America, and he did the same, arriving in 2000. Laila followed, and they later married.

They have legal permanent residency and plan to become U.S. citizens. "My thing is, obviously I don't want to go back home, you know?" Amirali says. "So rather than buying something in India, I'll buy something over here."

They have two children. Even though their apartment is outside Collierville's borders, their 11-year-old son, Ziyaan, attends Collierville's Sycamore Elementary because of a grandfathering rule. The Collierville schools were one of six municipal districts that split from the Shelby County schools in 2014 as part of a complex fight over school consolidation.

Amirali says the family wants the children to attend good colleges. His wife wants to move to Collierville to ensure both her children stay in the system. "I need a Collierville school," she says.

Collierville school board chairman Mark Hansen says many people consider schools when choosing where to live. "Schools drive everything," he says.

Valiani agrees schools are a draw. "People are more inclined to buy toward Collierville because of the school system," she said.

Amirali and Laila Dharani each finished 12th grade in India. Amirali didn't continue his education, but in the U.S., Laila studied cosmetology, a choice that would change their lives. She, her sister and their husbands opened a salon called Arch 2 Arch on Hacks Cross Road in 2010. It offers services such as eyebrow threading, facials and waxing. They've since opened several other locations. Amirali helps with the salon business and still works in his brother's gas station in Collierville.

They said the salon business is going great and has helped boost their income to the level it takes to buy a Collierville home.

Between 2013 and 2015, the average home sale price in Collierville's 38017 ZIP code rose from \$292,000 to \$314,000, an increase of 8 percent and one of the highest in the Memphis area, according to real estate research company Chandler Reports. In recent years, the 38017 ZIP code has also ranked first in Shelby County in number of houses sold: 1,098 last year.

As housing prices rise, demographics change. Census estimates show about 76 percent of Collierville residents are non-Hispanic whites, 13 percent are African-American, 6 percent are Asian, including Indians, and 3 percent are Hispanic.

Collierville school statistics from the 2014-2015 year show different percentages: 67 percent white, 18 percent African-American, less than 1 percent Hispanic and 11 percent Asian.

At Sycamore Elementary in south Collierville, where the house-hunting couple's son goes, the demographics have shifted much further: As of this month, 41 percent are African-American, 6 percent are Hispanic, 26 percent are white and 25 percent are Asian.

On a recent Thursday, students at the diverse school prepared for the annual We Are the World ceremony, in which kids walk across the stage with flags and costumes representing their heritage. The biggest group represented India: about 90 children in all.

Indians follow a wide range of faiths, including Hinduism and Christianity. Laila and Amirali Dharani belong to a Shia Ismaili Muslim community center in Collierville. That's where they met Valiani.

As the Dharanis continue their home tour with Valiani, they seem to grow more and more comfortable with the idea of living there.

The house is close to their son's school, their religious community center and to friends. Laila Dharani likes the high ceilings, the closets and the backyard. She likes that the layout is different from that of other houses she's seen.

Amirali Dharani opens the refrigerator and peeks inside. He identifies an upstairs windowless attic-like space where he can watch horror movies and his favorite sports - cricket, plus football and basketball.

Valiani points through a back window toward some plants. "Those are crepe myrtles and the beautiful flowers come in there."

Minutes later, the couple signs paperwork to make an offer on the house. "Keep your fingers crossed," the real estate agent says.

Valiani says she always tells clients if they don't get a house, God may have something else for them.

But good news comes in the next few days. The couple reaches a deal and sets a closing for April 5. It's all behind them: the multiple home visits, the years of searching, the illness that was bothering them the day of the tour.

"We are so excited!" Laila Dharani says later. They'll host a housewarming party and invite 100 or more friends and relatives from both sides of the family. Laila's mother already lives in the Memphis area, and Laila's grandmother will come all the way from India. "My grandma, my mom, me and my kids. It's like four generations," Laila Dharani says. The housewarming party will bring them all under the same roof, celebrating the new American home.



---

#### About Daniel Connolly

Daniel Connolly is a Memphis native who graduated from White Station High School and Kenyon College in Ohio. He joined The Commercial Appeal in 2006 and now covers Collierville. He's a member of the professional association Investigative Reporters and Editors and the author of "The Book of Isaias," a nonfiction work on children of Hispanic immigrants growing up in Memphis, scheduled for publication by St. Martin's Press of New York in fall 2016. In his spare time he enjoys long-distance running, jiu-jitsu and judo.

 @danielconnolly  daniel.connolly@comm...

 901-529-5296

#### Find this article at:

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/suburbs/collierville/an-indian-couple-seeks-an-american-house-can-a-real-estate-agent-from-pakistan-help-them-find-it-in--371149121.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

## COLLIERVILLE

# For this Collierville real estate agent, serving clients from India, Pakistan, Middle East is specialty



February 10, 2016 - Realtor Nasreen Valiani crosses her fingers after Amirali Dharani, left, and his wife Laila, (not pictured) signed papers to make an offer in Collierville. Valiani specializes in finding houses for clients from India. (Yalonda M. James/The Commercial Appeal)

By *Daniel Connolly* of *The Commercial Appeal*

Posted: **March 05, 2016**

When Nasreen Valiani started her real estate career in 2006, she didn't anticipate specializing in serving homebuyers from India, Pakistan and the Middle East.

"It just happened that way," said Valiani, 54. "Of course, I spread the word of mouth in our community."

She's originally from Pakistan and emigrated to the United States in 1991. Before starting her real estate career, she worked for years in hotel management, then in her husband's jewelry business. She's a mother, too: her son, Alishan, will graduate from Germantown High and has been accepted to elite University of Pennsylvania.

Valiani is affiliated with Coldwell Banker Collins-Maury in Collierville. Her biggest group of clients comes from India, and she says her language skills help. She speaks Gujarati, a regional language in India. She also knows Urdu, which is much like Hindi, a widely spoken Indian language.

Valiani says some of her clients choose a home based on vastu, a set of beliefs about proper architecture. People who believe in vastu often want the front of their home to face a certain direction, like north, east, or northeast.

Some have specific requirements for the master bedroom, kitchen and other rooms as well. One client was building a home and asked Valiani to draw a rough sketch of the plan so a guru in India could review it. The guru approved.

(Laila and Amirali Dharani, the couple featured in the accompanying article, don't believe in vastu.)

Valiani also said her clients from India and other countries often want great value for their price and a great deal. "And for that reason, most of my clients look for properties for years before they (buy) a home," she said. "It's very normal for my clients to look at over 40-50 homes before they choose one that meets their specific real estate needs and the one they feel is a good value for their price." Her former boss used to comment on it. "She would always say that Nasreen has a patience like a rock."

But she enjoys seeing the happiness in her clients' faces when a



deal finally comes together. She tells them she wants to find them a place for the long term: "I want to see you happy with the home and cherish that moment, even if I see you five years later."



#### About Daniel Connolly

Daniel Connolly is a Memphis native who graduated from White Station High School and Kenyon College in Ohio. He joined The Commercial Appeal in 2006 and now covers Collierville. He's a member of the professional association Investigative Reporters and Editors and the author of "The Book of Isaias," a nonfiction work on children of Hispanic immigrants growing up in Memphis, scheduled for publication by St. Martin's Press of New York in fall 2016. In his spare time he enjoys long-distance running, jiu-jitsu and judo.

 @danielconnolly    daniel.connolly@comm...

 901-529-5296

#### Find this article at:

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/suburbs/collierville/for-this-collierville-real-estate-agent-serving-clients-from-india-pakistan-middle-east-is-a-spec-2d-371149761.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.