Linda & Mike Lee – idealistic newcomers with a lifetime of professional skills

Auroville attracts people of all horizons, backgrounds and ages, and each year many decide to stay on, build their lives in Auroville and contribute to its flowering. They go through the YUCCA training, and then apply to be newcomers, a special status and process in order to become today’s «pioneers». In this issue we are pleased to introduce Linda and Mike Lee, a husband-wife team hailing from South Africa. They come with tremendous enthusiasm, maturity, and decades of valuable professional skills – Linda, is a multi-skilled doctor, and Mike is a business consultant with a rich professional background. Both are committed to contributing their experience and skills to Auroville’s life and growing future.

LINDA’S STORY
I grew up in South Africa in a very small town (village) in a place called Mpumelanga which is close to the Kruger National Park. I spent part of my childhood living on a farm and part at boarding school in Johannesburg. I left South Africa shortly after school traveling around Europe and then lived for a few years in Europe and for 12 years in the French West Indies on a boat and then returned to South Africa in my 40’s.
I have been practicing Health Care and Wellness for almost 30 years. I started my career as a reflexologist and then went onto to Acupressure/Shiatsu/Thai Massage and then got a degree at the University of the Western Cape as a Doctor of Chinese Medicine. I have trained as a yoga teacher and a yoga therapist in the USA at Kripalu and at Omega institute.

Mike and I got married in India in Kerala and we loved being in India from the first day. We were enchanted with the land and the people and when we planned our following trip we decided to travel to Pondicherry and then see what Auroville was about. I had heard about Auroville in my yoga circles and we thought we would do a day trip to Auroville while we were in Pondicherry.

We stayed at Quiet Healing Centre the second time we came to Auroville as we wanted to get to know our way around better and we were both intrigued by Auroville. After having spent time in Auroville we read the News and Notes every week (Mike would read it to me on Sundays). We wanted to see what it was like to live in a community (such as Auroville) as well as seeing what we could offer the community, and we became more and more interested in life here. We then went to Sri Lanka to see how we felt about living there, however Auroville kept pulling at us and we decided to come here. We arrived in Spring 2019 on volunteer visas, and we both switched to Newcomer visas after 6 months.

So we’re Newcomers now. I am 60 years old and Mike is 64 and we are in very good health with lots of years of experience in our respective fields. We both feel that we are healthy enough and young enough to offer our services here for the benefit of the community as well as explore new ways of responding to pressing issues and problems, fortunate to be in the position to contribute, both from a professional educational background as well as many years of experience.

When I came here, I first volunteered for Thamarai with Bridget as I wanted to work in the villages and/or bio-region. At Unity Pavilion, with Jaya (who is my mentor), I am also looking into how to work with the bio-region as well.
Once I was here and going to the villages, I asked what was the main health care concern and I was told that it was Alcohol Addiction and the impact on the family as well as the whole community. This got my attention and I started to enquire into the NADA Protocol which is auricular acupuncture for addiction, it is non-verbal (so no problems with communication) and also the patients are not required to verbalize why they are coming, the treatment is done in a group setting and is easy to set up. It can be done under a tree or in a clinical setting.

Then I found out that there is a foundation in Delhi called NADA-India and I contacted them and I organized for Mr Suneel Vatsyayan to come to Pondicherry to offer their training and I was also the trainer. We trained 38 people. This was a collaboration between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society. I wanted to bring us all together in the spirit of offering our services and collaborating with each other. Here is the brochure that we put out.

The NADA protocol is not put forward as a treatment for addiction, it is simply an invitation to experience stress relief, this means that there is no stigma attached to the treatment and no requirement by the patient to express why they are participating. It seemed the perfect intervention along with other modalities that the patient may be using. Bridget at Thamarai is currently building an educational Centre in Ana Nagar opposite the sports Centre that she has already built. Once the building is complete I will look into offering the NADA-Protocols programs there.

I am also currently working at Quiet Healing Centre offering Chinese Medicine and continue to explore ways to expand my services into the community as well as the bio-region. Additionally, I’m currently training in Embodied Awakenings Somatics in response to the current situation, as I feel that it is relevant to these changing times. I am exploring ways and methods to respond to our world that suddenly changed and how to respond in a healthy, sustainable and resilient way.
We notice that the youth here in Auroville are particularly vulnerable now, understandably anxious about their future, and we are constantly looking for ways to address this pressing issue. I have started to introduce the practice of cultivating "internal resilience" a concept which people have begun to develop in Europe and the US. And we try to live the example!!

We are extremely positive about India and her future and we would like to share this in Auroville and encourage people to stay and work with each other to create a future that is inclusive and in keeping with the Mother’s vision. Having grown up in South Africa, we are passionate about Equality in all its forms. Mike and I feel that we are a complementary team that can work together to bring new ideas, fresh approaches and practices to Auroville.

MIKE’S STORY
My name is Mike Lee and I am a South African, born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1955 in a multicultural context. My father was originally from Namibia and my mother from Uruguay and they met in Germany and then we all lived in South Africa.
I was educated in South Africa and through my university studies, I became a Chartered Accountant with 2 international auditing practices, an American firm called Arthur Andersen & then finally finishing off at Price Waterhouse in London. But it became very clear to me that although the experience I was gaining was invaluable, I did not want to remain in the auditing profession. Hence started my 35 year career where I gained diverse experience and understanding in how a business works.

After I left auditing, I went into general commerce and mass retailing in the corporate world, and then out of the corporate world into the role of entrepreneur. This evolved into my becoming an independent consultant specializing in small business, succession planning & change management. With my entrepreneur spirit, I cultivated an interest in Social Media, online marketing, eCommerce and eCommerce branding. I found have a knack for building up teams and developing business.

My work was always based in South Africa, but with a lot of international travel on a regular basis. Over the years our travels took us across India & Sri Lanka – ultimately down to Pondicherry and Auroville. In 2005, my wife Dr Linda Lee & I first came to India to get married in Kerala and our love affair with India started.
From my point of view, I was just fascinated with how things were changing, how the economy was growing, what this growth was doing for the people on the ground, what it was doing to the environment. However the ultimate pointer for me was the hope, energy and downright goodwill of all the people I met. Pondicherry with its great accommodations, multi-cuisine, extremely friendly people & Ashram became a natural place to visit on our yearly stays in Chennai, a city we also really enjoy.

And with our visits came the exploration of Auroville, trying to understand Auroville and how it works. The fascination grew through the years and finally Auroville, and Quiet specifically, became our final stop & resting place before catching our plane back to Dubai to go back home. Every time we got home & reminisced about our trip, Auroville would be right on the list of the visit again. Thus started our thought process – why not move from Cape Town, South Africa …

… and move to Auroville? This questioning began in earnest in 2015, followed by Linda’s 3-month visit to Auroville in 2018, and culminated in our final decision to move to Auroville. This was a major step, commitment, and turning point: both of us had to close down our practices – me, my consulting business and clients, and Linda her medical practice – and sell our home, that was not only our home but the base for both practices. In 2019 we were ready!!

Linda came to Auroville in March and myself in April after a brief client visit to Dubai. Then started the enormous learning process, not only for Auroville but also for India. Through the year we went through the Yucca Program, became newcomers, chose & were given our mentors. We are both now working towards becoming full Aurovilians.

Through this process it became very obvious & clear as to what I could offer to Auroville, what Auroville offers to me & how I could fit in. Hence I am very involved in applying my knowledge, training & experience to start creating a multidisciplinary Professional Services Hub to help certain Auroville units and activities deal with problems encountered on a daily basis. The other goal is to ensure continuity in their efforts, while gearing up for positive change and hopefully expansion. It became very clear to me that Auroville needs this actual support, but as an outsider to the Indian economic system I needed to work with people who understand the Indian business, legal process as well as Auroville systems. And yes, the needed people have been found, all living right here in Auroville with all the perquisite skills and experience! So I am now enthusiastically involved with several Aurovilians in two main areas:
Creating this multidisciplinary Professional Services Hub:
This will be embedded in the community’s framework and is intended to:
- Provide professional services and consulting on a project basis for Auroville units, entrepreneurs and services
- Serve as an incubator which hosts professionals from the wider world who wish to experience Auroville and assess its suitability for their future aspirations – to be done through very carefully defined guidelines, project guidelines, objectives and in return care & support over the period of their stay.

Creating a registered business activity in Auroville:
At the same time, in my very short time here, I have met an amazing expert in his field who is also feeling his way with his family to become an Aurovilian. Based on our combined practical skills of business and social media, this has culminated in a social-media driven eMagazine on Instagram concentrating on Auroville’s ‘eco-friendly lifestyle’.

As with all things Auroville, and India, this is a rich melting pot of ideas and opportunities to observe ... and when an opportunity emerges and the synergies are aligned, you just have to react! This is all very gratifying and stimulating! Going forward, the skills I bring to Auroville makes me very excited in tandem with my current very valuable support team.

At this time in my life, I actually feel like some pioneer who will be able to add to the future sustainability and growth of Auroville - not in physical work as per our honored past pioneers but in helping Auroville understand how to work and cope in this new world and fluid environment of Covid 19 and then post-Covid 19. I am enthusiastic to contribute and bridge in the transfer from the old to the new.