

'Hugging saint' visits Marlborough

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(NECN: Katie Daly, Marlborough, Mass.) --

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Thousands showed up to a convention center in Marlborough, all looking for a hug from Amma, the 'hugging saint.'

"Getting a hug from Amma is unlike any other hug you've ever had," said one attendee, Kristen Rohrer. "It's unique."

Amma is an Indian spiritual leader who has opened her arms to more than 30 million people worldwide. Many who come to see her are followers, while others simply want to know the significance of her hugs.

"It's a special experience," said Al Wroblewski of Worcester. "You feel an embrace you don't normally get in your day to day. It gives you a direct experience of being loved."

"When people come for that embrace by Amma, they get a taste of that selfless love for their first time in their lives," said volunteer Dante Sawyer.

Amma travels the world, handing out hugs, for sometimes 20 hours at a time. Her mission? To spread love and compassion.

"She encourages people to go deeper into their own faith," said volunteer Rob Sidone.

As a philanthropist, Amma reaches out through charitable organizations. She has donated more than 60 million dollars to disaster relief efforts and medical services.

Amma has visited the U.S. 25 times. This is her last American stop on her 2011 tour. Next, it's on to Canada, then back to India.