

## **30 Years Have Passed By . . . (Published in Celebrating 30 years, SACWin Souvenir, 1986-2016)**

**By Raj Patil**

The South Asian Centre celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2006. As part of that celebration, it published a Souvenir with an article covering its inception and the activities in detail, which follows this and next paragraph. Since then, the Centre has been carrying on its activities and projects, some with government grants, such as youth dance competition, health and fitness training for seniors, etc. A major project was to produce a video tape on Elder Abuse with a grant from the government. This tape was shown in many places.

The Centre established a business and professional group. It also established a new Business and Professional Person of the Year award and a Volunteer of the Year award. South Asian Centre published a new directory of Business and Professional members in 2015. The women's group has been very active and changed its name to "South Asian Women's Network". South Asian Seniors are carrying on their activities and the monthly pot luck independently.

In the 1960s, the South Asians from India and Pakistan started to migrate to Canada a small number settled in Windsor/Essex County. Like other immigrants, they also brought their cultures, languages, religions, foods, entertainment preferences and other aspects of South Asian identity. Because of the very small size, people arranged religious programs at members' homes and screening of the Indian movies at the University auditorium. Classical singers and dancers from around were invited and special programs were arranged. However, there was always a desire for more accessible services, program variety and the need to readily interact with the mainstream community.

The 1970s saw more South Asians migrate to Canada and the momentum increased in Windsor/Essex County as well. The Multicultural Council (MCC) started the Carrousel of Nations to bring together diverse ethnic communities to showcase their culture, ethnic food and



bring together with mainstream Canadians. That cultural exposure brought some Indians together to form a committee and organize a variety of entertaining cultural programs. With the moral support of people like Major Sunil Gupta and Dr. Amrit Lall, the Cultures of India Association was formed with the active participation of Rose Olivero, Raj Patil, Raj Varma and others. Soon, Usha and Satish Jacob, along with Kumar Chatterjee, joined the group. One of the objectives of the Cultures of India Association was to educate the broader Canadian community about the cultures of the Indian sub-

continent. The Cultures of India Association started the India Village as part of the Carrousel of Nations and an annual dinner with a variety of cultural activities.

In the early 1980s, the immigrant population continued to grow. In 1985, MCC, with the funding from Canada Works project, launched a project, "South East Asian Centre", under the direction

of Aruna Koushik, a talented classical dancer, with extensive background in social work. Towards the end of the year, the project's life coming to an end, due to Aruna getting full time employment in her career, the Cultures of India Association stepped-in to take over the project as well as providing additional services to the South Asian community. As a result, the South Asian Centre was formally registered as a non-profit organization in 1986. Dr. Kumar Chatterjee agreed to be the President with his extensive experience in the field of Social Work. Rose Olivero took the role of the Vice-President and I became the Secretary/Treasurer. Padmini Raju was given the operational responsibilities. The first office/meeting place was in the rented premises in the 300 block of Wyandotte Street West. Not soon after we started, Padmini decided to on other employment opportunity. We were fortunate to get Veena Varma to join us from the Multicultural Council and rejuvenate the original project. Veena Varma became the Program Director and managed the Centre for more than 20 years!



Over the las 30 years, Centre has been providing a host of services, speciality programs, forums and conducting major projects that had an impact on our community. This has all been possible with input and direction of the Board, follow-up and coordination by the office staff and help from our many volunteers, both visible and those behind the scene. The growth in the size of our community and the subsequent increase in the request for services from the Centre resulted in the office relocation to Park Street, with a larger office space, as seen

in the attached picture with our seniors standing in-front.

The seniors from the community continued to utilize the services provided by the Centre, taking classes in "English as a Second Language", "Canadian Citizenship" classes, as well as Centre providing referrals to other mainstream agencies. The seniors' group organized themselves under Centre's umbrella, meeting in the Centre, organizing their own music and singing programs with their famous "pot luck" food. Kusum Mann joined the Centre as the work load increased due to increased projects through provincial and federal grants, increase in client base involving women and youth. The Centre again relocated to 175 Tecumseh Road West, giving consideration to client preference to a bus route and centralised location.

Our members participated in various events organized for fund raising for the benefit of the less fortunate and actively involved with various agencies and organizations. The Centre continued for a number of years organizing picnics, bus tour to see Christmas lights for the members, participating in Carousel of Nations, forums and workshops. The “Women in Action” group, likewise, has a full agenda and continued to invite professionals to speak on select topics in their profession that are of benefit to our members. Some of these topics included the following:



- Wills and Power of Attorney
- Financial Planning, Mutual Funds and RRSP
- Income Security Program
- Women Enterprise Skills Training
- How to balance Work and Family
- Women and Addiction

And Of course, you could not leave the topic like, “How to Look Your Best”!

The Centre invited other South Asian organizations in Windsor for a number of “Community Vision” meetings to see if there was a common ground on which all the groups could work together. Obviously, this is an



on-going effort to highlight and streamline the key common issue that can be focused on in a group effort.

As the activities of the South Asian Centre increased and most of them were similar to the core objectives of the Cultures of India Association, as well as the volunteer pool and contributors of funds were the same, the Cultures of India Association concentrated on running the India Village in the Carrousel of Nations. After about 19 years, it stopped participating in that as well. After that, South Asian Centre and Sri Lankan group hosted the Village for some and the Bangladeshi group joined for some time. Under the leadership of Shalin Khosla, Cricket games were added as an attraction

and proved to be very popular with the community. The picture shows the cricket match at the Optimist grounds next to the Optimist Centre on Ypres Street, where the India Village used to be held. In the last few years, the India Village has not been presented.

After Major Gupta passed away, with major funding by his family, the Centre established an annual scholarship for a 12<sup>th</sup> grade South Asian student continuing post- secondary education and a “Volunteer of the Year” award, in his memory.

Under the leadership of Renu Khosla and Dr. Prem Nanda, a major research project, “Problem Gambling Trends within the South Asian Community in Windsor/Essex” was completed. It was an exhaustive study and well received by the community.



It is a matter of great pride that a number of South Asian women have been awarded the “Woman of the Year” award. Most of them are connected to the Centre as office bearers or volunteers. They are: Rose Olivero, Usha Jacob, Emily Carasco, Aruna Koushik and Rachael Olivero – Rose and Rachael being the first mother and daughter team to win this prestigious award.

The community members have also excelled and contributed in Windsor and Essex County. The Windsor Medical Clinic was selected as the “Company of the Year” and received the “Business Excellence Award”. The Athena Award from the Windsor Chamber of Commerce was awarded to Radha Khosla in the Youth category and to Aruna Koushik. The Centre is proud of the achievements of the South Asian Community members and will continue to support and participate in the community.