

ABBOTSFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD BUGEL®

bugel (byoogl), n., v., 1. a micro-tab newspaper serving a neighbourhood.
2. an instrument to sound the alarm or trumpet the truth.

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Challenging project set to open Sunday

With just two days to complete the most challenging project he's ever undertaken, Iqbal Braich admits he's feeling some pressure.

"Will you have it ready in time for Sunday's opening?" he's asked.

"I don't really have a choice," the site superintendent responds good-naturedly, surveying the crew of workers who are toiling to finish the final touch-ups inside and outside one of Abbotsford's most unique buildings, the 1911 Gur Sikh Temple on South Fraser Way.

Given official status as a heritage building by the Heritage Canada Foundation, the temple was the original meeting place of Abbotsford's Sikh community, and continued as a focal point until 1981 when the present temple was officially opened across the street.

A proposal to save the building as a national heritage site started several years later and eventually it was so designated. However, in order to become serviceable as such, the building required extensive renovations, which is where Iqbal and the company he works for, Raiwal Developments, came in.

"We're the general contractors," he says. "We started working on this project three years ago and now we have just a few days to finish."

With piles of dirt everywhere, painting to be done, the welding of handrails to be completed, statues to be delivered, and a hundred other details to be sorted out, it's easy to think the task might be impossible, but Iqbal has every confidence his workers will get the job done.

The confidence comes from knowing they've

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Come to have a look around before the grand re-opening of the Gur Sikh Temple are (left to right, above) Diwan Society member Rajinder Singh and temple priests Sucha Thandi, Iqbal Singh Toor and Ninder Singh. Meanwhile, workers were sweating in the sunshine for a change Wednesday as they attempted to finish the landscaping. There was a lot to be done still, but the site superintendent was confident it would be ready for Sunday's event.

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Sikh community excited about temple re-opening, says Diwan society director

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already overcome some major hurdles just to get this far along.

"It's been pretty interesting, that's for sure," says Iqbal.

He's referring to surprises such as the sawdust used as fill on the site many years ago, which eventually caused the building to sink about a foot.

"We had to jack the building up and dig out about 300 truckloads of sawdust so we could put proper fill in," says Iqbal. "That cost us time and money."

He notes the project wasn't a simple renovation because everything about the building had to be restored to its original look thanks to Heritage Canada specifications.

That meant poring over photographs of the original building to figure out exactly what needed to be restored.

And that meant a lot of custom fabrication to replicate parts of the original building that had been lost to renovation over the years (such as the four windows at the back of the building which were eliminated at some point in time), or which had simply rotted away (such as the porch that surrounds the building).

There were other more modern challenges, however, including a sprinkler system that the City of Abbotsford insisted on even though Heritage Canada balked at the notion because it wasn't original to the building.

There was also a need to make the building earthquake proof, and to put in a proper roof support system because the old trusses were not up to modern code standards.

"We couldn't just use ready-made trusses," says Iqbal. "We had to build the trusses with the roof in place, which was a lot trickier."

With the buildings (there's a smaller outbuilding that used to

be quarters for the temple priest) being such a challenge, it should come as no surprise that the ambitious landscaping project of fountains and statues also suffered setbacks.

"This weather really slowed things down because there were no breaks. Thankfully we've had several nice days this week to get the work done."

All in all, the site superintendent says he and his company learned a lot on this project, the first time they've ever attempted something of this nature.

Now that it's almost complete, it's time to celebrate and that's exactly what the Sikh community intends to do April 1 when about 2,000 people are expected to attend the official opening of the historic landmark.

A parade at 10 a.m. followed by the re-installment of the Sikh faith's holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, in the temple, and a multitude of speeches and other activities will round out a full day of celebration, according to Khalsa Diwan Society director Randy Kailey.

"We are very excited because it's been a long time coming," he says of the \$2.4 million project. "We are inviting everyone in Abbotsford to join us to celebrate this special occasion."

After Sunday, the building will be open to the public for viewing on a daily basis, and it will also be available for functions such as smaller weddings and like events.

In addition, the hope is to eventually turn the lower floor into a museum dedicated to the local Sikh community and Sikhism in general. But that will take extra fund-raising and time.

"We want to put our history together in one place," says the Society director.

"Joy is the feeling of grinning inside."

- Melba Cosgrove