

Centre For Indo Canadian Studies, University Of The Fraser Valley

By: Satwinder Bains

It was almost a decade ago, in 2002, when community members and the University College of the Fraser Valley faculty and staff discussed the prospects of creating a Centre dedicated to the academic, social, cultural, and economic development of Indo Canadians, the support was immense. Advocates campaigning for the cause, such as the honourable BC Lieutenant Governor, Iona Campagnola, stated, "With this [Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies and Research], the people of this

Centre come to fruition: "The Indo-Canadian community plays a vital and dynamic role in our region, our province, and our country. Support for the establishment of a Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies and Research is strong and enthusiastic because it is clear that this will benefit the ongoing social and economic development, not only of the Indo-Canadian community, but also of the community at large. UCFV is totally committed to establishing this vital new resource to support



Official opening of the Centre for Indo Canadian Studies at UCFV on October 28, 2007. Indian Consul General Hari Ashok Kumar, UCFV President Skip Bassford, CICS, Satwinder Bains, Mike De Jong, Federal MP Ujjal Dosanjh, and Campaign Chair Parm Bains.

university and this fortunate valley are reaching out to a whole new level of economic development through the greater integration of the Indo-Canadian community into the social and economic sustainability of this region and our province. Spearheaded by successful local business leaders of Indo Canadian heritage whose own expertise and resources are dedicated to this enterprise, with UCFV, they invite you to join them."

President of the University College of the Fraser Valley, dedicated supporter and advocate for the Centre, Dr. Skip Bassford, also expressed his passion in seeing such a

innovative research and teaching in Indo-Canadian Studies."

From downtown Vancouver to Abbotsford, the lower mainland of British Columbia is now one of the most ethnically diverse places in the world. The 2006 census figures show an estimated 1,262,865 Canadians are of South Asian descent and India is Canada's second largest source of immigrants. Abbotsford, which lies in the heart of the Fraser Valley, 70 kilometers east of Vancouver, has the highest proportion of Indo-Canadian people of any census metropolitan area (CMA) in the country.

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Thus, with such strong indications that the Indo Canadian populations in Canada, and the Fraser Valley, would continue to grow, a need for a hub where community members could engage in dialogue was evident. After two years of fundraising and campaigning, the community pulled through in an amazing demonstration of

ship opportunities and supporting them with resources throughout their education. The BC Regional Innovation Chair housed within the Centre for Indo Canadian Studies is unlike any other kind seen in other institutions, because it helps businesses in British Columbia take advantage of the opportunities offered by the



generosity, donating a total \$1.25 million dollars which was then matched by the Province of British Columbia. The Province provided a \$1.25-million contribution for the establishment of the BC Regional Innovation Chair on Canada-India Business and Economic Development to bring the total endowment for the chair to \$2.5 million.

The Centre for Indo Canadian Studies officially opened in 2006 with a vision that is supported by three tiers: academics, student involvement and community engagement. Academically the Centre has brought in scholars and guest lecturers around the world to discuss an array of issues, it has also hosted a number of writers' and scholars in residence, and its faculty members have also given guest lectures around the world. In 2008, a Canada India Studies Certificate has been established at UFV. A connection with Universities in India has produced many exciting collaborations and connections that have benefited faculty and students in both countries.

The Centre regularly hosts and organizes conferences, Film Festivals, Readers' and Writers' Festivals and other events and activities. The Centre is deeply connected to the students of UFV, integrating and involving them in academic activities, encouraging research, providing intern-

ship opportunities and supporting them with resources throughout their education. The Chair provides local businesses with the expertise and research necessary for them to access the fast-growing Indian economy and other overseas markets. Furthermore, the Chair serves as special advisor to the Provincial and Federal government, in fostering economic ties with India, allowing for new opportunities to emerge on both ends.

Finally, the Centre is proud to be a source of information and support for community members around the Province and beyond, a place where individuals or groups can come to seek support on initiatives, or for those seeking general advice. Engagement with the community has been appreciated by many individuals, organizations and agencies in the Valley, lower mainland, BC, and many parts of India.

For more information on the Centre for Indo Canadian Studies, or the BC Regional Innovation Chair on Canada-India Business and Economic Development, please visit www.ufv.ca/cics, and feel free to contact us.

-Satwinder Bains is the Director of the Centre for Indo Canadian Studies at the University of the Fraser Valley.

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