

Volunteer making connections through contact



By Saanich News

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You could meet with Haji Charania a dozen times and you probably won't hear the word inclusiveness.

And yet the concept is such an automatic with the longtime Saanich volunteer, it's pretty much sewn into the fabric of his being. Since he arrived in Saanich in 1969 as a civil engineer who had just completed his masters in applied science at the University of B.C., Charania instantly began giving back.

"My first experience was the India-Canada Multicultural Association, we organized a dinner for India's high-commissioner who was visiting from Ottawa," Charania said. "It was at the union hall on Quadra, a big to do."

He may be quiet in his mannerisms, but Charania, the current president of the North Quadra Community Association, is known for his far-reaching community presence. He's also on the Saanich board of variance and represents North Quadra in the Saanich Community Association Network. But unless you know him, you wouldn't learn it from talking to him.

And yet to bump into Charania is to enter into a conversation, and a likely connection. That's what makes him so valuable, says Gail Snider, executive director with Saanich Volunteer Services. With SVS, Charania has prepared personal tax returns for local seniors through SVS since 2005, and was awarded a 10-year recognition in 2015 for his effort.

"It's that invitation of a connection that he provides, it can make a difference to anyone," Snider says. "I've seen how he interacts with people either at the Christmas event or other events, he opens the door to others to get involved in so many things."

In a social spectrum where seniors isolation is of particular concern and focus, it puts a greater premium on volunteers such as Charania.

A prime example of Charania's work is his commitment to recruiting new players for Lakehill Lawn Bowling, where he remains a dedicated member despite being unable to bowl because of an ongoing knee problem.

"One of the things I see is the importance of connecting people with the resources of our community, and Charania is an advocate for connecting community bases," Snider says.

During his career years, Charania's focus was engineering, economics, politics and volunteering. Since retirement, it's been a focus on volunteering and community service. And though he's not a politician, there are few politicians who haven't heard from him.

Charania's involvement spans dozens of organizations, such as the Saanich Police Board, where he served six years as an order in council in the 1990s.

In 1971, he was the founding vice president of the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria. "We were a small group then, with little

resources, far before it took on the refugee support that it's known for now," Charania recalls.

It was Beckwith Park that drew Charania into local politics. Although he's not a politician, few have witnessed the change in Saanich council that Charania has. BC Hydro wanted to turn Beckwith Park into a workyard for its trucks, which was when Charania joined the North Quadra Community Association.

"I wasn't a prime mover for North Quadra then but it was my start. Actually, my first meeting with a Saanich politician was with [Mayor] Hugh Curtis, about a wage increase for councillors. I've seen a lot of [Saanich] councillors since then," he said.

Last year Charania earned another 10-year recognition award, as he was honoured by Junior Achievement B.C. for delivering economics programs to Grade 10 and 11 students. In 10 years with Junior Achievement, Charania has volunteered in more than 100 school classrooms.

For information on SVS' tax preparation services call 250-595-8008 or visit saanichvolunteers.org.

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