

# 2022 Great Valentine Gala

Presented each year at the Great Valentine Gala, the CFPDP Corporate Awards recognize the exemplary

## American Express Canada

*The first recipient of the 2022 Corporate Award is American Express Canada. The company is being honoured for its diverse, inclusive culture as well as its leadership in recognizing the rich, untapped talents of board members with disabilities.*

*“More than 6.2 million Canadians live with some form of disability, and it is vital that this group is represented at all levels of leadership,” says Annette Kingsley, Vice President, Colleague Experience at American Express Canada.*



“Beyond that, it also supports those with disabilities to see themselves represented and know that they, too, can thrive and grow within our organization. Board members play a key role in building an inclusive environment that drives performance and financial results, and we want to ensure we are tapping into an extensive talent pool that values different perspectives and

experiences. Following an extensive search process that identified a diverse group of highly skilled candidates, Gaurav Upadhyia, a top executive at Foresters Financial, was appointed to the Amex Bank of Canada Board in July 2021.

At Foresters, Upadhyia is Global Chief Actuary and Chief Risk Officer reporting directly to the CEO, and he co-chairs the company’s Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Council. Upadhyia also works closely with members of the Foresters’ Board while leading the company’s actuarial, capital and risk functions globally and managing a team of more than 40 professionals. Previously, he spent almost two decades in roles of increasing responsibility at Manulife John Hancock.

Upadhyia’s extensive background in finance, risk and actuarial science is undoubtedly a significant asset to the Amex Bank of Canada Board – yet so too are his lived experiences as a person with a disability. Born in India, Upadhyia contracted polio when he was three years old. He has walked using crutches and leg braces ever since.

“Over the last six or seven years, I have become more

involved in diversity and inclusion. I wanted to have a broader impact beyond Foresters and thought about working with corporate boards to grow my own skills and network, and also to provide some new, fresh perspectives,” shares Upadhyia. “As I learned more about American Express and their commitment to diversity and inclusion, I thought this would be a great place for me to start. So far, it has been fantastic.”

“To reaffirm our commitment, remain transparent, and hold ourselves accountable in creating a deeper sense of belonging and community across our organization, it was important that we started at the top with our Board of Directors,” says Kingsley. “A diverse Board brings diverse perspectives and leads to transformation, growth, and helps us better serve our customers, colleagues, and the communities we live in.”

Upadhyia welcomes the opportunity to leverage his leadership, technical, and business skills, as well as the diversity and inclusion work from Foresters to help advance initiatives with Amex leadership.

“[Being on a Board is] a different kind of role, but you can challenge and also provide viewpoints to senior management,” reinforces Upadhyia. “It is a place where you can help direct resources or make sure that there is attention being paid to important issues. If you don’t have people with certain lived experiences on that Board...people just take it for granted that everybody’s priorities are the same.”

To date, people who identify as having a disability hold only 0.3% of corporate board seats in Canada – even though they make up approximately 22% of the population. Through its “A Seat at the Table” initiative, CFPDP is challenging corporate Canada to increase that number to at least 1%.

“We congratulate American Express Canada for its leadership in creating a diverse and inclusive company at every level, including its Board of Directors,” says Honourable Vim Kochhar, Chairman of CFPDP. “American Express Canada is a wonderful example of all that is possible when you build a culture that recognizes and values people of all abilities.”

# Corporate Award Winners

*contributions of Canadian companies and organizations in support of people with physical disabilities.*

## opentext

*The second recipient of the 2022 Corporate Award is OpenText. The company is being honoured for creating a culture that welcomes and supports everyone, at all levels of the organization, regardless of their unique abilities.*

**While the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP)** has been actively promoting the importance of companies appointing more people with disabilities to corporate boards through its “A Seat at the Table” initiative, it only recently became aware of a powerful ally who was already serving in such a position.

Alongside a highly skilled executive management team and fellow Board members, this director is helping to promote the diverse, inclusive culture at OpenText, the second recipient of our 2022 Corporate Award. OpenText, headquartered in Waterloo, Ontario, is a world leader in information management, helping companies securely capture, govern and exchange data on a global scale.

In September 2018, several months before Honourable Vim Kochhar was inspired to begin CFPDP’s “A Seat at the Table” initiative, OpenText appointed Major-General (Ret.) David Fraser to its Board of Directors. It did so based on his impressive credentials and what he could bring to the table.

What OpenText did not know at the time is that General Fraser has a disability – significant hearing loss that resulted from his service as an infantry officer during the Yugoslavian civil war. Indeed, General Fraser had a distinguished 30-year career in the military, which included commanding the NATO coalition in southern Afghanistan. Combined with his business experience (he helped establish Blue Goose Pure Foods and Aegis Six Corporation, and also served as Chief Operating Officer of INKAS® Armored Vehicle Manufacturing), General Fraser had all the qualifications and expertise that OpenText wanted on its Board.

It was only in the most recent Board of Directors survey, which feeds into Osler’s annual report on diversity disclosure practices covering disclosure by TSX-listed and Canada

Business Corporations Act (CBCA) companies subject to diversity disclosure requirements, that General Fraser disclosed his disability.

“I am Deaf as a doornail...and wear hearing aids,” says General Fraser. “Quite frankly, I hid my disability. I didn’t get onto the Board of OpenText because of it. In many places, I wouldn’t want to disclose my disability, but at OpenText, I feel really comfortable that they accept it, because they accept me, and they will do whatever they can to help accommodate my disability because they value my contribution.”

General Fraser continues, “OpenText really believes in having people around that table that are different, that can all contribute to a conversation that supports the management team and the shareholders. I sit on a number of Boards and I can’t say that all the Boards are as good as this one. This one is special in my mind and that’s why, in fact, this year, for the very first time, I ticked the little box [to disclose my disability].”

Now, for the first time ever, General Fraser is talking openly about his hearing loss. He believes that doing so will help end the stigma that other people with invisible disabilities may feel at times. As a company that values diversity and inclusion, CEO Mark Barrenechea is leading by example, says Fraser.

“These are not just Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) agenda items for Barrenechea,” says Fraser. “He was doing this long before ESG became topical and even more important.”

General Fraser continues, “What really drew me to OpenText is not the fact that they reached out and offered me this opportunity to be on the Board, it’s because they walk the walk. Under Mark’s leadership, OpenText embraces diversity in everything. For me, where it’s all about people, they are all about people at every level within the company. It is one of the best Boards and groups of people I have ever had the privilege of working with.”

The logo for OpenText, featuring the word "opentext" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font, followed by a trademark symbol (TM).