

WhyNot.

MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2024



CELEBRATING 40 GALA YEARS and the Honourable Vim Kochhar



THE 2024 GREAT VALENTINE GALA AWARD WINNERS

KING CLANCY AWARD



Jay-Ann Gilfoy
President & CEO,
Meridian



Goldy Hyder
President & CEO,
Business Council of Canada



Norton Kothari
President & CEO,
Kothari Group

THE HON. DAVID C. ONLEY AWARD

CORPORATE AWARDS

THE HON. VIM KOCHHAR AWARD



Rick Mercer
Iconic Canadian
Comedian



Marco Di Buono
President,
Canadian Tire Jumpstart



Rob Kumer
CEO,
KingSett Capital



Raj Viswanathan
Group Head & CFO,
Scotiabank



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THE Great Valentine Gala

WhyNot. MAGAZINE / FEBRUARY 2024

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6 Sakura Way, Suite 265, Toronto, Ontario, M3C 1Z5

Telephone (416) 760-7351

Fax (416) 760-9405

E-Mail: whynot@cfpdp.com

Web: www.cfpdp.com

facebook.com/cfpdp

twitter.com/cfpdp

www.linkedin.com/cfpdp

www.instagram.com/cfpdp

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Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons, a charitable organization founded in 1985, assists people with physical disabilities to live fuller lives. Its mission is to create awareness in the public, business communities and government of the abilities of persons with disabilities and their needs in the areas of housing, employment, education, accessibility, sports and recreation and research. In the past 40 years, the Foundation has raised substantial funds, which it has distributed to a wide variety of organizations and events. These include the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame, Eternal Flame of Hope, Canadian Helen Keller Centre and housing for people who are deaf-blind, the Great Valentine Gala, the King Clancy Awards, the Corporate Awards, the Hon. David C. Onley Award, A Seat at the Table, WhyNot Marathon, the first Canadian marathon for the Paralympics, Jeff Adams' CN Tower climb, Rolling Rampage Wheelchair 10K Road Race and Rolling Rampage on the Hill.

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WhyNot.



It is with pleasure that I extend greetings to all gathered for the 40th anniversary of the Great Valentine Gala.

For the past four decades, this event has provided an opportunity to

celebrate the unsung heroes and commitment to breaking down barriers for Ontarians living with disabilities. Your generosity has changed countless lives and created innumerable future possibilities where there were believed to be none.

I take special joy in celebrating tonight's award winners. The significance and profound importance of the David C. Onley Award especially resonates with me. It fills me with pride to witness his legacy persist through the devoted efforts of everyone gathered here tonight.

As His Majesty The King's representative in Ontario, I send my best wishes for an enjoyable gala and my hopes for continued good works.

The Honourable Edith Dumont
The Lieutenant Governor of Ontario



I am delighted to serve as Honorary Co-Chair of the 40th Annual Great Valentine Gala.

This year marks an amazing milestone for Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) and

its largest annual fundraising and awareness event. To have surpassed 40 years of service to the disability community is remarkable.

As a past Gala attendee and years-long supporter, I have seen firsthand the difference that CFPDP has made. The Foundation has spent four decades creating positive change for everyone, from Paralympic athletes to highly qualified professionals with disabilities, who have put their names forward to help diversify Canada's public company boardrooms. And of course, these positive results would not have happened without the determined leadership of Vim Kochhar. His dedication to the cause is outstanding.

To that end, I am proud to be a member of the Selection Board for CFPDP's "A Seat at the Table" initiative. That program continues working to match candidates with public corporation director opportunities while also raising awareness about the benefits of board diversity.

CFPDP has an impressive community of supporters across the country. These individuals are passionate about creating equal opportunities for the one in four Canadians who live with a disability. Thank you for your continued dedication.

Finally, heartfelt congratulations to the recipients of this year's awards. We are grateful for your efforts to improve the lives of people with disabilities nationwide.

Phillip Crawley
*Retired Publisher & CEO, The Globe and Mail
Honorary Co-Chair, The Great Valentine Gala*



Thank you for supporting the 40th Annual Great Valentine Gala. It is my pleasure to serve as Honorary Co-Chair of this incredible event.

Element Fleet Management is a

proud supporter of Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP). The Foundation's mission to promote diversity and work towards equal opportunities for all Canadians aligns closely with our commitment to creating a strong culture of inclusion and belonging.

We value and recognize the different abilities that our people bring to the workplace and how these differences strengthen our team and enable us to deliver for our clients, communities, and each other.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are as important to Element as they are to CFPDP. Our organizations operate with the same principles to help create a world where everyone feels welcome, is empowered to show up authentically, and where we are inspired to give back, do good, and make a positive impact.

Thank you for your commitment to fostering change and genuine care for the collective well-being of our communities. Your generous support allows this vital work to continue. Thanks also to everyone who has played a role in the success of the 2024 Great Valentine Gala, including sponsors, attendees, organizers, and dedicated volunteers.

CFPDP deeply appreciates your generosity, and I am honoured to support this tremendous organization.

Laura Dottori-Attanasio
*President and CEO, Element Fleet Management
Honorary Co-Chair, The Great Valentine Gala*

MESSAGES



It is hard to believe that the Great Valentine Gala is celebrating its 40th year in 2024.

We started all those years ago with a dream to raise \$10,000 to help build accessible housing

for deafblind Canadians. When our first Gala raised \$230,000, we knew we could do that and much more.

And with your help, we have.

This Gala is the foundation upon which the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) was built. Over four decades, we have raised over \$40 million to help people with disabilities. These funds have helped support countless programs, amateur athletes, services and awareness initiatives that are close to my heart and those across the CFPDP community.

Each time I see a Paralympian representing Team Canada, I am filled with pride.

CFPDP's support for Canadian Helen Keller Centre (CHKC) continues too. People living with the dual disability of deafblindness will soon have access to even more safe, affordable and barrier-free housing options when CHKC's new 56-unit apartment complex is completed.

While we have accomplished so much, our work to make Canada the best country in the world for people with disabilities is not done.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your ongoing support as we continue to make a difference.

The Honourable Vim Kochhar
*Chair, Canadian Foundation
for Physically Disabled Persons*



Welcome to our 40th Annual Great Valentine Gala.

The Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) extends heartfelt thanks for your steadfast

commitment to our signature fundraising and awareness event. Your generosity and support for our mission truly humble us.

The entire CFPDP team is dedicated to supporting and uplifting the disability community. To do this, we always focus on abilities. This is a key part of our public awareness work.

CFPDP's initiatives also contribute financial support across the country. This includes funding for Paralympic athletes together with Scotiabank, the partner for CFPDP's Podium Fund since 2004. We are proud to support other Para sport initiatives and numerous organizations that help Canadians with physical disabilities. Through our "A Seat at the Table" program, we are helping to change the landscape of Canada's public corporate boardrooms. By supporting Canadian Helen Keller Centre, we are enabling independence for people who are deafblind.

Much of our funding is raised through this annual Gala, and we are thankful for your continued support.

On behalf of the Board, thank you to our loyal patrons, supporters, volunteers and CFPDP's staff. Collectively, we are having a meaningful impact.

Mark Lecker
Co-Chair, The Great Valentine Gala



I am delighted to share this landmark 40th Gala evening with the CFPDP community.

As a returning Co-Chair and member of the Foundation's Board of Directors, it is

an honour to help recognize the deserving recipients of our annual awards.

Our 2024 Corporate Award is being presented to two organizations that are improving accessibility for people with disabilities, Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities and KingSett Capital.

There are three recipients of the 2024 King Clancy Award. They are Jay-Ann Gilfoy, President & CEO of Meridian, Goldy Hyder, President & CEO of the Business Council of Canada, and Norton Kothari, President & CEO of Kothari Group. Their leadership and dedication to the disability community are to be commended.

The David C. Onley Award recipient for 2024 is Rick Mercer, an iconic comedian who needs no introduction. He is being honoured for raising awareness of Canadians who live with disability.

We are also proud to introduce the Honourable Vim Kochhar Award, created in 2024 as a tribute to CFPDP's founder, Chair and volunteer CEO. The first recipient is Raj Viswanathan, Group Head and CFO for Scotiabank.

Lastly, I must recognize Vim, who has made all of this happen for 40 years. His unmitigated enthusiasm, relentless drive and leadership to assist and honour Canadians with physical disabilities and those who support and encourage them are unparalleled.

Tony Wight
Co-Chair, The Great Valentine Gala



In its landmark 40th year, the Great Valentine Gala hosted by the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) remains a cherished tradition. The event showcases the wide-ranging and impressive accomplishments of people with physical disabilities. It also pays tribute to those who play a vital role in improving their lives.

AT THE SAME TIME, CFPDP's yearly Gala is a platform for fostering awareness, advocating for positive change and celebrating together as a community.

It also doubles as the Foundation's primary annual fundraising event and an unforgettable evening with emcee **Suhana Meharchand**. Hundreds of attendees come together to build lasting memories, recognize award winners, enjoy exceptional live entertainment and engage in meaningful conversations.

Over four incredible decades, CFPDP has successfully raised more than \$40 million to fund programs and services dedicated to enhancing the lives of individuals with physical disabilities.

"The money we have raised has created remarkable change and positively impacted the lives of thousands of people," says the Honourable Vim Kochhar, Founding Chair of CFPDP. "Looking back to our first Gala in February 1985, we proudly came together to help support a North American first. Funds raised went towards constructing the first fully accessible, barrier-free apartment complex where adults and seniors who are deafblind live independently. Fast forward 40 years

and we are now helping to support the construction of Canadian Helen Keller Centre's (CHKC's) new 56-unit affordable apartment building for the deafblind community and other disabled individuals. And we have also helped dozens of other important projects over the years."

CFPDP is incredibly proud to support these and other disability-related programs and services. Alongside its commitment to CHKC's most ambitious project to date, the Foundation is working to increase the representation of qualified professionals with disabilities on Canadian corporate boards. CFPDP also provides funding to Paralympic athletes, Para sports, endowment funds and more.

Businesses and business leaders also play a pivotal role in diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. This is why the Great Valentine Gala celebrates organizations that demonstrate outstanding commitment to supporting people with physical disabilities. The Gala also highlights individuals who contribute significantly as role models and changemakers.

The annual CFPDP awards are presented to individuals and organizations that have gone the extra mile.



Beijing 2022 Paralympic medal winners receiving their 2023 King Clancy Awards

Photography by Steve Blackburn

The 2023 Corporate Awards celebrated the achievements of the National Hockey League (NHL) and the Council of Canadian Innovators (CCI), which helps Canadian tech firms scale-up globally.

The NHL was honoured for its commitment to diversity and inclusion, including its focus on people with disabilities.

“The NHL is using its powerful voice and platform to promote people with disabilities, including during its 2022 NHL Awards Gala when they presented major, historic trophies. The League is also working to create a welcoming environment at every point where a player, fan or employee might interact with the game,” says Kochhar. “We applaud the NHL for being inclusive of the diverse people who live in our communities.”

CCI is another powerful ally in advancing equity and inclusion for disabled Canadians. As a membership-based business council, it is exclusively comprised of CEOs from Canada’s fastest-growing and most promising technology companies. Co-founded in 2015 by Jim Balsillie and John Ruffolo, the Chair and Vice-Chair of CCI, respectively, the Council’s mandate is to help these businesses optimize their growth, which includes helping them gain greater access to the talent needed to scale up globally. Balsillie is the retired Chairman and co-CEO of BlackBerry. Ruffolo is the Founder and Managing Partner of Maverix Private Equity and the Founder of OMERS Ventures.

CCI trains current and future board members through its Innovation Governance Program, then adds participants to a roster of prospective directors within a specialized referral program that helps scale-up companies fill board vacancies. The organization is driving change by working to elevate qualified people with disabilities into the boardroom.

Canada’s 37 medal-winning athletes from the Beijing Paralympic Games received the 2023 King Clancy Award.

CFPDP established the Award in 1986 to commemorate the contributions of King Clancy as an inspirational humanitarian. In partnership with Scotiabank, CFPDP also provided these outstanding athletes with podium cheques to fill a decades-old void when it comes to rewards

and financial support for our country’s best-performing amateur athletes. **Rob Snoek**, a three-time Paralympian, world champion medallist, Canadian record holder, renowned broadcaster and CFPDP board director, joined us at the 39th Annual Great Valentine Gala to present this award.

The 2023 Honourable David C. Onley Award was presented to Andrew Parsons, President of the International Paralympic Committee, for his passion, commitment and leadership in raising awareness of international Paralympic sport.

“I never could have predicted that the Gala would remain in the hearts of so many people for so many decades,” adds Kochhar. “It is hard to find the words to properly express how much the community’s enduring support means. With it, we can continue to carry the torch on behalf of the 27% of Canadians who live with disability.”



Emcee Suhana Meharchand and Ruth Ann Onley

2024 Great Valentine Gala Committee Members

GALA CO-CHAIRS

Mark Lecker
Tony Wight

FOUNDATION CHAIR The Hon. Vim Kochhar

EVENT PRODUCER Christine Payne

IT MANAGER Rob Ham

EMCEES Suhana Meharchand Rob Snoek

FINANCE David Ford

AWARDS COMMITTEE Tony Wight, *Chair* George Przybowski Hon. Vim Kochhar Christine Payne

VIP RECEPTION Phillip Crawley Laura Dottori-Attanasio Mark Lecker Tony Wight Faye Blackwood David Ford Maureen Harquail Major Beverly Ivany Brian McLean Rob Snoek

TOMBOLA Jan Verboom Jennifer Robbins Rob Ham Kelly Chumbley Clarissa Gregorio Thomas Gaffney Lynne Hardy Nicole Hardy Ivy James

EVENT VOLUNTEERS Lisa MacLellan Anne Choy Jacqui Banner



Corporate Award Presentation L-R: Honourary Gala Co-Chair **Paula Allen**, Vice President, TELUS Health (formerly Lifeworks) **Kay Whitmore**, Group Vice President, National Hockey League **John Ruffolo**, Co-Founder & Vice Chair, Council of Canadian Innovators **Benjamin Bergen**, President, Council of Canadian Innovators Honourary Gala Co-Chair **Raj Viswanathan**, Group Head & CFO, Scotiabank



Kate Stevenson, Chair, CIBC



Beijing Paralympic medal winner **Billy Bridges** receives his 2023 King Clancy Award. He is congratulated by **Marc-André Fabien** (left), **Raj Viswanathan** (second from left) and **George Przybylowski** (second from right) while his daughter **Kensi** looks on.

The Honourable Vim Kochhar, Founding Chair, CFPDP (*centre*) presents a donation towards a new 56-unit affordable, accessible apartment building to Jennifer Robbins, Executive Director, Canadian Helen Keller Centre (CHKC), and Philip Corke, Chair, CHKC



Anna Paddock, singer/pianist of The Lay Awakes, Patrick Anderson, singer/guitarist and Paralympic medallist, and Emcee Rob Snoek



Liviana and the Honourable Julian Fantino



Authentically You at Element

Element Fleet Management is committed to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive work culture, founded on respect, where everyone feels like they belong, and differences are genuinely embraced.

We believe diversity drives growth and innovation, which is why our Abled and Disabled Empowering People Together (ADEPT) Business Resource Group is paramount to our mission.

We are champions of our employees and our community, and we are proud sponsors of the 40th Annual Great Valentine Gala.

Learn more: elementfleet.com/dei



A Tribute to Our Founder

Celebrating The Honourable Vim Kochhar

As the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) celebrates its landmark 40th Annual Great Valentine Gala, an entire community is bursting with appreciation for the person who started it all. The Honourable Vim Kochhar, or just “Vim” as he is known to many, is the visionary leader who founded CFPDP and has volunteered his time for four decades.

For all that he has done, this tribute shares our collective appreciation for Vim’s passionate commitment over so many years.

“Words immediately come to mind when thinking of Vim Kochhar: dynamic, magnetic, innovator, progressive, visionary, creative, energetic, achiever, initiator, hard worker,” says **Major Beverly Ivany** of the Salvation Army and Director of CFPDP. “Vim has done so many absolutely remarkable things over the years, achievements attributed to him that have benefitted so many people. Besides all of his accomplishments, it is who he is at the core of his being that really matters. Vim is a man of integrity, one who is kind and caring.

He is a true gentleman who continually wants to make a difference in the world by helping in very practical and life-changing ways. Once you know him, he becomes a friend for life. He is truly one of a kind!”

There is nobody who would disagree that Vim is all that and more.

With the help of his fellow Rotarians, Vim organized the first Great Valentine Gala in 1985. It was supposed to be a one-time fundraiser to bring in \$10,000.00 to help build accessible housing for people with disabilities. When the Gala raised many times that goal, he knew he could do more.

“Forty years ago, Vim Kochhar and I were members of the Don Valley Rotary Club. At one of our meetings, Vim proposed a unique project – to raise funds to build housing jointly with the Cheshire Homes Foundation targeted at the needs of deafblind individuals. The first



Great Valentine Gala was launched in 1985, raising \$230,000 for this project. Always being a person with grand vision, Vim raised the bar on entertainment [at future Galas] with Bob Hope and then George Burns as headliners,” recalls **George Przybylowski**, Director of CFPDP. “As a result, CFPDP was created in 1987 to manage the millions of dollars in revenue with Vim as the Founding Chair. Its goal was to assist individuals with physical challenges to live fuller lives and raise awareness of their achievements and abilities. From that Gala, CFPDP expanded its reach [in future years], raising over \$40 million. This is the legacy of Vim Kochhar, who has succeeded in making a difference in the lives of Canadians with disabilities.”

Indeed, CFPDP was established to help distribute the funds raised after the first Great Valentine Gala. Some of those funds were used to help build Rotary Cheshire Homes (RCH), the first and only communication-adapted, barrier-free apartment complex in North America designed and built specifically for people who are deafblind. The building opened in 1992 and is home to 16 tenants who live independently in their own apartments and have access to intervenor services. Intervenors are specially trained professionals who act as the eyes and ears of a deafblind person. To this day, CFPDP continues to support Canadian Helen Keller Centre (CHKC), which now operates the RCH building after the amalgamation of two related agencies.



Vim with **Bob Hope** at the Great Valentine Gala in 1988



Vim with **George Burns** at the Great Valentine Gala in 1989

“Vim came into our lives over 40 years ago when our young families moved into homes on Toronto’s Woodlawn Avenue. He was a man of impressive energy and ambition extending far beyond his success in starting a manufacturing business and successful retail stores,” says **Patricia Michener**, a past Director of CHKC who was there when the first shovel for RCH went into the ground. “Once he saw the plight of disabled adults who had aged out of all then-available support systems, he was unstoppable in his efforts to improve their lot and prospects in life ... Vim has given back many thousand-fold to this country and its citizens the opportunities that he once told us he was honour-bound to repay.”

“Over the years of knowing Vim and his relentless work to better the lives of those with disabilities, he has always inspired and coached me to dream big, find a way, and take the risk,” says **Philip Corke**, Chair of CHKC. “It has been his never-ending tenacity, selflessness and guidance that has laid the foundation and continues to shape the work we do today at CHKC, including the addition of a second affordable independent living residence of 56 units and a new national training centre to be located in Toronto’s west end at 150 Eighth Street. Dream big and ‘WhyNot!’”

Since CFPDP was founded, it has raised over \$40 million in support of the disability community. In addition to its ongoing backing of CHKC, funding has helped CFPDP create significant awareness with the general public, government and business communities, ultimately changing how Canadians view disability. Under Vim’s leadership,

CFPDP has also had considerable impact in Canada's Paralympic movement, the WhyNot Marathon, community sports and recreation programs, the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame, increased representation of professionals on corporate boards, and endowment funds for students with physical disabilities, among dozens of other life-changing initiatives.

"The Honourable Vim Kochhar is a man who never gives up on his dreams, or more importantly, on others' dreams. He is a man who sees the impossible as simply something that will take a little longer to overcome," says **Patrick Jarvis**, a Paralympian, former President of the Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC) and member of the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame Selection Board. "Vim has dedicated much of his life to supporting various causes and diligently promoting the accomplishments of Paralympic athletes, driven by his obvious desire to make Canada a more equitable and accessible country. From the time I first met Vim in the '90s, he provided me with an answer to the age-old question of what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object. Vim is seemingly unstoppable."

"Vim is practically an unstoppable force in his mission to help people with a disability. I have been an eyewitness - for over three decades - of his dogged determination to make life in Canada better for those with a disability," says **Rob Snoek**, world champion medallist, CBC sports broadcaster and Director of CFPDP. "I say that his work and financial support with Canadian Paralympians is worthy of a gold medal. Vim often talks about



New CHKC apartment complex to be built in Etobicoke, ON



Grand opening of Rotary Cheshire Homes - June 22, 1992 - Board Members
Standing: George Przybylowski, Juergen Rust, Doug Robson, Khalid Khokhar, Adrienne Carruso, Richard Rusek, Doug Hitchlock
Sitting: Stan Lewis, Doug Park, K. Fleming, Vim Kochhar, Joan Mactavish, Ed Sweeney, Joyce Thompson



Sod Turning for Rotary Cheshire Homes - August 28, 1991 - Juergen Rust, Doug Park, Doug Robson, Hon. Lincoln Alexander, Richard Rusek, Hon. Vim Kochhar, Patricia Michener, Khalid Khokhar, Kerry Wadman, Adrienne Caruso, Doug Hitchlock, K. Fleming (holding plaque)

Canada being 'the best country in the world [for people with disabilities],' and I would suggest that his faithfulness to the cause has helped it become and stay great."

In 1996, the WhyNot Marathon created nationwide exposure and raised the profile of the Paralympics many times within a period of two months. The 11,000-kilometre cross-Canada relay enlisted 8,000 torchbearers and 150,000 runners in over 700 communities

in support of the Paralympic Games. A total of \$2 million was raised for CFPDP and to fund initiatives in local communities across the country. Thousands of media stories were published, with almost every radio and TV station and newspaper in Canada covering the event.

CFPDP has been an active sponsor of Canada's Para athletes since the first Great Valentine Gala, which highlighted the achieve-

ments of Team Canada at the 1984 Summer Paralympics. Medal winners are recognized at the Gala after each Summer and Winter Games. CFPDP also provides critical funding to every medal-winning Paralympic athlete via podium cheques presented at the Gala.

"40 years! Wow! You should be extremely proud of this achievement and the decades of support for persons with disabilities and the Paralympic movement in



Honourable Vim Kochhar presenting the torch to the Rt. Honourable Stephen Harper



Duncan Sinclair, Chair, Deloitte Canada and Chile with Honourable Vim Kochhar

particular,” says **David Legg**, Professor in the Department of Health and Physical Education at Mount Royal University and former President of the CPC. “The world needs more Senator Kochhar.”

Vim’s newest initiative at CFPDP is “A Seat at the Table,” which helps find and match qualified Canadians with disabilities for corporate board positions. The program also raises awareness of the benefits of board diversity so that companies will take

steps to recruit candidates with physical disabilities. When the initiative began, Vim could not identify a single public company director with a disability. The latest reporting on diversity disclosure practices reveals that 12 board positions at public companies operating under the Canada Business Corporations Act are held by persons with disabilities, with an additional seven disclosed voluntarily.

“The greatness of Canada is about people who have the courage to champion a worthy cause. For me, Vim Kochhar is one of those courageous people. Since 1987, when he helped launch CFPDP, he has successfully challenged Corporate Canada to change the way they think about people with disabilities,” says **Duncan Sinclair**, Chair, Deloitte Canada & Chile and a member of the Seat at the Table Selection Board. “Vim continues to



Hon. Vim Kochhar, Hon. Bal Gosal, Sabi Marwah, and Hon. David C. Onley with medal winning athletes from 2012 London Games at the 29th Great Valentine Gala



Inaugural Board of Canadian Museum for Human Rights - Vim Kochhar, Gail Asper, Hon. Connie Glube, Bill Barkley, Arni Thorsteinson, Yves Laberge, Wilton Littlechild and Ron Corey

Hon. Vim Kochhar
with Sarah Cooper



Hon. Vim Kochhar
with Hon. Sabi Marwah



Hon. Vim Kochhar with
Len Baker, *President, March of Dimes*



Hon. Con Di Nino
with Hon. Vim Kochhar



Lighting of two torches at the Eternal Flame of Hope
to start the WhyNot Marathon, May 27, 1996

Alan Tonks, Vim Kochhar,
Governor General Romeo Leblanc, Lt. Gov. Hal Jackman

remind us that, together, we have the power to galvanize our communities, build a brighter future, and create a more courageous shared destiny for all. Thank you for your leadership Vim!”

“Vim’s vision and dedication towards acknowledging the immense potential that people with disabilities bring to our society and creating opportunities for them to live fuller lives is inspiring,” says **Laura Dottori-Attanasio**, President & CEO, Element Fleet Management, Honourary Co-Chair of the 2024 Great Valentine Gala and a member of the “A Seat at the Table” Selection Board. “It is incredible to witness the monumental impact one person can make, and Vim, with his unwavering drive, passion, and relentless belief in the inherent value of all individuals, regardless of their physical abilities, is transformative and driving us to a more accessible, supportive, and inclusive Canada.”

“I have such affection and admiration for Vim. At a time in life when mere mortals would be retired and looking back, Vim continues to look forward,” says **Leonard Baker**, President and CEO, March of Dimes Canada. “He developed the “A Seat at the Table” initiative to put more people with disabilities around board tables. He champions the skills and potential of people with disabilities, and through his annual arm-twisting and cajoling of willing accomplices, continues to raise money to fund his noble ambitions through what is now the 40th Annual Great Valentine Gala. Vim Kochhar is a force of nature, and I am so proud to call him my friend.”

Around his dedicated volun-



Hon. Vim Kochhar presenting the Rolling Rampage torch to the Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau



Hon. Vim Kochhar with Josh Cassidy at the Rolling Rampage in Ottawa

teerism with CFPDP, Vim was appointed to the Senate of Canada in January 2010. In this role, he continued to advocate for Canadians with disabilities and increased his legacy to the country he loves.

“Public service’ and ‘Canada’ are words synonymous with Vim Kochhar. Vim has been and continues to be a tireless advocate for Canadians with disabilities,” says **Maureen A. Harquail**, President and CEO of the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council and Director of CFPDP. “His ability to bring people together for a common cause is indisputable. I am honoured to call Vim a friend and a mentor.”

“I have been Treasurer of the Foundation since the day it was incorporated. Not long ago, when GIC rates were starting to produce a reasonable return, Vim and I were chatting about where we could get a decent rate for the Foundation’s

short-term funds. I had checked out the competition. Then Vim told me what he thought was achievable. I told him this was impossibly high, but he said he would get it,” says **David Ford**, CPA, CA, Director of CFPDP. “Later that day, he told me that the manager had agreed to a rate half a percentage higher than any published rate! Again, Vim demonstrated something that many already know. Nobody can say no to Vim! Thank you Vim for all that you have achieved for the Foundation.”

“There is no greater champion for people with disabilities than Vim Kochhar. His support over the years is immeasurable, making sure the accomplishments of people with disabilities are recognized every year, which is highlighted at the annual Great Valentine Gala,” says **Faye Blackwood**, Sport and Recreation Consultant, Ministry of

Tourism Culture & Sport and Director of CFPDP. “We must thank Vim for his vision and leadership, showcasing what is possible, if you believe!”

“I am honoured to call Vim a dear friend of mine and I have known him for more than 20 years,” says **Brian McLean**, Founding Volunteer President, Achilles Canada and Director of CFPDP. “Of everyone I know, he has the biggest heart, determination and perseverance to make a difference in Canada, not only for those with a disability but for all individuals. When Vim asks you to do something or get something completed, you just do it! No one wants to let him down. You know he means well, and the outcomes will be beneficial to all.”

Indeed, everyone who has met Vim knows one thing – everything he does is with his whole heart.



Hon. Bal Gosal with Hon. Vim Kochhar surrounded by Ottawa school children carrying the torch to start the Rolling Rampage on Parliament Hill



Foundation

Creating a world without limits to ambition

Built on our longstanding history of supporting our communities, CIBC Foundation is committed to removing barriers to personal ambitions and making a positive impact.

We are proud to support the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons as they celebrate their 40th annual Great Valentine Gala.



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THE NHL CONGRATULATES
CORPORATE AWARD WINNERS

CANADIAN TIRE JUMPSTART CHARITIES

MARCO DI BUONO

President

KINGSETT CAPITAL

ROB KUMER

CEO

THE HONOURABLE DAVID C. ONLEY AWARD WINNER

RICK MERCER

Iconic Canadian Comedian

KING CLANCY AWARD WINNERS

JAY-ANN GILFOY

President & CEO, Meridian

GOLDY HYDER

President & CEO, Business Council of Canada

NORTON KOTHARI

President & CEO, Kothari Group

THE HONOURABLE VIM KOCHHAR AWARD WINNER

RAJ VISWANATHAN

Group Head & CFO, Scotiabank





PRESENTING THE 2024



King Clancy Award

The *Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons' King Clancy Award* is presented annually in recognition of outstanding personal achievement and important contributions in support of Canadians who live with disability. There are three outstanding recipients for 2024.

Jay-Ann Gilfoy

Ontario's largest credit union (and the second largest in Canada) is rewriting the script on inclusivity, diversity and accessibility. President and CEO Jay-Ann Gilfoy stands at the forefront of this transformative narrative.

"I feel very humbled to be counted among the honoured few to have received this award and it makes me even more committed to ensuring we do all we can to support people with disabilities," says Gilfoy. "I am a firm believer that purpose and profit can co-exist ... Building and fostering a psychologically safe and inclusive workplace is something that I aspire to do personally and it is also a key business imperative at Meridian."

For Gilfoy, inclusivity is more than a buzzword. It is a core leadership principle.

"Commitment to inclusivity must start at the top and be regularly reinforced with action," she asserts. "First, you have to commit to learning about others who have not had the same privileges as you might have had. Second, you need to be willing to understand how your people feel in their daily work, and you have to create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts about how to do things. You have to recognize your own biases and assumptions and that there is always a different way to do things. This can be hard for some leaders who strive to be infallible, but it is our vulnerability and willingness to admit biases and mistakes which make leaders authentic and human."



Within the tapestry of Meridian's inclusivity, volunteer-led Employee Resource Groups play a pivotal role across several demographic areas. "M-Access is dedicated to creating a barrier-free workplace for people with disabilities," explains Gilfoy. "They come together to share personal experiences and learnings, and they highlight opportunities to make Meridian a more equitable place to work for different types of disabilities, both observable and

non-observable, because accommodation looks different depending on the type of disability."

While acknowledging that some changes the credit union is making are small and some are big, Gilfoy emphasizes that they are all focused on making Meridian a welcoming place for everyone. This includes its employees and Members alike. The American Sign Language (ASL) and Accessibility Branch Champion initiative, for example, was originally offered as a pilot program in the spring of 2023.

"Due to its success, our learning and development team decided to offer it to employees on a regular basis," explains Gilfoy. "Participants join to learn ASL, but they are also being taught alternative communication techniques and general awareness that will make our services more inclusive."

In a further effort to ensure inclusivity, Meridian recently conducted a workforce diversity census to measure the level of representation in relation to the labour market and the communities it serves.

"This provides us with a baseline for creating an intersectional lens on employee sentiment and

experience,” notes Gilfoy. “Moving forward, the data will support the development of a workplace strategy and roadmap built upon the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging and representation. We operate in many communities across Ontario, and we want to be reflective of our communities and the people who live in them. We see great opportunity in expanding the talent pool to all people.”

Outside of Meridian, Gilfoy also greatly values opportunities to give back. “I am personally involved with several different causes close to my heart because I believe in shared purpose,” she says. “To me, that means if I have a vision for how the world should be, I must share in the responsibility to make that world a reality.”

Goldy Hyder

For Goldy Hyder, advocating for diversity and inclusion is more than a corporate responsibility; it is a deeply personal mission.

“I have two special needs daughters who are both amazing people,” he says, “and I have seen firsthand that the real unsung heroes are those like my wife Fatima, who are there day-in and day-out, fighting for their children in the school system and the health care system. Caregivers not only give the care; they become advocates for the person with a disability. They do it selflessly and often at great expense to their own careers and personal lives.”

As President and CEO of the Business Council of Canada, a non-profit, non-partisan organization comprised of pre-eminent business leaders and entrepreneurs, Hyder is also in an ideal position to see how Canada’s leading employers approach disability in their corporate cultures.

“I’m proud to say that the Canadian business leaders I work closest with recognize that those with different abilities can contribute in different ways, offering different perspectives, and make a positive difference in their companies,” says Hyder.

Yet, Hyder knows that much more still has to be done. To that end, he is a proud member of the Selection Board for CFPDP’s “A Seat at the Table”

initiative, which encourages greater representation of qualified professionals with disabilities on Canadian corporate boards.

“A disability is nothing more than a different ability,” Hyder asserts. “As such, it represents another diverse viewpoint which can add value to a board. We are all products of our own unique backgrounds, and our personal experiences shape our ability to contribute. Successful boards are inclusive in all their forms – leveraging the diversity and differences of all types of directors.”

He says, “Canada finds itself in a global war for talent and Canadian business leaders are working tirelessly to leverage the talents of those who have been traditionally underrepresented in the workforce and in boardrooms – especially those from the disability community. By hiring and employing qualified members of the disability community,

companies unlock an untapped pool of talent. The reverse is also true; Canadian companies will lose out by failing to employ the talents of the disability community.”

Hyder’s journey is rooted in gratitude for the opportunities Canada provided his own family.

“Canada took a chance on my parents, who immigrated here with me and my little brother and only \$28 in their pockets,” he says. “Many people along the way made it possible for us to achieve what we’ve been able to achieve. That instilled in

me the belief that those who have benefitted from the help of others must help others in need. For me, it’s the Canadian way. We need to be a country that supports one another.”

Hyder adds, “We should never underestimate the determination and resolve of people with disabilities. They have a fierce drive borne from their desire to manage their disability. They want their life to have meaning and to live it to their full potential. Everyone has a purpose and people with disabilities are no different.”

As a King Clancy Award recipient, Hyder reflects on the honour bestowed upon him. “It’s humbling to be in the company of past and present award winners,” he says, “all of whom are veritable Canadian heroes. My contributions are modest in comparison to many of them, but if in some small



way it inspires others to support the disability community, then it will be worthwhile.”

With a heartfelt belief in the power of doing good, Hyder underscores the intrinsic rewards of selflessness. As he inspires others through his leadership, support and generosity, he leaves us with a resonant message: “I have always believed in the motto ‘do good, be good and good will come back at you,’ but if it doesn’t, that’s OK. You will still feel good.”

Norton Kothari

Upon learning of his selection for the prestigious 2024 King Clancy Award, Norton Kothari expressed profound gratitude, viewing it as much more than an immense personal honour. It is also, he says, a tribute to his family and the dedicated individuals collaborating with him to drive beneficial change.

“It is a validation of our efforts and a reminder of the impact we can have,” he says.

That impact is far-reaching. The Kothari Group is a thriving real estate investment and development firm. The company boasts an impressive condominium portfolio in Winnipeg and has achieved significant success in mortgage financing, hotel development and residential multi-storey construction.

“Our success in real estate across Canada is not just a business achievement; it is a platform to effect positive change,” says Kothari.

Indeed, it is within the realm of philanthropy that both the company and its family foundation truly shine.

“Helping non-profit and cultural organizations is a core value of the Kothari Group and our family, with emphasis being placed on education and health care. We believe in building communities, not just buildings, and this philosophy drives our commitment to making Canada a better place for everyone. Our endeavours in the non-profit space are very important to our philosophy.”

Those endeavours include donating millions of dollars to various charities and cultural organizations, including Trillium Health Partners, the Human Rights Museum in Winnipeg, various food banks, Canadian

Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons and more.

“Our family believes that success comes with a responsibility to give back,” Kothari emphasizes. We’ve been fortunate in our endeavours and feel a strong obligation to share that fortune. Supporting diverse causes from healthcare to human rights reflects our commitment to a holistic approach to philanthropy, where we can touch lives in various meaningful ways.”

Kothari says, “Our work in Winnipeg goes beyond developing condominiums; it’s about enriching the community. Supporting the Canadian Human Rights Museum is part of our commitment to fostering a culture of understanding and respect, something we consider vital in every community we are part of.”

The family’s generosity is also helping the Canadian Helen Keller Centre (CHKC) as it works towards the construction of a new 56-unit apartment

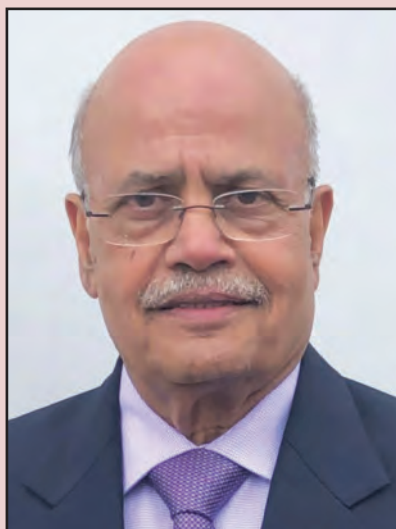
building. The apartment complex is being constructed to provide accessible and affordable housing for people who are deafblind or live with other disabilities.

“CHKC’s mission resonates deeply with us, blending our professional expertise with our desire to contribute meaningfully,” says Kothari. “Providing accessible, affordable housing for the deafblind community is not just a construction project; it’s about creating a supportive environment where individuals can thrive.”

Kothari is most proud of how his group has managed to intertwine their business success with their philanthropic efforts.

“We believe in the symbiotic relationship between businesses and their communities,” he says. “By supporting local non-profits and cultural organizations, we’re investing in the social fabric of the places where we live and work, ensuring they grow and thrive alongside our business. Each project we support feels like a step towards a more inclusive, caring society, and that is an accomplishment that transcends business metrics.”

Kothari says, “I’d like to add that our journey in philanthropy is continuous. We are always looking for new ways to contribute and new challenges to tackle. This award is not an end, but a milestone in our ongoing commitment to positively impact society.”



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2024 Great Valentine Gala

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

Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities

The first recipient of the 2024 Corporate Award is Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities. The organization is being honoured for helping to provide inclusive sport and recreation opportunities for kids of all abilities.

Canadian Tire Corporation was founded just over a century ago. The business has had a strong sense of community since its inception. One of its founders, A.J. Billes, was known to say, “Strive always to leave things better.”

Billes shared that ethos with his daughter Martha, who is still with the company. She was the driving force behind the founding of Jumpstart and its two precursor charities. Canadian Tire has backed up its commitment to Jumpstart with more than \$200 million in grants and resources since 2005, including 100% of all customer donations.

“For every dollar we invest in a community organization helping underserved youth, including youth with disabilities, there is a several-fold return on the social value of that spending within the near term,” says Jumpstart President Marco Di Buono.

And Di Buono has witnessed firsthand the transformative impact that such efforts can have on young lives.

“We have always pushed to ensure that we are tackling inequities, whether they are for children with disabilities, for girls and young women, or underserved and racialized youth, in ways that will ensure that everyone is able to benefit from the immense power of sport and play in their communities,” he says. “With the support of Canadian Tire Corporation, we will be able to continue breaking down barriers, big and small, to give every child in Canada the opportunity to thrive through sport.”

Every year, Jumpstart supports over 400,000 children and youth from coast to coast to coast. Those young people represent hundreds of thousands of individual stories about the impact of Jumpstart grants, “from creating a better sense of belonging for children with disabilities who



are able to access sport with their peers to building recreational infrastructure that does allow children with disabilities to participate with other peers in their communities,” says Di Buono.

Jumpstart’s commitment to inclusivity extends to its Coaching Kids of All Abilities program, an online resource designed to help coaches and youth activity leaders create more inclusive environments. “It is a mandatory condition of funding for any of the organizations receiving support from Jumpstart to have their youth activity leaders take the program,” Di Buono shares. “It’s not so much about accessibility as it is about being mindful about the individual needs of every single child.”

Di Buono stresses that sport is more than an opportunity to create the next generation of champions. It is also much more than just being physically active.

“Sport is a powerful tool,” he says. “As Nelson Mandela said many times in many iterations, sport has the power to unite us. It has the power to create common ground. It has the power to help us all thrive together and individually. I would encourage everyone to think on one hand about the real value proposition behind what it means to participate in sport. On the other hand, I would also like to ensure that people give pause to think about creating equity in participation and not just as an athlete, but opening our apertures collectively to thinking about what equitable access to sport looks like. That means on the field of play, as coaches, as officials and as athletes. It means behind the scenes, as administrators, as board members and as broadcasters. That means people working in the sports sponsorship space, in the sport marketing space, and academics. If we’re going to create equitable access, we need to reflect that all of that widened aperture provides opportunities for everyone to create the strongest diversity of thought and the strongest collective benefit through sport and play for all Canadians.”

Corporate Award Winners

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

KingSett Capital

The second recipient of the 2024 Corporate Award is KingSett Capital, honoured for being a real estate industry innovator committed to creating accessible buildings and communities for all.



KingSett
CAPITAL

KingSett Capital is a private equity real estate investment firm that stands proudly on the foundation of a simple yet powerful principle: “Doing the right thing is always the right thing.” For KingSett, this ethos translates into a diverse workforce committed to ESG best practices and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which are aimed at addressing various social, economic and environmental challenges to achieve a more sustainable and equitable world by 2030.

“Our aim is to create healthy, accessible and efficient buildings where people want to work, shop and live,” says KingSett CEO Rob Kumer. “This all starts with a commitment to the well-being of our tenants, employees, communities and partners.”

The company’s proactive stance towards accessibility is further demonstrated through its participation in the Buildings Without Barriers Challenge with the Rick Hansen Foundation.

“KingSett has been adopting the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) standard across its portfolio for many years,” says Kumer. “Participating in Buildings Without Barriers provides us with another way to show the market that we recognize the accessibility challenges that exist today and will find ways to improve our own assets to ensure all are welcome.”

Kumer adds, “By adopting RHFAC, we were able to identify areas of accessibility success within our buildings along with areas that provide challenges and need a solution. Acting on the recommendations for improvement allows us to provide an asset that everyone can enjoy, leading to greater inclusivity within the communities in which we operate.”

Certifying over seven million square feet of its assets and 500 rental apartments under the Rick Hansen Foundation accessibility program, KingSett is showing that it aspires to have a meaningful impact.

“We began by identifying large assets located in major urban

markets that are often mixed-use because these properties have the highest overall traffic from tenants, residents, visitors, etc. By focusing on scale assets, we could positively impact more people,” explains Kumer. “Undertaking this certification journey has allowed us to realize that different users will move around a building in different ways. By seeing things from alternative points of view, we are able to create more welcoming and inclusive spaces for everyone.”

Kumer adds, “We also believed it was important to use our existing assets and certification results to help inform us on how new developments should be incorporating accessibility throughout the design, construction and ultimate operations of the asset.”

What key elements of the RHFAC program is KingSett applying to new developments and major retrofits?

“There are external elements that we have been previously aware of as having value to our customers, such as transit, wayfinding and other requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act,” says Kumer. “However, through the Rick Hansen Foundation Certification criteria, we became more aware of areas where our buildings could improve. These include improved safety warning features like tactile indicators at the tops of stairs or assistive listening technologies.”

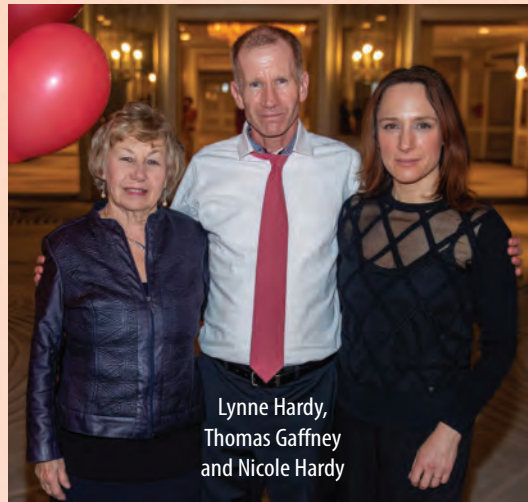
Receiving the 2024 Corporate Award holds a special significance for KingSett.

“We are proud to show the industry and the communities within which we operate that KingSett is committed to adopting market-leading frameworks like RHFAC and actively benchmarking, analyzing and developing actionable roadmaps to improve the accessibility for all people who come to a KingSett property. This award reflects the hard work, commitment and drive that our team invests in our business and portfolio. And knowing that our efforts are having an impact pushes us to think harder, be better and aspire to have an even more meaningful effect on our surrounding community and those that live, work and play in it.”

From the Heart: THANK YOU CFPDP VOLUNTEERS

"We extend heartfelt thanks to the many incredible volunteers who have supported CFPDP over the years. From those who have given their time for decades to our newest volunteers, your generosity of spirit continues to transform our mission into a celebration of shared purpose and community. Thank you for helping us to make Canada the best country in the world for people with disabilities."

–The Honourable Vim Kochhar, *Founding Chair, CFPDP*



PRESENTING

The Honourable
David C. Onley

AWARD

In tribute to our 28th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, the *Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons* introduced *The Honourable David C. Onley Award* in 2014.

Some people need no introduction. Iconic Canadian comedian Rick Mercer is one of them. Throughout his award-winning career attracting some of the largest TV audiences in Canadian history, he has prominently included people with disabilities in his work.

Mercer is immediately recognizable as the celebrated host of *The Rick Mercer Report*, a popular half-hour program that aired until 2018 on CBC Television. The show seamlessly blended news parody, sketch comedy and satirical editorials with visits to captivating locations across Canada. Mercer broke down barriers for individuals with disabilities over 15 seasons, though he admits he “stumbled on this amazing group of people who happened to make great television.” He frequently showcased accessibility on the program and invited notable figures from the disability community to join him, including then Ontario Lieutenant Governor the Honourable David C. Onley himself.

“Rick Mercer consistently portrays Canadians with disabilities in the same way that he portrays all Canadians, as ordinary people doing amazing things,” says the Honourable Vim Kochhar, Founding Chair of CFPDP. “While he may have been zooming through the hallways of Queen’s Park on a scooter as he did with the late David Onley, Rick has always used humour to reflect Canadians back to themselves.”

Mercer’s engagement with the Abilities Centre in Pickering, Ontario and Variety Village and his training sessions with Paralympians exemplify the comedian’s commitment to making Canada a barrier-free country. In 2010, he was invited to carry the Paralympic torch and ran with it during the start of the Paralympic Torch Relay on Parliament Hill. He also consistently featured segments on his show to highlight the achievements of Paralympians.

“Rick’s commitment to the Paralympic movement reflects a broader societal shift towards recognizing the



abilities of individuals with disabilities, which aligns perfectly with the values embodied by the Honourable David C. Onley Award,” says Hon. Kochhar. “His efforts emphasize the need for equal opportunities and recognition in all facets of life.”

Mercer’s dedication to the disability community earned him the prestigious King Clancy Award in 2012. This accolade, named after NHL legend King Clancy, recognizes individuals for their outstanding personal achievements and significant contributions to Canada’s disability community. Mercer’s receipt of this award showcased his ability to extend influence beyond political satire and make a

lasting impact nationwide. Mercer’s induction into the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame in 2015 further affirmed his pivotal role in portraying people with disabilities in a positive light.

“What distinguishes Rick’s work is his profound involvement with the Paralympic movement,” emphasizes Hon. Kochhar. “He has done stories on almost every Paralympic sport and showcased himself training alongside many incredible athletes. It is a wonderful legacy to have portrayed their abilities in a way to which everyone can relate.”

From sledge hockey and snowboarding to skiing, wheelchair basketball and more, Mercer brought positive attention and accolades to many rising stars of sport, showing a genuine commitment to help advance the Paralympic movement.

“The 2024 Honourable David C. Onley Award stands as a fitting tribute to Rick Mercer’s exceptional contributions, acknowledging the profound impact of his work on the lives of disabled Canadians,” says Kochhar. “In a world where diversity and inclusion are increasingly paramount, Rick’s endeavours have acted as a catalyst for change, challenging stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive society.”

Photograph by Jon Sturge

PRESENTING

The Honourable
Vim Kochhar

AWARD

As a tribute to the incredible legacy of CFPDP's founder, *The Honourable Vim Kochhar Award* celebrates individuals who have significantly impacted the disability community and our country. The honourees are quiet champions with an unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. As leaders who embody the values they speak about, they motivate and inspire others to uphold similar values and make a difference. *The Honourable Vim Kochhar Award* was established in 2024.

When he learned he had been chosen to be the first recipient of The Honourable Vim Kochhar Award, Raj Viswanathan admits that he was somewhat taken aback. "I am actually a very private person," he says. "I'm not an awards person."

But if anyone deserves to be honoured for their strong commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, both in the workplace and in society generally, it is this person. "I'm actually embarrassed [to be singled out in this way]," says Viswanathan. "But the fact that I'm being recognized with an award that is being named after the Honourable Vim Kochhar, I think it's a total privilege."

Viswanathan emigrated to Canada from India with his wife Hycinth with little more than a hope and a dream. In 2002, he began working his way up the ladder at Scotiabank where he is now Group Head and Chief Financial Officer.

Leading with humility and a genuine dedication to making a difference, his journey unfolded as a testament to the transformative power of inclusive leadership. As part of his commitment, he has ensured that accessibility and disability are not overlooked. "The more we can showcase people, the more we can encourage people to become the best that they can be," he asserts, drawing from his experiences as a visible minority.

On the personal side, Viswanathan shares a poignant story about his aunt, who had polio at age one. She became a postdoctoral scholar in mathematics and complex analysis. Her journey, navigating the world on one leg in the challenging times of the 70s and 80s, left an indelible mark on him. "I would refer to people with disabilities as being people with different abilities," he says. "They actually go above and beyond the physical component of it to ignore that in some respects. My aunt

was always proud about how she could walk on one leg with two sticks and travel the whole world. She was very proud of what she did."

Viswanathan's leadership philosophy is deeply rooted in acknowledging differences. "To be an inclusive leader, you should be able to look beyond all that," he asserts.

"Just look for people who bring their best to work or a conversation or whatever the situation might be, and that will make it very easy, whether it's gender-specific, somebody who is differently abled or somebody who looks different."

For Viswanathan and Scotiabank, diversity is not a checkbox but an ongoing journey. While the bank has made strides in gender equality, he recognizes the need for continued progress there and elsewhere. For example, he is now passionately focused on contributing to increased representation of the Indigenous community, viewing it as a personal priority to rectify historical injustices and ensure equal opportunities for all. "I think

the journey is a long one," he concedes. "You don't correct mistakes that have happened over hundreds of years in five years. But it is important to show that we are holding ourselves accountable and making progress."

Viswanathan's commitment goes beyond statistics and corporate roles. Scotiabank's long-standing partnership with the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP), particularly the Podium Fund for Paralympic athletes, holds a special place in his heart. Expressing his love for sports, he considers it a privilege to support athletes with disabilities who defy odds and excel on a global stage.

Reflecting on his role as Honourary Co-Chair for CFPDP's Great Valentine Gala in 2022 and again in 2023, he describes the experience as an emotional and once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.



“That is an emotion which is very hard to describe other than experiencing it,” he says. “The fact that I was given this opportunity because of Scotiabank’s role in supporting this event is extremely valuable to me.”

Beyond Scotiabank, Viswanathan and his wife actively contribute to various charities in their community. Whether through financial support or personal involvement, the couple believes in giving back and helping those less privileged, embodying a commitment to creating positive change.

“We don’t like to be put on the stage so to speak,” he says. “We love helping as much as we can, and we try to do it financially because we have more than what we need. To us as a family, it’s extremely important.”

In discussing his proudest accomplishments, Viswanathan humbly attributes his success to the support

of those around him. Grateful for the opportunities provided by Scotiabank, he expresses a sense of privilege to contribute to the bank’s success and, by extension, Canada’s prosperity. As he said, “I’m not so sure it happens in many countries. I’m not so sure it happens with the level of frequency that it happens in this country, and I think it’s only the beginning.”

“In the story of Raj Viswanathan, we find a leader who personifies the values of inclusion and humility,” says Tony Wight, Chair of the CFPDP Awards Committee. “His journey inspires us to rethink leadership, to celebrate the achievements of those who lead not with grand gestures, but with genuine commitment and a deep sense of responsibility. It is our great honour to celebrate Raj as the first recipient of The Honourable Vim Kochhar Award.”



Raj presents a podium cheque to a 2022 Beijing Paralympic medal winner



Raj presents the 2023 Corporate Award to Kay Whitmore of the NHL (centre) alongside Honourary Co-Chair Paula Allen (left)



Head table 2023 Great Valentine Gala
Sitting - Raj Viswanathan, Hon. Vim Kochhar, Phillip Crawley, Kate Stevenson
Standing - Hycinth Viswanathan, Hon. Con Di Nino, Paula Allen, Mark Andre Fabien, Laura Dottori-Attanasio, Ruth Ann Onley, George Przybylowski, Mark Attanasio, Dorothy Price, Hon. Sabi Marwah



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John Wallace
CEO, Caldwell Partners



Bringing Overlooked Talent to the Table

A group of CEOs and top leaders is promoting highly qualified Canadians with physical disabilities

The Honourable Vim Kochhar

Five years ago, the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) launched an initiative to encourage Corporate Canada to appoint qualified individuals with disabilities to their boards of directors.

This journey to reshape the governance landscape started at a CFPDP event in 2018. During a speech, The Right Honourable Brian Mulroney told attendees how his decision to appoint the first-ever Minister for Disabled Persons was instrumental in guiding his government's progressive policies and program decisions on behalf of the disability community.

The former prime minister's words struck a chord with me. If a senior-level disability advocate could create positive change at the federal cabinet table, disabled professionals could do the same from the boardroom table. That's when CFPDP's "A Seat at the Table" initiative was born.

At the time, I couldn't point to a single director in a corporate boardroom who identified with a disability, even though one in four, or eight million, Canadians do today. Clearly, this absence had nothing to do with a shortage of qualified candidates.

I turned to an influential group of leaders to help drive the project forward. CEOs, top Bay Street executives, representatives of charitable and media organizations, and chancellors from prestigious universities joined forces. They shared a common vision – to identify highly qualified Canadians with physical disabilities deserving of a seat at the table in corporate boardrooms.

Fast forward to 2024 and the wheels of change are moving, albeit slowly.

The latest Osler Report on Diversity

Disclosure Practices revealed that 12 board positions at public companies operating under the Canada Business Corporations Act are held by persons with disabilities, with an additional seven disclosed voluntarily.

At the same time, more than 30 highly qualified candidates selected through the CFPDP program are being actively promoted for board positions. In the summer of 2021, one of the candidates was appointed to the Amex Bank of Canada board.

Crown Corporations are now seeking applications from CFPDP candidates, head-hunting firms are reaching out regarding board search projects, and public companies are expressing interest. The next crucial step is to match more qualified individuals with disabilities with opportunities.

With the current representation of disabled professionals on corporate boards at less than one percent, there is still work to be done.

Public service ads in *The Globe and Mail* have played a significant role in publicizing the initiative and candidates. New endowment funds to help create leaders of tomorrow have also been created at major universities.

As "A Seat at The Table" continues to advocate for qualified candidates with proven business acumen, we need a commitment from Corporate Canada to create more diverse and representative board leadership where individuals with physical disabilities have a strong presence and voice.

Editor's Note: This article was originally published in the January 2024 edition of *Director Journal*, a publication of the Institute of Corporate Directors.

Endowment Funds

To help prepare the next generation of leaders for a seat at the corporate board table, CFPDP launched an initiative to create endowment funds that provide bursaries and scholarships for students with disabilities. CFPDP's goal is to launch the initiative at all major universities in Canada.

To date, the following endowment funds have been established:

- York University – CFPDP
- Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) – CFPDP
- University of Manitoba – Asper Foundation
- Pearson College, Vancouver – Vim Kochhar
- Ivey Business School at the University of Western Ontario – Thorpe Family Foundation in partnership with CFPDP
- Queen's University – Duncan and Michelle Sinclair Foundation in partnership with CFPDP's "A Seat at the Table" program

Further, additional endowment funds are being finalized at York University, Osgoode Hall Law School at York University and Queen's University.

CFPDP is inviting donors to commit \$100,000 and asking universities to match it. As an incentive, CFPDP will add \$10,000 and name the endowment fund in the donor's name. In addition, CFPDP will issue a tax/business receipt for your donation. This creates a \$220,000 endowment fund to grant bursaries and scholarships in perpetuity using the investment proceeds.

Donors who wish to make a meaningful donation of less than \$100,000 are also encouraged to contact the CFPDP office.

Reach our team at 416-760-7351 or whynot@cfpdp.com.

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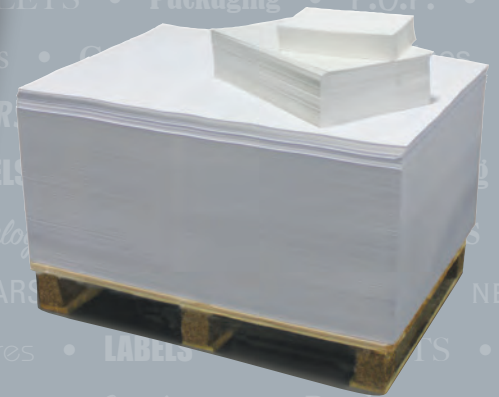
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Deepak Chopra



Photograph by Kara O'Keefe



RICK MERCER'S top-rated, award-winning CBC show, *The Rick Mercer Report*, routinely trampled even its American competitors in the ratings. The show featured Mercer's trademark rants, satirical newscasts, commercial parodies, and comic encounters with famous Canadians. Mercer has won over 25 Gemini Awards for *The Rick Mercer Report*, *Made in Canada*, and *This Hour has 22 Minutes*. For his incredible achievements, he received a star on Canada's Walk of Fame, which honours notable Canadians like James Cameron and Wayne Gretzky. He also starred in *Rick Mercer's Talking to Americans*, which attracted attention across North America, was watched by millions, and remains the highest-rated comedy special in Canadian history.

Mercer won the 2022 Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour for his memoir *Talking to Canadians*, in which he tells his own story for the first time—with the same biting wit that endeared him to the nation. It has been described by legendary author Margaret Atwood as a “funny, pitfall-strewn, no-holds-barred memoir from the ranting TV uproarist, edge-walker, envelope-pusher, and pot-stirrer.” His second memoir, *The Road Years*, continues the story of *The Rick Mercer Report* and the success it found by leaning into what there is to love about Canada.

His earlier book, *Rick Mercer Final Report*, a #1 *Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail* bestseller, brought together never-before-published rants from the last five seasons of his show, plus a selection of the very best rants from earlier years. Throughout the book, in a series of brilliant essays, Mercer shares his hilarious, moving, and at times hair-raising memories from the course of the show. Mercer is also the author of four national bestsellers, *Rick Mercer Final Report*, *Streeters*, *The Rick Mercer Report: The Book*, and *A Nation Worth Ranting About*.

In 2019, Mercer won the Governor General's Award for lifetime achievement, which recognizes artists who have made an indelible contribution to Canada and the world's cultural life. He is an Officer of the Order of Canada.

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E-mail: whynot@cfpdp.com Web: www.cfpdp.com

Please include your name, address, email and phone number.

NOMINATIONS TO BE RETURNED NO LATER THAN MAY 6, 2024



Call For Applications

Qualified professionals with a disability who are interested in joining a corporate board should visit aseatatthetable.ca and complete the application.

For more information, please contact
aseatatthetable@cfpdp.com

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