

# Why Not?

MAGAZINE

FALL 2025

32  
YEARS

THE CANADIAN  
DISABILITY  
HALL OF FAME



Dr. Tom Chau



Kevin J. Collins



Ina Forrest

World Curling/Annis Venues

Our 2025 Inductees  
WELCOME TO THE HALL OF FAME







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# WhyNot.

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Dr. Tom Chau, Kevin J. Collins, Ina Forrest  
Our 2025 Hall of Fame Inductees



2018 Outstanding  
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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 41 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, the Eternal Flame of Hope, Canadian Helen Keller Centre and accessible housing for deafblind people, the annual Great Valentine Gala, the King Clancy Awards, the Corporate Awards, A Seat at the Table, the 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.*



I wish to extend my warmest greetings to everyone gathered for the 2025 Canadian Disability Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

This ceremony is a powerful reflection of what we value in

Ontario: innovation, excellence and the conviction that extraordinary contributions deserve recognition. Events like yours remind us that impact comes through dedication — whether through pioneering research, passionate advocacy or athletic achievement that inspires others.

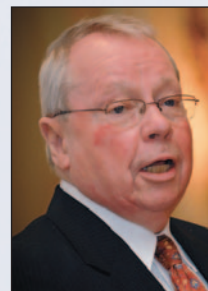
To today's inductees — Dr. Tom Chau, Kevin J. Collins and Ina Forrest: your commitment and vision are truly remarkable. Through your groundbreaking work in accessibility technology, leadership in disability advocacy and Paralympic excellence, you continue to break barriers and transform lives. You represent the very best of Canadian achievement and determination.

To the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons, the Selection Board, families and supporters — thank you. Your efforts create more than a recognition ceremony: you foster an environment where excellence is celebrated and contributions are honoured.

À titre de représentante de la Couronne en Ontario, je tiens à souligner l'importance de cette cérémonie qui célèbre des leaders exceptionnels de nos communautés. Cette reconnaissance nous rappelle que l'excellence individuelle enrichit la qualité de vie pour tous.

Congratulations to our three distinguished inductees!

**The Honourable Edith Dumont**  
*The Lieutenant Governor of Ontario*



As we mark the 32nd year of the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame (CDHF), I am proud to recognize our latest inductees.

Dr. Tom Chau is a Senior Scientist at Holland Bloorview

Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, where his lab has created a range of groundbreaking access innovations for children and youth with disabilities. These novel pathways make it possible to communicate and engage with the world without relying on functional speech or gestures.

Kevin J. Collins, President and CEO of Easter Seals Ontario, has dedicated decades to improving the lives of young people with disabilities. Once an Easter Seals "Timmy" ambassador himself, he is a committed advocate and leader who has grown awareness, fundraising and access to programs and opportunities.

Ina Forrest has been a cornerstone of Canada's National Wheelchair Curling Team since 2007, winning four Paralympic medals (two gold, two bronze) and six World Championship medals (three gold, three silver). She is a longtime supporter of Plan International and, in 2020, was elected to the Canadian Paralympic Committee's Athletes' Council.

We celebrate all our inductees, past and present, for their remarkable achievements and impact.

I am also deeply grateful to the Hall of Fame's Selection Board and the entire CFPDP team for their outstanding dedication.

**The Honourable David Crombie**  
*Chair, The Canadian Disability Hall of Fame*





It is always a privilege to welcome you to the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame (CDHF) Induction Luncheon. Now in its 32nd year, CDHF continues to celebrate remarkable Canadians who have

excelled as leaders, advocates, changemakers, athletes and more.

With this year's inductees, our Hall of Fame has grown to 132 members. Together they represent more than 3,000 years of service to improving lives and advancing equal opportunities.

Since its founding in 1985, Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) has remained committed to championing abilities. At CFPDP we celebrate accomplishments, honour those driving change and raise awareness of the invaluable contributions of people with physical disabilities.

We are truly grateful for your continued support of the Hall of Fame, Canada's only permanent exhibit recognizing achievements within the disability community.

Our thanks also go to The Honourable David Crombie, who has led the Selection Board with passion since the beginning, and to George Przybylowski and Tony Wight for once again serving as Co-Chairs of this event.

Because of you, the torch of opportunity burns brighter, making Canada stronger for us all.

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



As a founding Board member of Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) since its inception in 1985, I am honoured to once again serve as part of the organizing

team for our annual Canadian Disability Hall of Fame (CDHF) Induction Luncheon.

The Hall of Fame serves many important purposes. It honours individuals for their outstanding achievements and shines as a source of excellence, encouraging others to pursue their dreams. Inductees are true examples of what can be accomplished through perseverance and commitment. Equally significant, CDHF ensures that the stories and successes of Canada's disability community will be recognized and remembered for future generations.

On behalf of the entire CFPDP team, I extend heartfelt congratulations to our 2025 inductees and to the 129 remarkable individuals who came before them.

I also commend the CDHF Selection Board for its careful consideration and commitment to honouring excellence throughout the induction process.

Finally, I wish to recognize The Honourable Vim Kochhar, whose vision has guided CFPDP and CDHF from the very beginning. His passionate, lifelong commitment continues to shape and strengthen Canada's disability community from coast to coast to coast.

**George Przybylowski**  
*Co-Chair, The Canadian Disability Hall of Fame Induction Luncheon  
Board Director, Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons*



It is truly inspiring to look back at more than three decades since the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame (CDHF) was first established at Metro Hall in Toronto. Over this time, the initiative has grown

into a cornerstone program of Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP), advancing awareness and education across the country.

We proudly congratulate this year's inductees for their exceptional achievements. Whether driving meaningful change, strengthening communities or excelling in sport, each has made a lasting impact that deserves recognition.

Our deep appreciation goes to the Hall of Fame Selection Board. Through this team's efforts, CFPDP is able to shine a spotlight on extraordinary Canadians with disabilities, along with those who tirelessly champion accessibility and inclusion.

We are equally grateful to our loyal patrons, sponsors, donors, attendees and volunteers. Your continued generosity and encouragement make it possible for this celebration to continue.

I must also acknowledge The Honourable Vim Kochhar, whose drive and determination brought both CFPDP and the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame into being. His leadership has been instrumental in building a legacy of opportunity and recognition that continues to grow stronger each year.

**Tony Wight**  
*Co-Chair, The Canadian Disability Hall of Fame Induction Luncheon  
Board Director, Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons*



# Welcome to the Hall of Fame

## CELEBRATING 32 YEARS OF INDUCTEES

**T**he Canadian Disability Hall of Fame (CDHF) marked its 31st annual celebration in 2024, welcoming three more remarkable Canadians and bringing the total number of inductees to 129. Collectively, honourees have contributed more than 3,000 years of service to improving the lives of people with disabilities, with their achievements showcased at the CDHF's permanent exhibit in Toronto's Metro Hall.

The induction luncheon brought together distinguished guests, loyal sponsors, community and business leaders, longtime volunteers and dedicated supporters to recognize the newest inductees. Each new member was honoured as they joined the Hall of Fame's esteemed community of Builders, Achievers and Athletes, receiving warm applause from everyone in attendance.

"Canadians with disabilities make significant contributions and achieve greatness every day. They are building legacies, creating change, advocating for others, exceeding professional and personal milestones and excelling in athletics. There are also individuals who have made extraordinary efforts to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities, increase awareness or improve opportunities," said **The Honourable David Crombie**, Chair of the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame since its inception. "Our 2024 inductees continued that proud history of achievement."

**Penny Bennett**, inducted in the Builder category in 2024, is a leader in Canada's blind and deafblind community and is known nationwide as a strong, tireless advocate. She has spent decades building awareness and breaking down societal barriers for people with disabilities. This includes advocating for the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2015 and serving in



Canadian Disability Hall of Fame at Metro Hall, Toronto

leadership roles with numerous national, provincial and local community and disability organizations. Bennett has been involved in countless committees and boards, including Chair of CNIB Deafblind Community Services, member of the Municipal Accessibility Awareness Committee for the City of Kingston, Ontario, and Co-Chair of the National Deafblind Awareness Month Working Group, among other notable roles. She has contributed to the creation of a self-advocacy guide for the deafblind community and advocates for equitable access to intervenor services so that all Canadians who are deafblind can thrive.

Inducted as the 2024 Achiever, **Tim Rose** is a business leader, changemaker, advocate, role model and entrepreneur who works passionately to advance accessibility, inclusion and diversity initiatives. Rose believes his disability has given him a perspective and lens on the world that very few get to have, and



he approaches everything with positivity and humour. After graduating with a master's degree in human rights law focusing on disability policy, Rose has spent 15 years in both the disability and corporate sectors, from nonprofit work to employment consulting, mentoring and beyond. Since 2017, Rose has been a proud team member at CIBC, holding roles including regulatory compliance, community investment and as the lead for client experience accessibility for the 27% of Canadians who identify as having a disability. In this role, he works to make banking more inclusive for all Canadians.

The 2024 inductee in the Athlete category, **Francis Roussel**, is a remarkable competitor who won 21 medals in 28 world championship events, including five gold, ten silver and six bronze. Competing against the world's top swimmers, his phenomenal performances spanned three Deaflympics. He won seven medals at each of three consecutive games, including Sofia 1993, Copenhagen 1997 and Rome 2001. Roussel broke numerous records in a total of 22 event categories during his career and has nine Canadian records that remain unmatched as of June 2024. These categories include the 400 metre (m) individual medley, 200m butterfly, 200m freestyle, 400m freestyle, 800m freestyle and 1,500m freestyle. In addition to his athletic accomplishments, Roussel supports the development of sports within the Deaf community through his involvement and board service with the Canadian Deaf Sports Association.

"The Canadian Disability Hall of Fame was created to recognize excellence, honour role models and celebrate exceptional impact in improving the lives of people with physical disabilities," said **The Honourable Vim Kochhar**, Founding Chair of CFPDP. "Penny Bennett, Tim Rose and Francis Roussel have all excelled in their chosen fields while giving back to make Canada a better place. We congratulate them for their achievements."



2024 inductees with  
(far left) **Andrea Nalyzty**  
of presenting sponsor CIBC  
and (far right) **The Honourable  
David Crombie**, CDHF Chair

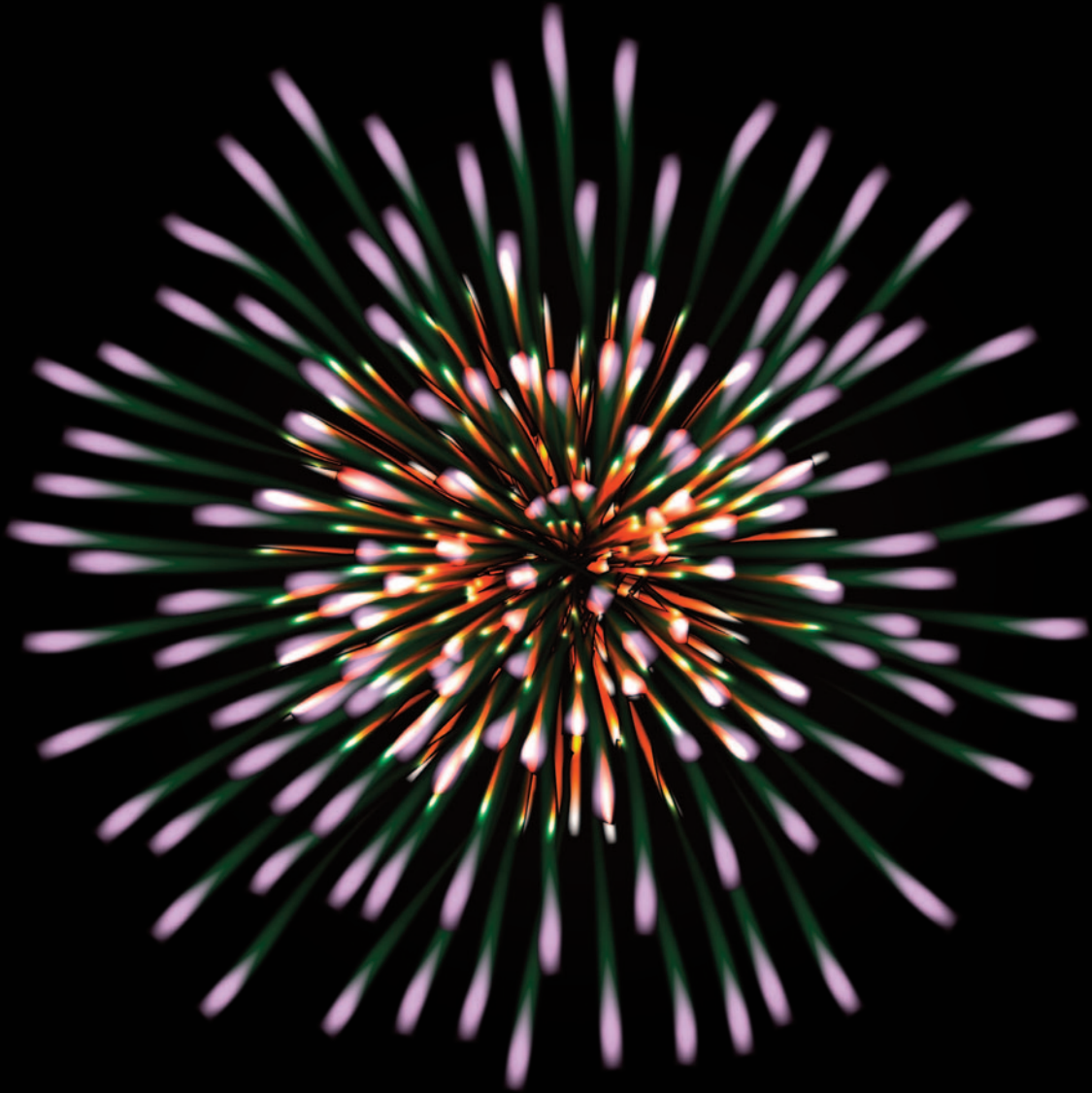


**George Przybylowski** (left) and **Tony Wight** (right), CDHF Event Co-Chairs  
and CFPDP Board Directors, with guest speaker **Ben Mulroney**



**Rob Snoek**, CDHF Emcee and CFPDP Board Director,  
and **Major Beverly Ivany**, CFPDP Board Director

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## **Congratulations!**

Deloitte congratulates the 32<sup>nd</sup> annual  
Canadian Disability Hall of Fame inductees

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Located in downtown Toronto on the ground floor of Metro Hall, 55 John Street, the Hall of Fame recognizes outstanding achievement in sports, health and rehabilitation, science and medical research, advocacy, public policy, volunteerism and community service.

## HONOURARY PATRONS

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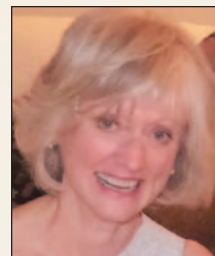
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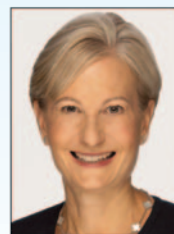
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# Momentum Builds for CFPDP's "A Seat at the Table" Initiative

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In 2019, Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) launched "A Seat at the Table" (SATT), an initiative to reshape Canada's corporate boardrooms by appointing highly qualified individuals with disabilities as board directors. Inspired by a pivotal conversation between CFPDP Founder **The Honourable Vim Kochhar** and former Prime Minister **The Right Honourable Brian Mulroney**, SATT was built on the belief that change must start at the top.

"At the 2018 Canadian Disability Hall of Fame ceremony, where he was inducted, Brian Mulroney reminded me that while creating employment opportunities is important, true influence comes when people with disabilities are present where the big decisions are made," recalls Hon. Kochhar. "That insight inspired the creation of 'A Seat at the Table.'"

At the time of its launch, CFPDP's own research suggested that people with disabilities were virtually absent from public company boards. Today, despite an increase in actual numbers, representation remains under one percent. This stands in stark contrast to the 27% of Canadians who live with a disability. The most recent Osler Diversity Disclosure Report also indicates that the number of board directors with disabilities has remained unchanged over the past year.

## A Growing Movement

SATT is guided by an influential Selection Board made up of CEOs, senior executives, university chancellors and other top leaders. To date, they have identified more than 30 board-ready professionals with disabilities, with expertise ranging from finance and law to marketing and technology.

Momentum is building. SATT candidate **Gaurav Upadhyia** has joined the boards of Amex Bank of Canada (2021) and Primerica Life Insurance Company of Canada (2024). "Issues impacting disabled people have not always been expressed ... at senior levels due to their limited representation," Upadhyia notes. "Fortunately, due to initiatives like 'A Seat at the Table,' that representation will continue to rise, and their perspectives will be shared much more."

"Every qualified person should be provided with an equal opportunity to participate as a member of a board," remarks **John A. Adams**, Chief Executive Officer of Primerica Life Canada. "Inclusivity allows everyone to grow, develop and contribute. This approach makes us stronger as a community and certainly improves [business] outcomes."

## Investing for Impact

While the statistics are static, CFPDP is not slowing down. Instead, it is investing even more in SATT to accelerate progress. The Foundation has added new capacity to augment its existing team dedicated to advancing this mission.

Earlier this year, CFPDP welcomed **Dale Heckman**, a seasoned consultant, executive and advocate who has served as a freelance writer, editor, and advisor to non-profits and small businesses, National Staff Representative for the Canadian Media Guild and Executive Director of the National Radio Producers Association. Now, she has come out of retirement to join CFPDP and help advance the goals of SATT.

"I have always gravitated to roles where I could champion people and help create meaningful change," Heckman says. "This initiative is about opening doors that have been closed for far too long and I am honoured to support that work."

Heckman's role is twofold: to further expand outreach to professional associations, nonprofits and charities to build the candidate pipeline, and to help strengthen connections with public companies and Crown corporations so that more organizations consider the value of disability representation at the board level.

## The Road Ahead

Progress is visible, yet the pace must quicken. As the Committee on the Future of Corporate Governance in Canada has noted, greater representation of underrepresented groups, including people with disabilities, is vital to the health of Canada's boardrooms.

For CFPDP, the immediate goal remains clear: to see at least 1% of directors on Canada's public company boards identify with a disability. Reaching that milestone will be just the beginning.

"Boardrooms should reflect the communities they serve," says Hon. Kochhar. "With more than one in four Canadians living with a disability, representation in leadership is not just the right thing to do – it is a business imperative. 'A Seat at the Table' is helping companies find the talented leaders who are already out there, ready to contribute. We will not stop until we achieve our first goal, and then we will aim even higher."

# THE TRADITION CONTINUES

## MEET THE 2025 INDUCTEES TO THE CANADIAN DISABILITY HALL OF FAME

*This year's Hall of Fame inductees continue a great tradition of leadership, advocacy and athletic excellence.*



### DR. TOM CHAU, *Builder*

**D**r. Tom Chau is internationally recognized for his pioneering work in developing technologies that give children and youth with severe physical impairments new ways to communicate, connect and express themselves. A Senior Scientist and Raymond Chang Foundation Chair in Access Innovations at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, and Professor at the University of Toronto's Institute of Biomedical Engineering, he has devoted his career to transforming lives through innovations such as the Virtual Music Instrument, the Hummingbird and various brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) that led to the launch of Holland Bloorview's pediatric BCI clinic in 2019.

Chau traces his inspiration back to the young people often left out of research studies. "Some [parents] had so much confidence in the potential of their child that had not yet been realized. Yet others lamented at the lack of solutions and technology to allow their child to flourish. Both of these perspectives motivated me to learn more about the needs of these children and to devote research efforts to realize some of their latent potential."

Central to Chau's work is the idea of creating "novel access pathways." As he explains, this is "a new way for someone to communicate or interact without using typical speech, hand movements or other standard gestures. In our lab, we've explored approaches that use muscle vibrations, vocal cord vibrations, changes in brain oxygenation or blood flow and facial or mouth gestures — such as opening and closing the mouth or sticking out the tongue — to control devices or convey messages."

One shining example is the Virtual Music Instrument. "Early in my career, I had the privilege of witnessing the empowering and healing experience of music therapy for children who had many physical limitations. Yet, there were some children who couldn't take part because they could not physically interact with traditional musical instruments ... We wanted to enable music-making with any part of the body that a child could control, even if those movements might be unsteady or very subtle."

The result was a non-invasive technology that lets children make music using gestures like eye blinks, head nods or wiggling a finger, captured by a camera. "Using a standard computer, webcam and monitor, players move through virtual objects on screen — such as coloured dots representing musical notes — and the software translates their gestures into sound."

Other innovations include the Hummingbird, "a wearable device that translates vibrations from the vocal cords into switch outputs, which can control communication devices, computers and other systems. This enables individuals who cannot speak or use traditional controls to access communication and environmental interaction."

Chau's team has also pioneered BCIs for children and youth. "By detecting brain signals, such as those associated with intention to move or error recognition, these systems allow children to communicate or control devices without relying on physical movement. This can be transformative for young people with limited motor control, giving them new ways to express themselves and participate in daily life."

There are powerful rewards that come with his work. Chau recalls one especially moving story: a non-verbal



DRAWINGS BY SHANNON PARKS



young man with cerebral palsy that affected both of his arms and legs trained for months with a mouth-movement system. Slowly, he spelled out his very first word: “m-u-t-h.” The team thought he meant “mouth,” but then he added “e” and “r,” calling out to his mom for the very first time at age 25. “Needless to say, this was an emotional moment for him and his mom, as well as all of us who were present,” Chau remembered.

Chau credits his team and a collaborative environment, yet his priority remains clear: “It is essential that we keep the people we serve at the centre of every decision — honouring their voices, priorities and autonomy — so that the technologies we develop truly empower them to live, communicate and participate on their own terms.”

### KEVIN J. COLLINS, *Achiever*

**K**evin J. Collins’ induction into the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame celebrates a lifelong journey of advocacy, leadership and community building. Born with cerebral palsy, he became the Orillia Kiwanis Club Easter Seals ambassador “Timmy” from 1973 to 1975, then the provincial “Timmy” in 1976. These early experiences launched a five-decade path as a champion for children and youth with physical disabilities, including speaking at nearly 1,000 events.

“As a provincial ‘Timmy,’ being introduced at the annual Conn Smythe Sports Celebrities Dinner and carried into the venue hall on the shoulders of [Canadian professional wrestler] ‘Whipper’ Billy Watson [is a vivid memory]. That entire year was spent meeting so many incredible people who all supported Easter Seals,” he said.

After beginning his professional career in the hotel industry, Collins joined Easter Seals Ontario in 1991 as Manager of Corporate and Special Events, then became Executive Director of Friends of We Care, which unites the foodservice and hospitality industry to support Easter Seals. In that role, he helped grow annual revenue from \$250,000 to \$1 million. “This role allowed me to combine my education and original career in hospitality to continue building relationships and raising awareness and funds for an organization that means the world to me.”

Since 2017, as President and CEO of Easter Seals Ontario, Collins has led efforts to increase financial

support, expand brand awareness and create opportunities for children with physical disabilities. A highlight was celebrating the organization’s 100th anniversary with a fundraising road trip across the province, which included bringing ambassadors to meet the Prime Minister.

Collins’ lived experience with cerebral palsy continues to shape the way he advocates for children and families. “[I am] proving and showing people that no matter what potential challenges you may deal with, you can always work towards achieving your dreams and goals,” he said. To one reporter, he once described life this way: “Life is like a track and field race — you will need to jump over a number of hurdles. Having a disability sometimes prevents you from jumping over these hurdles, [so] you need to go around them instead. The bottom line is that we all eventually get to the finish line.”

He takes seriously the responsibility of being a role model, community leader and disability advocate. “It is what motivates me the most. Talking with kids and parents and sharing my experiences both personally and professionally is an added bonus,” said Collins. “I strive to lead by example,

showing others — especially young people with disabilities — that they are capable, valuable and deserving of respect and opportunities.”

Collins adds, “I fight for access, equity, and representation. Advocacy means speaking up when something isn’t right, whether that’s in education, employment, healthcare, or public spaces, and pushing for systems that support dignity, independence and opportunity for all. It also means challenging stigma, breaking down barriers and curbs, and educating others to shift attitudes toward inclusion.”

When discussing his success, Collins points first to others. “There are so many individuals I would like

to thank for their support, but most importantly, Maria, my spouse, who has been by my side for over 35 years. She continues to be my strongest advocate and follows in my footsteps of mentoring kids, supporting their families and giving them hope that their child can also get married one day.”

Learning of his induction into the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame, Collins said he felt “overwhelmed,” adding that it is “such an incredible honour to be included with so many amazing people who have dedicated their lives to advocate, support and achieve success in the disability sector. Sharing the space with individuals like ‘Whipper’ Billy Watson is truly a dream come true.”





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## INA FORREST, *Athlete*

**I**na Forrest's induction into the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame honours nearly two decades as a cornerstone of Canada's National Wheelchair Curling Team, where she has won four Paralympic medals — including two gold — and six World Championship medals while also serving as a flag bearer and role model. She has also represented Team BC, winning four national medals (two silver, two bronze). Recognized for her remarkable achievements, she received the Best Female Athlete Award from the Canadian Paralympic Committee after Sochi 2014 and was inducted into the Canadian Curling Hall of Fame in 2016.

Her curling journey began unexpectedly. "I was shopping in a Costco when I was approached by an avid wheelchair curler, Eric Eales, who asked if I would be interested in wheelchair curling," Forrest recalled. "My youngest child had just started kindergarten, so I thought it would be a fun way to fill an afternoon or two. When I discovered it was a Paralympic sport, I was inspired to become a Paralympian."

Among Forrest's many career highlights, one stands above the rest. "My most memorable moment was winning a gold medal at my first Paralympics in my home country, Canada, in my home province, BC, with my family and closest friends there to share the moment. Having the medal placed around my neck, seeing the Canadian flag being raised while singing 'O Canada' is a moment I still feel in my heart."

She said, "At every event, my goal is to play my best and support my team. It is truly amazing when [our] performance results in a podium finish. We are teammates but ultimately friends with the same goals and aspirations, so the thrill of winning a medal together is a tremendous, shared elation."

Forrest has also carried the Canadian flag with pride. "The Opening Ceremonies are the celebration of achieving the dream of being a Paralympian, representing Canada and being part of Team Canada," she said of Beijing 2022. "Being one of the flag bearers ... and leading all those talented Canadian athletes toward the moments of their great achievements had a sense of responsibility. I am always proud to be a member of Team Canada, but that

day it was an intensified feeling of being proud of everyone's Paralympic journey."

Family has been at the centre of Forrest's Paralympic experience. "The Paralympics are the pinnacle of our sport with all the ceremonies and fanfare. I feel so fortunate that my family has been able to enjoy the international travel and the highest peaks of my sport, since they were the ones who enabled me to continue playing ... Though they think I never look up in the crowd, I always know they are there at every game [and] handing them the Paralympic medal is the greatest moment of sharing for me. My children are not huge curling fans, but they are huge Mum fans and knowing they are proud of me is one of my happiest moments in life."

In addition to her achievements on the ice, Forrest has given back by serving on the Canadian Paralympic Committee Athletes' Council and through her longtime support of charitable causes such as Plan International. Her spirit of commitment and giving back made the recognition of her induction especially meaningful, with the news shared in a personal call from The Honourable Vim Kochhar, founder of Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) and the Hall of Fame.

"Our team has been supported financially and recognized for our podium achievements after every Paralympics at an amazing

celebration by CFPDP. I have so appreciated their commitment to bringing recognition to Paralympic athletes. When I received the call from Vim [about my induction into the Hall of Fame], I was very surprised, and yet again so heartened by the recognition from the Foundation. I was very touched to have been nominated by my teammate Jon Thurston and honoured to have been chosen by the induction committee because I know there are so many amazing Canadian athletes worthy of the recognition."

Ever humble, Forrest insists her accomplishments are a testament to collaboration. "It is important to me that my accomplishments be recognized within the framework of a team effort and accomplishment. Ours is a team sport and virtually every shot is a team effort of collaborating our collective understandings to enable the best shot execution. Sharing all the experiences with my teammates is one of the best parts of sport."





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# New Award Opens Doors for Students with Disabilities at Nipissing University

Students at Nipissing University living with physical disabilities will soon have access to a transformative new opportunity thanks to a generous partnership with Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP). The newly established “Honourable Vim Kochhar Award” will be awarded annually to two students who demonstrate resilience and potential while living with disabilities. It is made possible through a \$110,000 donation from CFPDP in partnership with the **Shah Family Foundation**. With matching funds from Nipissing, the endowment fund of \$220,000 will provide support in perpetuity.

The award at Nipissing is part of a pan-Canadian collaboration between CFPDP and the Shah Family Foundation, which will see similar funds established nationwide as part of the Foundation’s “A Seat at the Table” program.

This award offers more than financial support — it’s a statement of inclusion, equity and belief in the power of education to change lives. It marks the first award of its kind at Nipissing, and it is designed to help remove financial barriers that can stand in the way of academic success and personal growth.

“On behalf of Nipissing University, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to CFPDP in collaboration with the Shah Family Foundation for their generous gift and commitment to students,” shared **Dr. Kevin Wamsley**, President and Vice-Chancellor at Nipissing University. “The support of these two organizations will make a meaningful difference in the lives of students

with disabilities, helping to ensure all students are empowered to succeed.”

The award is named in honour of **The Honourable Vim Kochhar**, founder and volunteer Chair and CEO of CFPDP, and a tireless advocate for accessibility and inclusion for over four decades. His legacy continues to inspire change across Canada, and this award ensures that his vision reaches future generations of students.

“Our partnership with Nipissing and other universities and colleges ensures lasting resources for students with disabilities while nurturing tomorrow’s leaders,” says Hon. Kochhar. “This effort reflects the Shah Family Foundation’s commitment to providing meaningful resources that foster individual growth and strengthen communities. We are very grateful for their partnership to help make this initiative possible.”

Hon. Kochhar continued, “Working to make Canada the best country in the world for people with disabilities is the honour of my lifetime. I am deeply moved to see visionaries like Kris and Neelam Shah, along with their family, investing in creating opportunities that champion students with disabilities as they grow to become executives, entrepreneurs and community changemakers.”

“This endowment allows us to recognize and support the incredible potential of students living with disabilities,” said **Dr. Scott Russell**, Chancellor of Nipissing University.

“We’re honoured to partner with CFPDP to create more equitable opportunities for future generations of Lakers.”



**Neelam and Kris Shah, The Shah Family Foundation**

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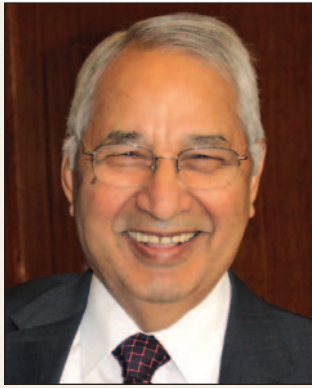
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**Hon. Vim Kochhar**



**Dr. Kevin Wamsley**



**Dr. Scott Russell**

The funding comes as part of CFPDP's "A Seat at the Table" (SATT) initiative, launched in 2019 to encourage corporate Canada to diversify its boards of directors by appointing qualified individuals with disabilities. CFPDP's SATT endowment funds program is creating pathways to post-secondary education for students with disabilities who might otherwise face barriers. A landmark \$1.3 million donation from the Shah Family Foundation is enabling the creation of 13 permanent student awards at universities and colleges nationwide. With matching funds from CFPDP and the participating schools, this collaborative effort will result in a \$2.82 million investment across the country.

"The Shah Family Foundation is deeply honoured to support this transformative initiative to advance equity, accessibility and opportunity in education in collaboration with Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons," says **Kris Shah**, President of the Shah Family Foundation. "These endowment funds, named in recognition of The Honourable Vim Kochhar, reflect our

shared belief that education is a powerful tool for empowerment and opportunity. By helping students with disabilities pursue their academic goals, we hope to build a legacy of inclusion, resilience and progress that will benefit individuals and communities across Canada for generations to come."

"These endowment funds reflect our dedication to fostering inclusion and creating lasting impacts for students who face unique challenges in pursuing higher education," says **Neelam Shah**. "Our work with CFPDP aligns perfectly with their mission to build academic pathways and cultivate leadership opportunities for students with disabilities. Together, the Shah Family Foundation and CFPDP aim to create a positive and lasting impact."

Eligible students at Nipissing will be able to apply for the award beginning in the 2026/2027 academic year, with the goal of helping them thrive academically, socially and professionally.

### **Endowment funds established:**

- 1 York University - CFPDP
- 2 Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) - CFPDP
- 3 Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) - Vim Kochhar - CFPDP
- 4 University of Manitoba - Asper Foundation - CFPDP
- 5 Pearson College, Vancouver - Vim Kochhar
- 6 Ivey Business School at the University of Western Ontario - Thorpe Family Foundation in partnership with CFPDP
- 7 Queen's University - Duncan and Michelle Sinclair Foundation in partnership with CFPDP's "A Seat at the Table" program
- 8 Osgoode Hall Law School at York University - Abe Bresver Award with CFPDP
- 9 York University - Noor Award with CFPDP
- 10 Queen's University - Jim Leech in partnership with CFPDP's "A Seat at the Table" program
- 11 Ontario Tech University - Dottori-Attanasio Family with CFPDP Award
- 12 University of Calgary - Aaron Family Award for Students with Disabilities in partnership with CFPDP's "A Seat at the Table" program
- 13 University of New Brunswick - The Honourable Vim Kochhar Award in Partnership with Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons
- 14 Nipissing University - The Honourable Vim Kochhar Award in Partnership with Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons
- 15 University of Alberta - The Honourable Vim Kochhar Graduate Bursary in Partnership with Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons

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# Love, Laughter and Legacy

## A Preview of the 42nd Annual Great Valentine Gala

**N**EXT VALENTINE'S DAY will be one to remember. On Saturday, February 14, 2026, Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) will host its 42nd Annual Great Valentine Gala at the Fairmont Royal York — and for the first time in many years, the celebration lands on Valentine's Day itself.

The evening promises elegance and entertainment, with Scott Russell returning as host to guide guests through cherished customs and fresh experiences. For decades, the Gala stage has welcomed world-class entertainers, but in 2026 the spotlight is shifting in an exciting new direction — toward the guests. The program will offer more time to mingle, share stories and build relationships. Conversation and camaraderie will take centre stage, enhanced by the return of the popular fireside chat, which debuted to rave reviews last year.

To keep the energy flowing, a sumptuous dessert buffet will tempt guests with decadent treats while creating even more moments for socializing. And of course, guests will find the signature elements that have made the Gala a highlight of Canada's social calendar for more than four decades. This includes

awards presentations celebrating the disability community and its champions, elegant photo opportunities to capture the magic of the black-tie optional evening and the ever-popular Tombola game of chance, where each shimmering red mylar heart balloon holds a dazzling prize. From event tickets and fine dining to romantic surprises and more, every balloon is a guaranteed win, with proceeds supporting CFPDP's vital programs.

"The Gala is a joyful night of glamour and generosity, celebrating love in all its forms — love of community, love of inclusion and love of possibility," says The Honourable Vim Kochhar, Chair of CFPDP. "Since its inception in 1985, the Gala has raised over \$40 million to support Canadians with disabilities. It's much more than a fundraiser and awareness event. It is a beloved Valentine's tradition."

Mark your calendars for February 14, 2026. Join us for a night of love, laughter and legacy as we celebrate the disability community in style.

Sponsorship opportunities and tickets for CFPDP's 42nd Annual Great Valentine Gala are available through our events team via [whynot@cfpdp.com](mailto:whynot@cfpdp.com) or (416) 760-7351.





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# CHKC 150 Eighth Street Update

## *New apartment complex for deafblind community nears completion*

Last fall, **Canadian Helen Keller Centre (CHKC)** was preparing to break ground on a new \$44 million, 56-unit affordable and accessible apartment building for people who are deafblind or living with physical disabilities. Today, that vision is close to becoming a reality.

Construction at 150 Eighth Street in Toronto's Etobicoke-Lakeshore neighbourhood is just weeks from completion. Final touches — from painting to countertops — are being finished and tenants are expected to move in before the end of the year. For CHKC, founded by **Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP)**, this milestone represents a renewed promise of inclusion and opportunity.

"It is an incredible feeling of pride and anticipation," says **Philip Corke**, Board Chair of CHKC. "Personally, it's moving to see years of vision, planning and dedication materialize into something so tangible. As an organization, we are thrilled to be this close to providing a second home that will truly change lives. There is a sense of excitement, but also a deep gratitude for everyone who has helped bring us to this point."

For Corke and the board, this project reflects the very heart of CHKC's mission. "It reinforces why I first became involved — to ensure that people who are deafblind have every opportunity to live with dignity, independence and connection," he says.

The new CHKC residence is designed not only to provide housing, but also to foster community. A 6,500-square-foot training facility and shared amenities, including a rooftop garden, will help residents learn life skills, connect with peers and reduce social isolation.

One of the most rewarding parts of the journey, says Corke, has been seeing the project's many collaborators come together. "From board members and staff to architects and contractors to donors and community advocates, every step has been a reminder that this is bigger than just a building."

That spirit of cooperation was evident at the ground-breaking ceremony in November 2024. "To have residents, donors, board members and community leaders all gathered with shovels in hand — it was a powerful reminder that this was a shared dream," Corke recalls.



CFPDP and CHKC Founding Chair **The Honourable Vim Kochhar** joins CEO **Jennifer Robbins** (together, front centre), Board Director **Anupam Kothari** (second from left) and Board Chair **Philip Corke** (back row, far right), alongside other passionate board directors and team members in celebrating progress on the Eighth Street building, September 2025.

# Congratulations to the inductees of the 32nd Annual Canadian Disability Hall of Fame!



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“Watching the first modules go up was another unforgettable moment because it was the first time we could physically see the home taking shape.”

That shared dream has been made possible by support from the government, community partners and private donors. “What resonates most is the generosity that comes from people who may never directly benefit from this home, yet see the value in making it possible,” says Corke. “In particular, and if I could only name one, it would be **Anupam Kothari** and the **Kothari Group**, who have not only been very generous with their financial donation, but the time and construction knowledge that Anupam has invested to bring this project to a start and close has been instrumental and immensely appreciated.”

This new project builds directly on CHKC’s legacy. In 1992, with support from CFPDP and the provincial government, CHKC opened the world’s first barrier-free, independent-living apartment complex for people who are deafblind.

“This second residence builds on that legacy by showing that the need is still great and that CHKC continues to lead the way in creating spaces where people who are deafblind can live independently,” says Corke. “It is about carrying that pioneering spirit forward while also adapting to the evolving needs of the community.”

As completion nears, excitement within the deafblind community is palpable. “Deafblind consumers, CHKC staff

and residents alike are eager to see the doors open,” Corke notes. “There is a sense of validation — that their needs and voices are being heard and acted upon. It has also sparked a lot of [excitement], not just here but across the broader community, that this type of inclusive housing is possible and achievable.”

Asked to describe the project in a single word, Corke chooses one that captures both the tangible and symbolic essence of the work. “Hope,” he says. “Because at its core, this building is about more than bricks and mortar — it is about the continued promise of a future where people who are deafblind have the opportunity to live independently, supported by a caring community.”

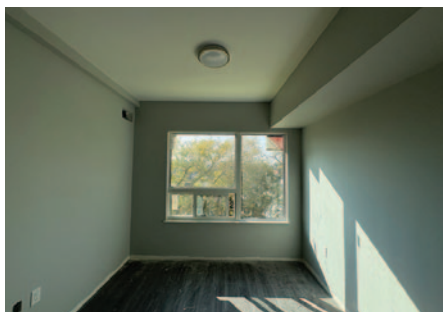
While construction is nearly complete, fundraising continues for the final portion of the project. Corke encourages all who can to play a part. “There is still time to make a lasting impact ... Every dollar brings us closer to completing a home that will serve generations. Your support doesn’t just build walls — it builds independence, dignity and community. Whether it’s a major gift or a small contribution, every act of support has carried the same message: that the deafblind community deserves a home designed with them in mind.”

Please contact CFPDP to donate or for information regarding available sponsorship opportunities via [whynot@cfpdp.com](mailto:whynot@cfpdp.com) or (416) 760-7351.

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*“CHKC continues to lead the way in creating spaces where people who are deafblind can live independently.”*

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**Top left:** A bright bedroom at 150 Eighth Street awaits finishing touches.

**Top right:** Tactile flooring in the stairwells and other areas will help residents move safely through the building.

**Bottom left, centre left and centre right:** An accessible bathroom nears completion.

**Bottom right:** An accessible kitchen awaits the installation of its countertop.



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## 2026 CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

**THE CANADIAN DISABILITY HALL OF FAME** recognizes distinguished Canadians who have made significant contributions to assisting or enhancing the lives of physically disabled persons.

Both disabled and non-disabled persons may be inducted into the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame. Individuals are inducted into one of three categories: *Builder*, *Achiever* or *Athlete*.

Nominations are considered on the basis of information provided. Please submit as detailed an account of the individual's background as possible, including a resume or biography and any additional material, such as newspaper clippings, testimonial letters, etc., via [www.cdhf.cfpdp.com](http://www.cdhf.cfpdp.com).

Submissions can also be sent to:

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Please include your name, address and phone number. Nominations to be submitted no later than **May 4, 2026**.





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# Celebrating community role models

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