



Respect Works Here

Community Champion

For **Herb Wong**, volunteering is a family tradition. Herb is a third generation Canadian, yet his commitment to volunteering can still be traced to his family's immigrant roots.

His grandfather, a Chinese immigrant, came to BC to work on the CP Railroad and when that was complete, took a job as a houseboy to a family.

"The fellow he worked for was a lawyer and he helped my grandfather to learn English and to establish his business," continues Herb. "The immigration laws at that time didn't allow Chinese people to bring a wife or family over unless they had a business."

Once his business and family were established, Herb's grandfather committed to giving back and was one of the founding members of the Chinese Freemasons Society in the early 1900s. The fraternal organization was started to help Chinese immigrants to settle in their new community. "This was before the government sponsored multicultural programs. My father and other Freemasons would help immigrants with setting up their businesses and getting settled."

Herb's father, John, joined the Freemasons when he was just 15 and volunteered diligently for almost 65 years before his death in 2001.

"My father was a big influence on me, especially in terms of community involvement," says Herb. "He wouldn't say 'you have to do this', but rather, he led by example."

The Wong family moved to the Kootenays to run a restaurant when Herb was an infant. After attending university in Vancouver and starting his accounting career, Herb returned to Vernon because he liked the lifestyle and wanted to be closer to family. His father had also returned to Vernon and his brother and family were in Revelstoke.

Back in Vernon, he became involved with the Freemasons, volunteering side-by-side with his father. When the Chinese Masonic Lodge was sold to the province to establish the Gateway shelter, Wong ensured there was signage that not only commemorated the historical impact of the Chinese community in Vernon but also acknowledged the historical wrongs perpetrated against Chinese immigrants by the government.

In 2004, he joined the Board of the Community Foundation of the North Okanagan which has experienced tremendous growth during his 13-year tenure. He is clearly very proud of the Foundation's achievements and its ability to fund worthwhile community projects.

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Shortly after joining the Foundation, Herb determined that his career in the financial sector lacked fulfillment and he made a change, becoming a construction electrician. "Actually the mental skill set I need are very similar for both jobs," he says. "But now I work with my hands more."

Herb has also been a member of the Eagles for over 25 years and gives back to the sport he enjoys: curling. "Most people are unaware that I umpire curling playdowns at the provincial and national level," says Herb.

When asked why he volunteers so much, he says simply, "There are a lot of things in our community that wouldn't get done without volunteers. I do it because I like it. It's one of those things that you need to believe in. If you don't enjoy it, you shouldn't do it."

