

Respect Works Here

Community Champion

Sponsored by his sister's husband to come to Canada, **Paramjit Singh Janda** was encouraged to cut his hair and remove his turban in order to fit in. As a devout Sikh, he found this very difficult. However, his desire to come to Canada - a safe place, where there is order and people follow the laws - overcame his reservations and he complied. Sacrificing strong beliefs and cultural heritage, in return for safety and inclusion, is a common struggle for immigrants.

The turban represents the sense of duty Sikhs have to be defenders and their willingness to always be seen. It's a tradition determined by one of the ten Gurus of Sikhism, to have Sikh men stand out in a crowd as a beacon to those in need. Additionally, orthodox Sikhs are asked to wear the five Ks as articles of faith: Kesh (uncut hair), Kara (a steel bracelet), Kanga (a wooden comb), Kachera (boxer shorts with drawstrings) and Kirpan (a steel sword).

Celebrating diversity strengthens our communities and our nation. A few years after being in Canada, Paramjit realized that these early fears of ostracism and exclusion were unfounded and he is proudly wearing a turban again. Finding a safe home where he could raise his family and still reflect and practice important tenets of his faith, is part of what makes Paramjit such a fiercely proud Canadian today.

His strength and contentment shines through as he explains that he is so proud to have his own business and that he has had opportunities that have allowed him to get ahead.

A farmer in Punjab, India, Paramjit came to Vernon in 1994 and worked as a farm labourer for ten years. Now he is very busy running his own business by leasing over 55 acres of orchard that he tends in Vernon, Oyama and Kelowna. Paramjit is happy his kids have opportunities in their home country, with his son hoping to become an RCMP member and his daughter desiring to be a nurse.

Paramjit is recognized as a Community Champion for his generosity and leadership for other immigrants and the community at large.

An active member of the North Okanagan Sikh Cultural Society, Paramjit was on the executive for seven years (five as president) and was also part of the Vernon Punjab Heritage Society.

His wife, Rajwinder, for years has been in charge of overseeing the preparation for the communal meal called Langar after service at the Gurdwara, Sikh temple, on Sundays. The tradition of Langar represents the core belief that all humans are equal. Everyone – man, woman, rich or poor, Sikh or visitors to the temple – eat together in a common room, symbolizing the oneness of humankind.

“ We don't leave anyone behind. We believe in equality and service and we are friendly and welcoming. ”

~ Paramjit Singh Janda

The Sikh tradition of seva or selfless service underlines Paramjit's determination to support both the Sikh community and the community at large. When newcomers arrive, they get support to find jobs, to connect with people and services in the community and even financial aid when needed. The Jandas' seva goes beyond the Sikh community and when a friend was organizing a volleyball meet, Paramjit and Rajwinder opened their home to a 25-member team of girls that were not able to find accommodation elsewhere.

“When I first came here, it was very hard to start. But now it's good,” he says, happy to be able to give back. “That is my religion. We are the protectors, we don't leave anyone behind. We believe in equality and service and we are friendly and welcoming.”

And he proudly wears his turban as symbol of all of these qualities.

