

MONEY

MAKE SAVE SPEND

PAUL LUKE (EDITOR) • 604-605-2018 • pluke@theprovince.com | MONDAY, JUNE 28, 2010



Seeking hidden talents

Artzi Stuff arts and crafts store offers handmade clothing and features works by more than 40 B.C. artists

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MEET YOUR MERCHANT


COMPANY:
Fruiticana

EMPLOYEES:
500

STORES:
Fifteenth location opening on the Fraser Highway in Surrey in August

BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY:
"I'm a partner, not a boss"

Special foods have grocer flying high

TONY SINGH: In touch with his multicultural consumer base

 BY SHANNON MELNYK
MATA PRESS SERVICE

Tony Singh is the accidental grocer.

"I was an architectural student, but decided there was no future for me there. I got my pilot's licence, but that got put aside when I got married," he says.

"It's always the girl that changes your career."

Singh has given up a life in the air, but he's flying high with 14 Fruiticana stores in B.C. and Alberta stocked with specialty products from India, Pakistan,

Thailand, Dubai, Australia, Mexico and the Philippines.

The president and founder of one of Canada's major produce and spice importers and wholesalers started with a single location to support his family and transformed it into a \$100-million company.

Born in India and raised in Montreal from the age of 10, Singh moved to Surrey in 1992 and relied on his experience working in produce as a student when he opened a small store in Newton.

It was a challenging year: his

family relied upon his wife's dental hygienist's salary to set up shop.

Singh worked 16-hour days as janitor, buyer, banker, fruit picker and merchant.

He soon added trailblazer to the list, importing items such as fresh sugar cane, Indian yams and guavas — products that weren't readily available in Western Canada.

His ability to obtain specialty items worldwide was quickly welcomed by a multicultural consumer base. Singh gives credit to what he feels is an inherent

Canadian ease in crossing cultural boundaries in business.

"I am a Canadian first, then Indian."

What started out as a way to supply goods to the East Indian community is expanding into a 105,000-square-foot temperature controlled warehouse — that he says is the only one of its kind in Canada.

He now hopes to expand Fruiticana across Canada and into the U.S.

Singh is well known for the giving of his time and money in fundraising initiatives that flow

■ **Tony Singh is president and founder of Fruiticana stores, one of Canada's major produce and spice importers and wholesalers.**

— HANDOUT PHOTO

■ *If you want to be featured in Meet Your Merchant, please contact merchant@postpeopleinc.com*



from personal experiences.

At Surrey Memorial Hospital, Singh found himself receiving what he remembers as exceptional care during some of life's most important moments: the birth of his three children, and the death of his father.

Those experiences moved him to become an active donor and fundraiser in the push to build a new emergency wing.

This commitment has expanded within his family: his daughter has become a volunteer at her very birthplace, Surrey Memorial Hospital.

Singh and his team are also active participants in the B.C. Children's Hospital telethon and his staff takes part in children's hospital programs and events.

He also is active in education as a founding member of the SPARK Foundation, a non-profit endeavour that helps at-risk youth get a university education.

And, through the Indo-Canadian Business Association, Fruiticana has contributed to 400 student scholarships.

Whether Singh is making business decisions in a boardroom, handing out 45,000 cups of sugarcane juice during Vaisakhi or helping his children give away watermelons, he is content in blending life and work.

"What you take, you must give back," he says.

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