

Sussan Ekrami, philanthropist and President of the Norooz Education Foundation.

The article was published at www.noroozfoundation.ca

Sussan Ekrami's philanthropic activities began with the establishment and operation of the Public & International department of Queen's hospital for Burn and Reconstructive surgery in Tehran in early 1970s.

Since becoming a Canadian Citizen in 1984, Sussan has channeled both her passion for philanthropic causes and her management skills toward the Norooz Education Foundation, which she founded in 1985 in Toronto. She continues to be involved with the Behnam Charity Group serving Cancer patients, as well as the Mehr foundation for handicapped girls and Noor Ehsan for single mothers.

Born and raised in Iran, Sussan is an MBA graduate of the Iran Management Institute. She is a mother of two sons, both practicing physicians serving in Canada and the United States.

NoRooz Educational Foundation,

The signing into law of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom in 1982 was a seminal event for Sussan Ekrami, a native of Iran who had recently chosen vibrant, multicultural and peaceful Canada as her new home.

Steeped in the rich cultural heritage of her land of birth and animated by its ancient tradition of respect for human rights, famously exhibited by Cyrus the Great's Declaration of Human Rights circa 550 bca, Sussan set on the task of creating a forum for bringing together Canadians of various cultural backgrounds as a means of celebrating their common human experience in the spirit of the new Charter and the old Declaration.

The symbolic vehicle that best lends itself to the balance between the old and the new, it occurred to Sussan, is the equinox which she saw as a gift from Mother Nature. The equinox is when day and night are of equal length and it happens in spring and autumn of the year. Sussan thought of this balance and cycle of renewal as a fitting reflection of the Canadian bond of citizenship. It also kept her true to her origins where the vernal equinox, Norooz in Persian, has been celebrated at the beginning of each year for millennia.

With the support of generous leaders of the community, Sussan's contagious enthusiasm paid off in 1985 when the New Day Foundation--the forerunner of today's Norooz Foundation--was officially registered as a non-profit organization with Sussan Ekrami and Dr. Cuyler Young Jr., the then Director of the Royal Ontario Museum, as co founders. The first board of the Foundation consisted of distinguished members of academic and professional communities of Canada, a composition that continues to date. The first honorary chairman of the board was Ambassador George Ignatieff who was the Chancellor of the University of Toronto at the time

The New Day Foundation's inaugural event took place on March 22, 1986 at Hart House in the university of Toronto, in the presence of the distinguished guests The Honorable Lincoln Alexander, Lieutenant Governor Of Ontario, His Grace Bishop Sotiros, Head of the Greek Church of Canada, Dr. Lily Munroe, Minister of Citizenship and Culture of Ontario and Mr. Paul MacCrossan MP, representing the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism. Dr. George Ignatieff CC presided as Chairman of the Symposium

In 1986, New Day Foundation was also the sponsor of the Soka Gakkai International Photo Exhibition at Robot's Library in University of Toronto, bringing awareness to the Nuclear Arms Threat to our world.

This day was not only an observance of the Spring Equinox, but also a tribute to the International Year of Peace as designated by the United Nations. As part of the Inaugural celebration, the ceremonial planting of Tree of Peace took place at Queen's Park.

Canadian Multiculturalism in a Global Interdependence

In a Salute to Equinox, on March 25, 1989, New Day Foundation presented a Symposium chaired by Dr. George Ignatieff CC. Dr. Wemer Dutz addressed the audience on The Roots of Monotheistic Religions: Nomads in Crisis. He was followed by Mr. Mendel Green QC who led a panel of speakers on the topic of Racial Harmony in Canada. The Reception featuring the lively Caribbean rhythms of Yorktones Steel Band followed a selection of young musicians.

A New Approach to Multiculturalism

Our second annual event, "A New Approach to Multiculturalism" was held on March 21, 1987, again in the Great Hall of Hart House, in the presence of His Honor, The Lieutenant Governor, The Honorable David Crombie, Secretary of State of Canada and Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism, represented by Mr. Alan Redway, QC, MP and the Honorable Lily Munroe, Minister of Citizenship and Culture of Ontario, Dr. Ignatieff acted as Chairman of the Symposium.

Speakers: Prof. Jacob Thomas
Prof. Julia Ching
Prof. Roger Savory
Prof. Anne Dooley

Celebration

A Musical Pageant with the participation of distinguished Canadian performing Artists, Instrumental Soloists' with special appearance by SALOME BEY under the direction of John Kim Bell.

We have enjoyed the encouraging support of His.Hon, Lincoln Alexander, The Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario since we began our activities. Every spring, after each successful project, our members & guest were invited for a reception. March 21, 1988 was indeed an exception. His Honor, extended a gracious invitation to the Foundation to attend a reception under his patronage to celebrate the New Day. Over one hundred members, community leaders, academics, artists, and friends of the foundation were received in His Honor's suite at Queen's Park. This generous act of friendship and respect was representative of the encouragement and tangible support which His Honor has given to our organization during his tenure. We remain deeply appreciative of His Honor's invaluable contribution to the work and well being of our Foundation

Legislation Alone Cannot Ensure Racial Harmony

On May 2, 1989, The New Day Foundation and the Toronto Mayor's Committee on Community and Race Relations presented a debate on the topic of race relations. The debate was held at Hart House, University of Toronto. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Canadian alliance for Solidarity of Native People, the Inter- community Youth Association, were among the organization represented in the debate.

Ignatieff Memorial

In 1991, in gratitude, and in memory of Dr. Ignatieff a ceremony was held at the Trinity College, University of Toronto and a red oak tree was planted at the entrance of the George Ignatieff Theatre. The plaque was subsequently unveiled in 1992.

Supporting Institutions and Organizations

University of Toronto
Royal Ontario Museum
Royal Conservatory of Music
National Ballet School of Canada
Canadian School of Management
Toronto French School
CBC Ontario Region
Canadian Native Art Foundation
Canadian Chinese National Council
Canadian Society of Comparative Study of Civilization
Iranian Ferdowsi Association
National Indo-Canadian Council
Toronto Mayor's Committee on Race Relations
Urban Alliance on Race Relation

The Foundation, which has since been renamed The NoRooz Educational Foundation, received charitable status in 1989. Since its inception it has focused on cultural education by using various means of creative expression such as poetry, dance and music. It has developed and implemented an extensive outreach program in the form of The Equinox Award, a competition among high school students. The pilot phase of this competition has been running successfully in the York region. The goal of the Foundation is to extend the Equinox Award competition to all high schools in the York region and later, in succession, to high schools in the greater Toronto area, Ontario, and finally to other provinces of Canada.