

Connect Legal Most Promising Immigrant Entrepreneur Award

BACKGROUND ON FINALISTS

Carolina Velez, ColombiaExotic: Importer of exotic fruits & other natural products

“Many times big corporations closed the door on me....Instead of feeling defeated I took the entrepreneurial path and now I couldn't go back to be an employee. Coming to Canada and becoming an entrepreneur have been the best decisions I have made in my life so far.”

Carolina arrived in Canada with a business degree earned in her native Colombia. Although she found jobs with prestigious companies, her lack of Canadian education was limiting her ability to climb the corporate ladder. Carolina saw an opportunity to leverage the new trading relationship between Colombia and Canada and bring some of her favourite fruits to Canada. Carolina formed ColombiaExotic, and became among the first distributors in Ontario of an exotic fruit called yellow pitahaya, with Loblaws as her first customer.

Attending a Connect Legal workshop helped Carolina understand the different forms of business organization. Further volunteer lawyer assistance enabled Carolina to read and negotiate supplier contracts with confidence.

After just twelve months in business, Carolina expects to import over two tons of yellow pitahaya per week and is quickly expanding her importing to other exotic fruits and even non-perishable items. Carolina believes that Canada is a country of possibilities and anyone can achieve their goals with hard work and perseverance.

Vibhor Chhabra, Grand Travel Planners Ltd.: Tourism company operator

“Immigrants are willing to work very hard to succeed in Canada and therefore it is very important for Canada to support their efforts so that everyone wins.”

Vibhor came to Canada from India as an MBA student. After graduating from York University, he worked for some major Canadian corporations, but eventually decided to launch his own tourism business. Grand Travel Planner Ltd. specializes in independent group tours between Canada and India. Working with his family's travel business back in India allows Vibhor to offer travelers expert advice to clients on the ground in both countries.

Vibhor found Connect Legal online and reached out for help negotiating his commercial lease and setting up employment contracts and policies.

Sanjay Pandrala, BUGMAN Pest Control Landscaping Services & Trading Company: Landscaping maintenance and pest control

“We hope that our experience will become an example for other new immigrant entrepreneurs who come to Canada to follow their own hopes and dreams.”

With a B.Sc. in horticultural science from India and work experience in India, Oman and Canada, Sanjay decided that if he truly wanted to get ahead, he should start his own business. With the purchase of a sprayer and the distribution of some flyers, *Bugman Pest Control* was launched.

Sanjay leveraged the Connect Legal program to develop the employment and customer contracts needed to run his business.

Today Sanjay's perseverance has paid off. He has served almost 800 clients and he uses every opportunity to market additional services to existing and potential clients.

Igor Chigrin, Win Global Partners: Export and distribution services

“Focus—As soon as you know exactly who your clients are, where they go or what they read you will immediately understand what marketing channels you need to use and what message to deliver.”

Since immigrating from Russia with his wife four years ago, Igor has established his business and welcomed his first baby, all while holding down a full time job in the IT sector. Back in Russia, Igor worked in import and distribution and today he is offering his services to Canadian companies who need help accessing foreign markets.

Through attending a Connect Legal workshop, Igor became aware of important aspects of Canadian law. A volunteer lawyer helped him learn how to protect the Win Global Partners brand and implement a privacy protection policy.

Igor is proud that as his business grows and he helps Canadian companies find markets for their goods overseas, his efforts will be supporting Canadian prosperity and competitiveness.

Hardik Kumar Dave, Uniglobe Consulting: International student recruitment and educational consulting

“If you play hard and work hard you will achieve your entrepreneurial dreams.”

When Hardik arrived in Canada he had a bachelor's degree from India and a Master's of Engineering from the U.K. He topped up his foreign credentials with a degree from Conestoga College. He worked in engineering for a few years before realizing (while between jobs) that with his international education and work experience, he had the perfect background to connect Indians seeking foreign educational experiences with Canadian educational institutions. Hardik now has several institutional clients and is considering expanding his services geographically throughout India and to a broader range of students.

Connect Legal volunteer lawyers helped Hardik build his business by providing him with standard for agreements for use with employees and the company Board of Advisors. Hardik thinks Canada is one of the best places in the world to start a business.

About Connect Legal (www.connectlegal.ca)

Connect Legal fosters entrepreneurship in the immigrant community by providing legal educational services and pro bono (free) commercial legal assistance to low-resource immigrant entrepreneurs. In this way, Connect Legal seeks to advance the integration of new immigrants into the economy for the benefit and prosperity of all. Concurrently, Connect Legal provides an opportunity for commercial lawyers to give back to the community by sharing their expertise and providing pro bono legal services.

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