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Releases

Golden Tree Farmworkers' Monument a Lasting Legacy

Vancouver – After more than seven years in the making, the Golden Tree Farmworkers' monument was unveiled today in its permanent home in the Friendship Garden, behind the Clearbrook Library in Abbotsford.

The Golden Tree stands as a lasting and important legacy to Amarjit Kaur Bal (52), Sukhvinder Kaur Punia (41), and Sarbjit Kaur Sidhu (31), the three women killed on the morning of March 7, 2007, while being transported to work in an overloaded passenger van. It will also serve as a monument to all farmworkers in recognition of the important work they do and their ongoing struggle for dignity and safety.

The Golden Tree Monument Project Committee, led by the victims' families in coordination with Abbotsford Community Services, Progressive Intercultural Community Services and the BC Federation of Labour, has worked tirelessly to bring this project to life. The Golden Tree is the first monument in Canada to celebrate and honour farmworkers.

The Committee wants to recognize and thank the many people and organizations that have contributed to this project. In specific, many organizations have given generous financial and in-kind donations as well as countless volunteer hours, without which this project would not have been possible.

The Golden Tree was designed and built by local artists Dean and Christina Lauzé. The tree embodies the images of three women in the three stages of life - maiden, mother, matriarch. The Golden Tree is comprised of a 22’ tall, twisting apple tree that merges into three subtle female forms. Anchored by strong, thick roots, the tree rises and spreads gleaming gold limbs into a canopy of iridescent green leaves and golden apples.

For a full list of project donors, information on the artists and background on the issue of farmworker safety, please visit the Golden Tree website at www.goldentree.ca.

Quotes from key project stakeholders:

"We are overwhelmed with joy and gratitude for this beautiful monument, designed in remembrance of our lost wives and mothers. We are proud to dedicate this monument to all farmworkers in BC, to honor the work they do and to encourage us all to keep working towards healthier and safer working conditions in agriculture. This is an amazing milestone in our journey, but the healing of our families and our fight for farmworkers’ rights still continues."
- The Bal, Punia, and Sidhu Families

“The Golden Tree monument is an historic achievement and a vital reminder of the challenges farmworkers face every day. This remarkable monument stands as a legacy to three women so tragically killed, and a reminder that we can never again fail in our obligation to protect all working people. This monument will add new inspiration to the fight for farmworkers’ rights and the labour movement will continue to be in the forefront of this struggle.”
- Irene Lanzinger, President, BC Federation of Labour

“It has been a privilege for ACS to have the fiduciary responsibility and to be a part of the journey of the making of this project. It is not only the monument itself which is spectacular, but what it represents is heart moving. The tragedy, the trials and tribulations of the farmworkers and ultimately the hopes and dreams of the families who lost their loved ones to bring awareness and change in the industry standards will make working conditions better for all farmworkers. My salute to the families and all the partners for their persistence in seeing this monument come to fruition.”

- Manpreet Grewal, Director, Abbotsford Community Services

“The Golden Tree Monument is a befitting tribute to three hardworking farmworkers who became victims of a callous and negligent system. But I am pleased that after eight years of hard work and unparalleled collaboration between families of the victims, labour organizations, service providers and the government; this beautiful monument is finally ready for the world to honour these women. I hope that this golden tree will remind us about the conditions farmworkers work in to bring food to our table and will always inspire us to improve their working conditions.”

- Charan Gill, CEO, Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS) Society

"It has been a true honor to be part of the creation of the most amazing and powerful monument to farmworkers in Canadian history. Let it stand tall and beautiful as a reminder that all workers’ lives are equally important and that the rights of people who provide our food need to be respected. I want to especially thank the families who just days after the tragedy joined the call to clean up the industry and protect farmworkers. Without them, no improvements would have been won for farmworkers and this monument would not exist.”

- Jim Sinclair, Former President, BC Federation of Labour

“We are hopeful that the Golden Tree monument will help all of us remember the women who were lost in the tragic van accident in 2007. Our government supported the monument to honour their lives and also to serve as a symbol that recognizes the importance of all farmworkers in British Columbia. It will also stand as a stark reminder of our need to remain vigilant and continually strive to improve workplace safety.”

- Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training and Minister Responsible for Labour, Government of British Columbia

“This monument recognizes the vital contribution of farmworkers to our communities and to our country. Agriculture is a rich part of our community’s heritage; and with the richest and most productive agricultural land in Canada as well as a skilled and innovative agricultural community, agriculture will continue to be a rich part of Abbotsford’s future. As a community, it is our responsibility to do our utmost to protect the land and the people who work in agriculture and agriculture-related

industries – this monument serves as a tribute to that commitment."

- Henry Braun, Mayor of Abbotsford

"In March 2007, a tragedy unfolded that left the families here today shattered. The impact of the loss of Sarbjit Kaur Sidhu, Amarjit Kaur Bal and Sukhvinder Kaur Punia cannot be measured. As the Golden Tree monument is dedicated today, we remember every worker's life matters and no worker should die because of their employment. The Farm and Ranch Safety and Health Association, farm owners, Commercial Vehicle Safety and Enforcement and WorkSafeBC continue to share the goal of ensuring farm workers, who are transported to and from work, return to their families safely at the end of the day."

- Diana Miles, President and CEO, WorkSafeBC

"It has been a great honour and privilege to be commissioned to create this important monument. We have tried to convey a deep sense of hope and respect into every element. We are so thankful to everyone who has helped to bring this monument to fruition, from our tireless staff to the rallying support of family and friends. With the unwavering support of the BC Federation of Labour, the families have succeeded in providing a legacy on behalf of the beloved family members they have lost, and have made significant strides in their quest to bring awareness to the working conditions of Canadian farmworkers. We hope that this artwork will serve as a symbol of their strength, love and determination, as well as a lasting reminder of the need for meaningful change. We are deeply honoured to have been involved."

- Dean and Christina Lauzé, Artists, D'Arts