

NEWS

MISSISSAUGA NEWSMAKER OF THE YEAR: FOUNDER AND CEO OF PARAMOUNT FINE FOODS MOHAMAD FAKIH

MARYAM MIRZA

mmirza@metroland.com

January 3, 2019

When Mohamad Fakh moved to Canada he was 23-years-old, alone, and had only \$1,500 dollars to his name.

Now, the owner of Paramount Fine Foods is a successful entrepreneur with 60 restaurant locations (with more on the way) across Canada and internationally, has consistently made headlines across the province for his community work, and is Mississauga News' choice for Newsmaker of the Year in 2018.

In 2016, when Canada welcomed 25,000 Syrian refugees, Fakh called up on the business community to consider hiring refugees and hired more than 100 himself.

"When I came to Canada people helped me become who I am today," he said.

Without the help and opportunities given to him, Fakh says he wouldn't be where he is today and strongly believes in paying it forward.

But Fakh's generosity didn't end there.

When the lives of six Muslims were claimed in a Quebec mosque shooting, Fakh - in partnership with Islamic Relief Canada - raised \$125,000 to pay for the victims' funerals and to repair the mosque.



Claudio Cugliari/Metroland

Mississauga-based Paramount Fine Foods has announced its official expansion into North Eastern United States. In this file photo, Mohamad Fakh, CEO/president, Paramount Fine Foods, was named the Brampton Board of Trade's Business person of the year for 2017.

Fakh said his love for Canada instilled a sense of duty in him to help bring the community back together.

"We are all different," he said. "But our differences should be our strength and it should be something that makes us all better."

It was this very sense of pride and his ability to dream that pushed him toward earning naming rights to the Paramount Fine Foods Centre - former-

ly known as the Hershey Centre.

Seeing that name up there brought me to tears, Fakh said.

"For someone who landed in Canada with nothing, to have a sign for his business up there and represent the minority community made me very emotional," he added.

"I wanted to tell the little guys who don't come from a lot of money that we can do it too."

While many developments in Fakh's life have been positive recently, it hasn't been without his share of challenges.

In July 2017, Ranendra "Ron" Banerjee - a prominent fixture at anti-Muslim rallies across the GTA - stood in front of Paramount Fine Foods in Mississauga and labelled the business "nefarious" and one that served customers who are "jihadist" or "raped your wife at least a few times," even though Fakh says he has never met him.

In response, Fakh sued Banerjee for defamation and won, according to a settlement reached on Dec. 7 this year.

The reason he chose to file the lawsuit, Fakh says, was to set an example for his three boys.

"I've always told my kids that people are generally kind, but I wanted them to know to never give in to bigotry" he said.

"I believe when we stand up against hate, we make their voice smaller and smaller until it disappears. If we are silent and don't condemn hate, we are sending a message that we are OK with hate."

Winning, Fakh added, set an example of love and unity by the beautiful country that welcomed him.