

24 October 2024 - vOscars – Volunteer Ottawa Tribute for Bharat Rudra's "Lifetime Achievement Award"

A Heartfelt Tribute: Honoring Bharat Rudra's Lifetime of Giving

Good evening, everyone. It is both an honor and a privilege to stand before you today to celebrate a truly remarkable individual—Bharat Rudra.

What do you give to someone who expects nothing, who seeks no reward, whose only desire is to share and give without ever asking for anything in return? For a long time, I've looked for the right moment to shine a light on such an individual—someone who has dedicated their life to helping others. Bharat Rudra is that individual. For many in our community, he has set the vision and standards that have allowed them to expand their impact.

I am deeply grateful to Volunteer Ottawa for giving me the opportunity to highlight Bharat today.

Volunteerism is a noble calling. Ask anyone, and they will tell you how essential it is. But there is a rare breed—those like Bharat—who don't engage in volunteerism as a side activity or a way to earn recognition. For them, it's a way of life. It's woven into the very fabric of who they are.

I vividly remember walking into an office in early 2003 as a recent international student, and there he was. Bharat extended his hand with a smile that instantly made me feel seen. He listened with genuine curiosity, and in that brief encounter, I already sensed the deep compassion that defines him. I didn't know it at the time, but that moment marked the beginning of a journey that would change my life.

Allow me to take you all back to July 2000. The evening before I was set to leave my home in India, I stood on our terrace next to my mom, looking out, absorbing everything: the streets, the sounds, the comfort of family, the joy of childhood friendships—things that defined my life. In that moment, I knew I was about to lose them. A wave of fear washed over me. The excitement of pursuing my dreams, of attending graduate school in the U.S., had given way to deep anxiety. I looked at my mother and whispered, "Mom, my tummy hurts. What if I have appendicitis?"

She held my hand and, in her quiet, reassuring way, said, "Manu, this fear is natural. A massive change awaits you. But there's a world out there, a community you haven't met. You just don't know it yet."

Comforted by my mom's wisdom, I left for North America the next day. But during my years in Chicago, that promised community remained a distant mirage. Despite receiving an excellent education, the sense of belonging—feeling truly welcomed—remained elusive.

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Then, I came to Ottawa to pursue my MBA. But those lingering doubts followed me. Would this be any different? Would I find the community I longed for? And then, one fateful day, as I mentioned earlier, I walked into my boss’s office and met Bharat Rudra.

In his usual warm and engaging way, Bharat invited me to volunteer at an upcoming TiE Ottawa event. A few days later, I arrived at the National Arts Centre, feeling underdressed and overwhelmed, volunteering at the registration desk before quietly taking a seat at a back table. I felt out of place. As the event formally began, Bharat saw me in the back and walked over. He took me to the head table, where he asked a senior TiE member to vacate their seat so I could sit next to the guest of honor, Promod Haque, a highly esteemed venture capitalist.

I hesitated, unsure if I belonged there. But Bharat looked at me and said, “Manu, please take your seat. You belong here.”

In that moment, everything shifted. The fear I had felt years ago on my terrace in India, the uncertainty about whether I would ever find my place—it all melted away. My mother was right. I had found my community. And it happened because of a volunteer in the community—Bharat Rudra.

I share this pivotal moment to emphasize something we often overlook about volunteerism: the profound impact it can have on an individual level. That evening didn’t just change my sense of belonging; it set me on a path that would shape my life’s purpose. Bharat didn’t just invite me to a table; he opened a door that led to a lifelong pursuit of contributing to others. It’s this ripple effect—the deeply personal impact of volunteerism—that transforms not just communities but individuals.

Bharat’s deep commitment to giving back, to lifting others, sparked something in me that continues to burn brightly to this day. His humanity, humility, and unwavering integrity are at the heart of everything he does. The stories of lives touched by Bharat are countless. I know many of you here tonight could share your own inspirational stories of how he has enriched your lives.

Tonight, as we gather to celebrate Bharat’s lifetime of achievements, this award is not just about the millions he helped raise, the causes he has championed, the event’s he organized, or the community bridges he helped build. It’s about the lives he has touched, the communities he’s nurtured, and the legacy of generosity he continues to create. This recognition honors the quiet contributions, the silent acts of selflessness, and the countless hours he has invested in uplifting others.

We all have a bucket list, and today, I get to check off one of my most cherished items—a heartfelt tribute to my mentor, whose life has been defined by compassion, dedication, and care for others - Bharat Rudra.