

# Afghan wedding brings hearts, cultures together

BY LEEMA FARHA

CANADA is hailed as the land of immigrants. For centuries, immigrants entering this land of hope have contributed to a rich, diverse culture known as multiculturalism. The 1988 Multiculturalism Act declared that the government would: “recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian Heritage and identity.”

As an immigrant living in Canada for the last 12 years, I have never attended a wedding ceremony in Thunder Bay. This summer was the very first time I not only attended, but helped with organizing an Afghan wedding with my dear friends at work.

The love birds, Fatima and Farhad, arrived in Canada from Afghanistan in February 2022. They decided to become life partners. With no relatives or friends to help with the wedding plan, me and my friends were thrilled beyond joy to have this noble task bestowed upon us.

With zero funds at hand at first, we reached out to the Thunder Bay community and our respective networks for help. Their kindness knew no bounds. Some contributed financially, a kind person donated a gorgeous wedding dress, and others shared skills and expertise in planning the wedding including Mais, who stepped in to do the bridal make-up, Anja offered to do the bride’s hair, Niny and Michelle paid for the delicious wedding cake. All arrangements splendidly came together with everyone coming forward with an open and giving heart.

Tasks were divided among the others. Neena, Ahmed, Hanna, Sahar, Terril took care of all the wedding shopping, Nicole’s car was decorated as the bridal car



ONE CITY,  
MANY VOICES

**The Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.**

with Roudi taking the role of the chauffeur. With the help of some boys from the Afghan community, Michelle and Sarah managed to set up a beautiful wedding arch at the Oliver Road Community Centre.

Anita and I took the beautiful wedding dress to a drycleaner who offered to clean free of charge. Lelise called her friend Jodi Quadrilatero, a professional photographer in Thunder Bay. She volunteered and took absolute radiant pictures of the bride and the groom. Cathy made a financial donation for emergency purchases and anything that came up along the way in executing a perfect wedding.

Such are the wonderful, caring, and thoughtful members living in the Thunder Bay community. Without their compassion and generosity, it would have been near impossible to get through.

The Afghan and many other community members gathered at the wedding on June 25. The Community Centre lit up with the glittering traditional dresses worn by the guests. The pretty bride walked down the aisle with the beautiful bridal bouquet that was designed and made by Anita.

Following the wedding, the bride and the groom danced. The

Afghan boys along with the groom treated us to a few Afghan dances—so elegant and impressive. The ladies joined in the dance after the men stepped out of the room.

The most successful part of the wedding was that the bride and groom’s families attended the entire ceremony virtually. The organizers operated the Zoom so that the families back home could watch without any disruption. We invited the justice of the peace from the City of Thunder Bay to officiate the wedding and the Imam (the Muslim priest) to bless the Muslim couple.

From planning the wedding, to getting help from the communities, and executing the event, every moment will remain enshrined in our memory; and I personally took away some very eye-opening insights.

The wedding organizers came from various faiths — Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. No matter what our cultural background or religion were, we all came together and arranged the elegant wedding. No matter how different we look, think or lead our lives from one another, from community to community, in times of need, this city comes together with affection, understanding, and respect.

As I observed the serenity of the wedding ceremony, I was overwhelmed with both smiles and tears. I realized that my child is growing up amongst such diversity, each with their distinct and rich cultures and yet embracing and preserving our identity as Canadians.

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