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Kannu Sahni Helps Forge Meaningful Ties Between Pitt and Community

By Adam Reger

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Kannu Sahni fell in love with Pittsburgh at a time when it was confronted with one of its greatest challenges: how to recover from its post-industrial economic struggles.

Sahni was a young business executive living in New Delhi, India, when he came to Pittsburgh on an official visit in 1987.

"It instantly felt like home," he recalls. "It had all the potential positives of an ideal city for me—the people, the neighborhoods, the culture..." And, he says, his first sighting of the Cathedral of Learning made a very strong impression, representing the knowledge-based strengths of the city.

Within a year, Sahni moved with his family to Western Pennsylvania and began a career as an entrepreneur and systems engineer. Since then, he has observed the region's transformative change and feels privileged to be engaged with helping accelerate this exciting renewal. After years of "admiring Pitt from afar," Sahni joined the University of Pittsburgh in July 2007 as an employment specialist in the Office of Human Resources.

Today, he is Pitt's director of community relations, working within the Office of Community and Governmental Relations. In this position, Sahni is a prominent face of the University and an energetic leader in connecting Pitt with the region's broader community. "As a University committed to academics, research, and public service, we are a great asset to this region. We look for every opportunity to meaningfully connect our faculty, staff, students, and our know-how with needs in the community. I'm grateful for Chancellor Gallagher's strong leadership and vision in this area."

Sahni fulfills a number of other roles within the University. Based upon his background as a human-resources professional, he teaches part-time in Pitt's Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business. He serves on the boards of the Matilda Theiss Health Center, the Office of Child Development, the Collegiate YMCA, and cochairs Pitt's United Way campaign. ("Please do make a contribution to this impactful campaign!" Sahni implores.)

In recent years, too, he has served as a member of the Mayor's Welcoming Pittsburgh Advisory Council and the Pittsburgh Bicentennial Steering Committee, as well as the board of the Oakland Business Improvement District.



Kannu Sahni (Photo by Emily O'Donnell)

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Recently, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf appointed Sahni to the Governor's Advisory Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs. As leader of its *Jobs That Pay* working committee, Sahni will focus on statewide strategies to attract international businesses and investment to Pennsylvania. "Our future as a region depends on how successful we are at attracting and keeping people, including retaining our own graduating students," Sahni said. "This requires increasing employment opportunities and being even more welcoming."

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As Pitt's director of community relations, Sahni says that he and his colleagues work hard to serve as trusted resources for both the University and the broader community alike, and he views the Office of Community and Governmental Relations as an important bridge between the two. This motivates him to personally participate in every community meeting possible. "It's a vital way to represent Pitt and address opportunities and challenges, letting residents and community partners know that the University is fully committed to working with them."

A significant element of his job is helping students to succeed when living off-campus by integrating successfully into their Oakland locales. Sahni helps to educate students on issues associated with living off campus, including strategies for getting involved in and respecting the community at large.

His work on these and related issues led to the development of *Pitt's Student Guide to Campus Life*, a guidebook that has been tremendously useful within the University and beyond. It has garnered broad national attention and serves as a model for college-community strategies.

One program of which Sahni is most proud, he says, is the annual Christmas Day at Pitt, which serves many of the region's residents in need. With a small army of volunteers, Pitt partners with campus food-services provider Sodexo and the Salvation Army to serve a free meal on Dec. 25 and to provide winter clothing essentials to participants as well as toys for the children who attend.

During last month's Christmas at Pitt, 225 Pitt volunteers set up the Market Central dining space in Litchfield Towers and served more than 2,400 meals. Prior to the event, 134 student athletes wrapped and sorted more than 600 gifts and 1,600 gift bags, all donated by the Pitt community.

"It's a very happy place to be on Christmas," Sahni says about the Dec. 25 event. "People come out and host our guests in a uniquely Pitt kind of way."

Sahni's dedication to the University is that of an alumnus as well as an employee: he earned a Master of public policy and management and is working on his doctorate in public policy at the University's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. He is a lifetime member of the Pitt Alumni Association.

Away from work, Sahni plays guitar and sings in a rock band and is a second-degree black belt in karate.

He has two sons, one of whom graduated from Pitt-Greensburg. While he and his wife, Ranjana, currently live in Pittsburgh's east suburbs, Sahni says they are contemplating a move into the city—to Oakland, of course.

"I am so happy and so fortunate that I'm here at Pitt," Sahni said. "This is the kind of place where you can spend a lifetime and make a very positive impact on our region and beyond."



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