



The Singh famiy invested more than \$50,000 in their state-of-the-art gelato display unit at their new second location in Surrey.

A heart-melting ice cream tale

COMMUNITY: Surrey family sustains father's legacy through new restaurant venture

The sound of an overworked drill punches through Mama Mia Gelato.

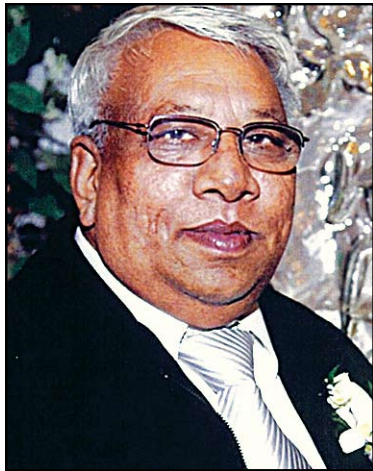
It is part of the last minute touches contractors are making to the ice cream-maker's latest retail store in Satnam Plaza on Scott Road. The obsession over detail however will come as no surprise to anyone who has frequented this family restaurant.

The quality is always in the finishing is the maxim Paul Singh, the founder of the wildly successful Surrey franchise, lived by throughout his life. That guiding rule now lives on through Singh's wife, Susan, and their four children who are carrying on the legacy of their pioneering father.

This is the first Vaisakhi the family will spend without their father who passed away last fall. As the family prepares to open their new store, they can't help but recount his stories.

Singh made his start in the food industry in bone-chilling Winnipeg. The frozen prairie town couldn't have been any further removed from his hometown of Malacca, Malaysia.

Ice cream was not even in the picture when he opened his first



Paul Singh was a pioneer in the food industry.

restaurant specialising in Canadian cuisine. Having been raised on the stories of his enterprising Sikh forefathers from Punjab, India, Singh was undaunted by the thought of slugging through a frozen Manitoba winter, making Canadian-style dishes for foreign customers, all while learning the rules and conventions of his newly adopted country.

It was one year later, when he and Susan were expecting a baby,

the family picked up and moved back to Vancouver where Singh eventually landed on Fraser Street and opened Noor Mahal Restaurant - an establishment focussing on Indian cuisine. His famous dosas were all the rage in Vancouver, with line-ups on weekends going out the door and around the corner.

"He had an extraordinary palette for food," his wife Susan said. "Once he tasted a dish, he could tell you exactly what was in it. He didn't have to read the ingredients."

But it wasn't until 1997 when Paul opened Sagar Restaurant on Main Street where the idea of running an ice cream parlour caught his fancy.

"He started churning out ice cream in a little machine we kept in the back of Sagar," remembers 27-year-old daughter Natasha Singh. "Every weekend we would serve Indian and Malaysian buffet and eight flavours of ice cream."

Paul and Susan would pack up again in 2000 and open Mama Mia Gelato at 72nd and Scott Road. Once again Singh was undaunted, this time by the challenge of mastering the technique

of preparing Italian gelato and simultaneously educating price sensitive South Asian customers on its premium value.

Twelve years later the parlour is a mainstay in the neighbourhood and a destination for ice cream lovers across Surrey and the Fraser Valley. Come summer days, it is packed throughout the day.

"On the first day we opened, we made \$50," Susan reminisces. "There was no advertising."

Success continued for Singh as his culinary skills led him to innovate a marriage of kulfi, an Indian frozen dairy dessert, and traditional ice cream. The resulting "matka kulfi" - matka means clay pot in Punjabi - became an instant hit in the South Asian community.

Over the next decade Paul, Susan and their children would serve thousands of 'matka kulfi' desserts at their store and at a variety of community functions from the Surrey Fusion Festival, Canada Day celebrations in Cloverdale, Vancouver's Celebration of Light, and the Vancouver Olympics.

As Sikhs prepare to embrace renewal with Khalsa Day and the

re-birth of their faith, so too does the Singh family with their business.

When asked what it's like to open their second location without his father in command, Singh's son Onkar responds frankly, "It is hard, very hard, because he knew the ins-and-outs of everything. We're keeping his dream alive by opening it up."

Onkar, however, knows the business well and is enhancing his father vision. He played a key role in the purchase of a rotating gelato display case for the new location and a bar where cocktails and fresh fruit juices will be available.

"Dad wanted me to always look forward and to do what I believed is right," he beams.

Susan sees her husband's lessons on the value of hard work have been passed on to her children as they endeavour to keep the family's legacy alive.

"The family's been together and it will always stay together," she says. "We're all going to be running the show. All five of us."

To get a taste of Mama Mia's *matka kulfi's*, visit their new location at 7130-120th Street, Surrey.