



Lanka Link

Spring 2023 Edition 1

May 14th, 2023

Editor: Lasith R. Witharana

The Sri Lanka Canada Friendship Association of Edmonton is excited to learn about our association and your participation in our activities. The SLCFA is an organization whose primary goal is to create and strengthen relationships between Canadians of Sri Lankan Origin and other Canadians. The Association's essential purpose is to help preserve Sri Lankan culture and traditions and enhance our youth's adventures and activities in Canada!

SLCFA,

I am very proud to show our Executive Committee elected at the AGM meeting on Wednesday, April 12th:

Position:

Name:

President	Mano Senaratne
Vice President	Pandula Wickramarachchi
Secretary	Priyantha Silva
Treasurer	Lakshaman Samarasinghe
Director of Culture Activities	Shyama Fernando
Director of Membership and Welfare	Maya Silva
Director of Projects and Fund Raising	Chris Senaratne
Director of Publicity and Communications	Lasith Witharana
Director of Social and Recreational Activities	Shehan (Sean) Devapura
Past President	Susantha Tennakoonwela

PRESIDENTS CORNER

As you know the SLCFA has reached a crossroads with the need for multiple AGMs to finish off the business from 2022 in a manner acceptable to the members and required by our By-laws and Objects. Whether we move forwards, sideways or go backwards is ultimately up to the membership. What is not tenable is the continuing leadership by the “old guard”. As you know the key positions were taken up by members who are in their 70s, retired from their own occupations essentially as a stopgap measure to deal with the apparent shortcomings. I am glad that several younger members (Lasith, Shehan and Pandula) volunteered to serve in the EC for 2023. What is obviously needed is a concrete plan to elect a new leadership consisting of younger members to take over in 2024. If this is not forthcoming we will have to proceed with discussions about winding up the association by the end of the year. However one needs to realize that acceptance of the leadership comes with commitment to manage the affairs of any association in a professional manner. This in my opinion was sorely lacking by what surfaced at the 2022 year-end AGM (as evidenced by the corrective measures that had to be carried out by the present EC as outlined below). The reasoning given stating “I didn’t have the time”, “I couldn’t do such and such as I am working out of town” is not acceptable. Most of the work required to run an organization in a proper manner with due diligence to financial matters doesn’t require a lot of time. If time constraints were there the solution would have been to cancel all commitments (such as participation in the Heritage Festival) and do the bare minimum needed to keep the association functioning as opposed to undertaking activities that couldn’t be done in a proper manner. I would like to point out (as a person who has served as the President as well as in other EC positions multiple times) that a lot of time is not needed to fulfill the “bare bones functions” of our association. I am outlining below the current position of the SLCFA with the corrective measures taken and pointing out the actions that are needed to avoid similar issues in the future as a guide to any future EC leadership.

Building Insurance-This was in arrears in spite of Cooperators Insurance sending the notice for payment. Everyone will agree this as a serious lapse. This was paid personally by the current Treasurer pending the change of signatories. **Solution-A single EC member (could be in rotation although ideally one) should be assigned to visit the SLCFA building at least twice a month to check on mail and arrange for any necessary action.**

Bookkeeping and Accounting- A monthly subscription to the Quickbooks (Accounting Program costing approximately \$46.00 per month) had been obtained 2yrs ago. Although many accountants use such programs to ease the burden of work, electronic downloading of transactions from the bank accounts doesn’t take away the need for

proper reconciliation of each transaction as well as the need to ensure that transactions belonging to the AGLC account are not misplaced with transactions belonging to the General account and vice versa. Furthermore the SLCFA on the average has 10-15 transactions per month with several recurrent (utility bills, condo fees etc). Thus payment of \$46.00 monthly is simply not worth it. This subscription has been cancelled.

From what was told the bookkeeping was not done by the Treasurer but by another EC member. This is hardly ever done in a small organization like ours. If the Treasurer does the book keeping he/she would catch any errors or omissions early leading to remedial action. Furthermore the advantage of book keeping by the Treasurer is the awareness of the ongoing status of the organization on a regular basis avoiding overdrawn status etc. The accounts were overdrawn on several occasions (in spite of vast amounts of funds available in GICs) with money from the General Account transferred to the AGLC account to meet the immediate shortfalls(an absolute No-No). **Solution: Acceptance of the Treasurer post should go hand in hand with undertaking the book-keeping task**

Credit Card and Debit Cards - We felt these as unnecessary (other than a debit card to electronically access account balances and transfer of funds from chequing accounts to GICs etc). The automatic payment of the credit card from the different accounts (as was carried out last year) is also not in keeping with the need for approval of all payments by the EC. These cards have been cancelled.

Annual Report to AGLC-There were errors in the report submitted by the previous EC primarily a result of funds being mixed between the AGLC and General Accounts. As the report had been sent in January 2023(due by end of Dec 2022) we contacted the AGLC immediately after we took over, informing them of the need for revision of the report. An amended report was submitted quickly. The AGLC has accepted the amended report as accurate but with the proviso that switching of funds between the AGLC and the General Account should not occur under any circumstances(the erroneous mix up during 2022 amounted to over \$14000.00). Furthermore they have stated that if it is repeated in the future they will deem the transferred amount as permanently belonging to the AGLC Account and subject to their rules of usage.

Solution: The two account ledgers must be maintained separately at all times with monitoring of balances by the Treasurer. No automatic debits should be approved as this is what often leads to an overdrawn status (whereas when one makes payment it is very likely one automatically checks to make sure funds are available). Also a report by the Treasurer at each EC Meeting detailing the account balances with approval of all pending payments serves as a safeguard to avoid this situation

Dance Classes-The amount paid for the classes was \$1100.00 per month for 2 lessons of 2hrs each essentially for one teacher. This we felt was not proper use of funds of the SLCFA. Please note that approval of a project by the AGLC does not mean that we should spend funds in a manner which is out of keeping with market rates especially paying an individual who would not be considered as being “at arm’s length” in financial terms. A letter had been sent by one EC member in (November 2022) to the Dance Teacher committing to pay \$1100 per month until the end of 2023 (the total would amount to \$13200.00 for 2023). This was never discussed and approved at an EC Meeting (as confirmed by the former Treasurer, other EC Members from last year who are in the 2023 EC too as well as per EC Meeting minutes from 2022). Thus we do not consider this as an agreement with the SLCFA. I feel the parents of the participants too have to bear some responsibility about not querying the amounts paid for the classes. There were certainly children/grandchildren of very senior members who were participants. We are looking at a future revised Dance Program but will be expecting all participants(parents) to contribute as well as is the case with all community league activities such as soccer, hockey, swimming etc. Furthermore if a person who is not at “arms length “ and is an SLCFA member is hired they too would be expected to provide the service at a rate considering their obligations and responsibilities to the SLCFA. As you may be aware in the past when classes were conducted many member teachers were not paid at all.

City Properly Taxes- In spite of several letters by the City of Edmonton sent in the fall of 2022 (found opened in the SLCFA office but obviously not acted upon) asking us to re-submit the form needed to extend our Business Tax Exemption status the form was never filled and sent. Thus we have lost our Business Tax exemption status. We have spoken to the city and submitted an appeal to regain our Business Tax exemption status. However even if successful we will have to pay the extra amount until the end of April this year.

Condo Fees(Cedar Park) - We were in arrears as we had not paid from Jan 2023 onwards. As you know the key members of the previous EC circulated letters amongst themselves about their resignations(resignations done in this manner have no validity) and did not attend to the absolutely essential day to day functions of the SLCFA (such as the payment of Condo fees, Insurance fees etc) In spite of direct communication of the invalidity of the resignations by several members of the SLCFA. Thus we are ending up paying additional Late Payment Penalty Fees to the Condo Association. These payments amount to wasted money.

Heritage Festival- Although informed at the 2nd AGM by the previous Pavilion Chairman that the initial deposit for 2023, participation has been paid it turned out that no payment has been made. Although this was another omission it was a blessing in disguise as we didn't have to worry about losing our deposit. We have canvassed for any 3rd party interest in taking over the food preparation and sales under our supervision with no positive interest in spite of contacting over a dozen individuals. We will discuss with regards to participation with cultural and entertainment involvement only. A final decision will be made after the next EC meeting.

In summary there were major omissions last year. Although the brunt of the responsibility has to be borne by the President, Vice-President, Treasurer and the Secretary I should point out that the other members of the EC should also have questioned regarding the lack of proper meetings, proper approvals etc (as voiced by some former EC members now). I have informed the current EC members that if they feel any actions by the current senior EC members do not appear to be done in a proper manner they should definitely bring it forward at the EC meetings and not be worried as they are young or new EC members.

So as to comply with the AGLC guidelines (as brought to our notice by Ramona Fernando at the last AGM) Chris Senaratne resigned from the post of Vice-President and was appointed as the Director of Projects and Fund Raising. Pandula Wickramaracchi resigned from the position of Director of Projects and Fund Raising and was appointed as the Vice-President. I would like to thank Lakshaman Samarasinghe and Chris Senaratne who have attended to the bulk of the corrective measures needed to put the SLCFA back on a proper course. We are almost there!

As noted at the outset we need to prepare for 2024. It is essential that younger members step up to take over the leadership. We always hear "I just don't have any time this year". I would like to point out that running the SLCFA doesn't require spending a vast amount of time. If the activities are carried out in an organized manner with allocation of responsibilities the time commitment is not high. As you are aware I have functioned as the President on multiple occasions while working as a physician on a full-time basis including being on-call on nights and weekends. The bottom line is that we will have to seriously consider talks about dissolution if new committee members do not step-up by the end of this year.

Mano Senaratne

SLCFA Achievement Scholarship for the Year 2022

Januki has volunteered in many SLCFA functions from a very young age. She has won three years from grades 10, 11, and 12 for the Rutherford Scholarship and the SLCFA Achievement Scholarship for 2022. She is a first-year honours student in the Physiology Undergraduate Program at the University of Alberta.



March Seniors Day



Musical Workshop on March 20th, 2023



First Friday Event on May 5th 2023



SLCFA Mother's Day Event May 14th, 2023



These were unanimously approved by the Executive Committee:

All EC positions are essential as they strive to reach the SLCFA Community. They need to be focused and constantly stay connected. EC involves diplomacy, courtesy, perseverance, and innovation. For the EC members, the volunteer experience provides an opportunity to serve the Sri Lankan Community keeping in line with the AGLC, City of Edmonton, Alberta Government and Federal Government guidelines. SLCFA is mandated to serve the community, not just a few privileged SLCFA Members.

From the Director of Publicity & Communications: What emails can we share with the SLCFA membership?

1. Mainly essential emails to the members sent by the EC.
2. Members' news, such as notable achievements and receipt of awards by members and their families (with their consent).
3. Obituary Notices of members (with their consent). The EC recently approved that we will also share obituary notices of non-members (with their consent and if we are informed)
4. Any news we consider of interest and benefit to the membership.

What can't we share with the membership?

1. Any commercial emails that would be considered advertisements and would be more suitable for publishing in the newsletter.
2. All emails that do not fall under the shareable email category. What can we publish in the SLCFA Newsletter? – published quarterly.

1. We take advertisements from small business owners, musical groups for ticket sales etc. (Charges: Page: ¼ \$15 1/2 page \$25, Full page \$35)
2. Can publish one or 2-paragraph articles of research papers and interesting articles (Sri Lankan theme) from the members or nonmembers.
3. SLCFA membership news

Enclosed is a member of the SLCFA Ad for Sathika Witharana is a volunteer with Engineers in Action with a passion for helping those in developing countries
<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/sathika-witharana>



In July 2023, I am traveling to Eswatini, South Africa to volunteer, mentor university students, and work alongside with Eswatini community members to construct a 74m suspended bridge. This bridge will impact approximately 4800 community members in the Kalashabane and Esphumlweni communities allowing them to safely access essential resources including a school, hospital and markets. The phophonyane river restricts the mobility and accessibility of these communities for 28 days per year, which has resulted in six injuries and one death in the past three years. Please consider donating to help enable safe access to essential resources for those in need!



I am raising money to help Engineers in Action (EIA) cover the cost of material for this bridge. None of the money fundraised will go towards personal travel costs and all of the money will be managed by EIA. Thank you for your support!

-SATHIKA WITHARANA



Please scan QR Code for fundraising page, project updates, and information on why I am doing this!