



Dr. S. Lal Mattu

Dr. S. Lal Mattu, currently carries the title of the Ambassador at Large. As the founder of Third Schools, he is no doubt in the best position to promote our schools among various community sectors. As an experienced educator and with his many successful years in administration, he has also assumed much needed role of a “mentor” to our strong leadership team.

Born in India, raised in the highlands of Kenya where he received his initial education and teaching certificate, he moved to England where after teaching for five years, he decided to move in 1967 to Canada. This was Canada’s centennial year and there was much excitement for the endless possibilities that the future held. To start, he was involved in the new adventure of the very early development of schools in northern Alberta.

Starting as a teacher and then a principal in a small school in a Metis colony, he was invited to Wainwright School Division as a teacher where he was very quickly promoted to a position of the Assistant Superintendent of Schools. This position provided him with the opportunity to expand his skills and knowledge about providing support and managing teachers and administrators throughout the district. At the same time, it provided him an important link with personnel at Alberta Education to learn about education and programme development throughout the Province. This resulted in his new initiatives in Early Childhood Education as well as programmes for children with learning disabilities.

Dr. Mattu was not only busy with his responsibilities associated with his role as the Assistant Superintendent, he was also invited to provide consultative and mentorship services to teachers in several Alberta districts in the development and implementation of resource rooms for children with learning disabilities. It also gave him exposure all over the Province with the result that he was regularly invited as keynote speaker. As well, he became a well-known resource for many provincial organizations, acting as an advisor and a consultant. Of particular note was his presentation on behalf of the Alberta Learning Disabilities Association to the Senate of the University of Alberta, which resulted in reassessment and changes to its Bachelor of Education programme. Specifically, courses dealing with teaching learning disabled children were, for the first time, included in the programme for teachers coming out of the University.

It was also during these years that he became motivated to finish his Bachelor of Sciences (Early Childhood/Reading) and Master of Education (Special Education/Administration) degrees at the University of Oregon in the United States. In his last year in Wainwright, he also finished his course requirements for a doctoral programme in Psychology at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. He successfully completed his PhD a few years later after completing his dissertation, Role Analysis of Learning Disabilities Resource Room Teachers. As a result, he acquired a registered psychologist status of Alberta, Canadian and American Psychological Associations.

Dr. Mattu was then appointed as the first Superintendent of Schools of Jasper School District, where he once again established programmes for children with learning disabilities. After a short stay in Jasper, he was invited to become an Assistant Superintendent of Schools in the Shuswap District in Salmon Arm British Columbia. He considers this as his most challenging assignment. Here again, he implemented programmes for children with learning disabilities in some fifty schools as well as took charge of developing personnel policies. A few years later, he was elevated to the position of Superintendent in the District.

The last assignment as a Superintendent was in Golden, British Columbia. Again, Dr. Mattu got busy with organization of special education, setting up new programmes as well as rewriting the policy manual. It was here that he realized that even as a Superintendent with all the powers his office gave him, there were still lots of children falling between the cracks on his watch. On a trip to Australia that year to attend the Rotary International Conference, he considered all his experiences as a teacher and senior administrator and he realized that something different was needed for children who “were unsuccessful in the conventional school system”. He knew then, that if he could not change the conventional system, then he has to do it somewhere else. Hence, the idea of opening Third Academy was born.

Dr. Mattu often mentions his own story of how he came from a very humble background, where he is the first child in a family of eight who finished his secondary school and went on to college and university. He often quotes his father who motivated him during his growing up years when he used to say: “Without education, man has eyes but he cannot see properly; he has ears but he does not understand properly what he hears; he has hands but they do not work properly.” He feels that he has been blessed and needs to give back “the gift of literacy” to those children who would otherwise fail in the conventional classroom.

Third Academy opened its doors in 1997. It was a school where ALL children could succeed.

Dr. Mattu mentions his wife of 55 years as a very close ally, who has stood by his side and has selflessly provided strong support throughout his professional career and in particular with Third Academy from its inception. Along with his family- 3 children and 8 grand children- he has traveled the world with a camera in hand and boasts of thousands of memorable photographs, each telling very exciting stories of the places and events. He is an ardent sportsman having held records in long-distance running in his school days. An excellent field hockey player, he had the honour of representing Kenya against Indian and Pakistani Olympic hockey teams. And he continued playing international field hockey in Europe when he was in England as a young man.

Community involvement has been an integral part of Dr. Mattu's entire life. To that end, he has been member of such clubs as Lions and Rotary. In fact he served as the President of Fish Creek Rotary Club recently. Rotary Foundation International named him as a “Paul Harris Fellow” for furtherance of better understanding and friendly relations among local and people around the world. To that end he has represented his clubs over the years at International Rotary Conference in Melbourne Australia and participated in a Friendship Exchange Programme to New Zealand. He has also served on many other local non-profit boards and organizations too numerous to mention and received several honours for his contribution to local community causes.

The one honour worth mentioning is when Dr. Mattu was awarded the Alberta Centennial Medal in 2005 by Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong. At the presentation ceremony, the Lieutenant Governor commented: "Dr. Mattu is a respected educator and psychologist, the founder of Third Academy schools, and has the dual philosophy that all children can learn and that no child should be constrained for financial reasons from achieving that end...."