

# Family Matters; the Lebanese Success Story

## Do we underestimate family and community when focusing on “economic immigration”?

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Commentary based on remarks to the Annual Celebration of the Lebanese Independence Day,  
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Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening and welcome to our Annual Celebration of the Lebanese National Independence Day.

I would like to start by thanking the individuals who helped in making this special event possible; my wife Cathy and I are grateful for your continuous support. Your presence means a lot to me personally, and is a profound testament to our strength as a community, and to our profound ties to both Canada and Lebanon.

As you probably know, I am a strong advocate of the benefits of immigration to our Province. It is a cause that I am passionate about, and I advocate at every opportunity. I have been fortunate to be

able to travel throughout the world, and I tell you no matter where you go, even in small remote areas, the stories of successful and resilient Lebanese communities are endless. However, none of these success stories measure up to what we have here in Halifax.

For the past 2 centuries and for various reasons, Lebanese people have been emigrating to all corners of the globe. To put this into perspective, there are documented statistics of twice Lebanon’s population, about 8 million people throughout the world. The successful achievements of Lebanese immigrants on an individual level are truly remarkable and outstanding to say the least; however the integration of the Lebanese both on an individual and community levels in

various adopted countries has had its challenges.

- In some countries with large populations, Lebanese immigrants have struggled to keep a sense of community, and have dissipated in the broader population; as a result their children have lost their Lebanese identity and culture. This is unfortunate for both Lebanon and their adopted countries;
- In other countries Lebanese people are not allowed to become citizens, and never develop a sense of belonging;
- In some countries which are much closer to Lebanon geographically than Canada, Lebanese people do not have the freedom of speech and religion, and equality, and they never integrate;
- And in other countries, successful Lebanese people had to sell everything and flee back to Lebanon due persecution by groups that became jealous of their achievements.

Obviously, this is not the case here in Canada and specifically in Nova Scotia. What we have here is a remarkable immigration phenomenon, that I believe should be documented for History.

We have a community in Halifax with roots back to the early 1880s, that is a source of national pride, and I say this with great humility.

- Our community, with 2 churches, social, cultural and political organizations, is very well integrated in the fabric of our Nova Scotia society. Our existence as a strong community has helped us create the intricate balance between becoming Canadian Citizens and staying true to who we are, by preserving our identity and our culture. This I believe has allowed us to become better Canadian citizens and has enriched our society.
- We have also succeeded in not allowing the difficult situation in Lebanon impact our community in Halifax, by distancing ourselves from the political segregation, affiliations, and conflict that has devastated our country. I don't think that the broader community has much of an appreciation on how serious of an issue this is; it has torn other Lebanese communities apart. But not here, thanks to the Leadership of our organizations and the maturity of our community members. We have an unwritten pact: our friendships, our respect to one another and the well being of our community and our city is far more important than

our political affiliations and beliefs. Anyone who undermines this understanding is on their own and has no support from our community.

- Another sign of maturity within our community is the recognition that we have to give back to the betterment of our society from our time, talent and treasure. I am proud that individually and collectively, members of our community are giving back. I am not going to dwell on this topic, because this is our duty, however, I want to thank the many of you who have responded and worked with me on many wonderful causes.
- As for our success on the entrepreneurial and business levels, one does not have to look hard, just pick up a paper and read the headlines; or even yet, just log on ALLNOVA SCOTIA.COM, we can't keep anything hidden from them, even if we tried.

I know that our success speaks a lot about us as individuals and as a community, but more importantly it speaks volumes about this great and open nation and this beautiful city that have embraced us and given us the environment in which we have been able to thrive.

You know we are not exactly sure why the first Lebanese immigrants came to this part of the world, most likely they were on a journey to a different place to meet other friends or family, and landed here by coincidence. We do know however that we are all here, because of 2 individuals that came here in 1881. We joke sometimes, especially in cold winters, on why they couldn't have landed in Florida. But joking aside, I can tell you on behalf of every person in our community, that there is nowhere else in the world where we would rather be.

This is where we belong; this is our home.

Happy Independence Day! May God Bless both of our Countries Canada and Lebanon.

Thank you.



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