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FAUJA SINGH: The World's Oldest Marathoner

Orange County Students and Teachers Prepare for Centenarian and Human Tornado, Fauja Singh, at OC Human Relations 23rd Annual "Walk in My Shoes" Student Leadership Conference

Santa Ana, Nov. 14, 2011

It is rare when a tornado sweeps through California anywhere, let alone in Orange County. And rarer still the ability to predict the path a tornado might take. Yet OC Human Relations is ready to do just that—predicting that Orange County students and teachers attending its 23rd annual "Walk in my Shoes" leadership conference on November 17 at Cal State Fullerton are going to be swept up in the unique and wise presence of the "Turbaned Tornado," Sardar Fauja Singh, when he visits southern California as a conference keynote speaker.



At age 100, Fauja Singh is whirling into southern California, following the completion of his ninth 26.2 mile race in the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon race in Canada. Nicknamed "stick" as a child, due to his spindly legs, Fauja, whose name means army, has conquered just about every running record imaginable for his age category, and all in the last 12 years' of his life. At age 92, he set the world record for the men's over-90 marathon run in five hours and 40 minutes. Since then, he's also set records in the 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, mile, 3000m and 5000m runs.

"Our goal is to empower and mobilize students to work towards creating positive social change," said Rusty Kennedy, chief executive officer, OC Human Relations. "Fauja Singh's life story and ongoing athletic

feats—which are amazing at any age, let alone at age 100—will help to inspire and empower Orange County youth this year to make a difference on their campuses and in their corner of the world.”

Fauja Singh didn’t begin running races with any serious intent until the age of 89, although he has enjoyed running throughout different periods in his life. This athletic focus is particularly remarkable since his early years were filled with illness. As a child, Fauja Singh could not walk until he was five years old and was so weak at the age of 15, that he could barely cover a mile. In his authorized biography, *Turbaned Tornado*, he has said, “Perhaps it was the Almighty’s way of preserving [my legs] for later years.”

Sardar Fauja Singh is a Sikh, a follower of the world’s fifth largest religion that preaches a message of devotion to God, equality for all and an abhorrence of blind rituals. Sikh literally means “disciple” and typically, male followers wear turbans as an outward sign of their inward faith in God and their willingness to follow Sikh codes and principles. Fauja Singh wears his turban on and off the track and stays on the move whether walking eight miles a day throughout his home city of London or running in half or full marathon races and other tournaments. At 5’8” and 115 pounds he truly is a marvel.

“As a centenarian marathon runner, Fauja Singh’s infectious enthusiasm for life, running and healthy living is a model for all of us,” said Gurpreet Singh Ahuja, MD, OC Human Relations board member and President of the Medical Staff at CHOC Children’s Hospital. “Sardar Fauja Singh runs because he loves it and because he can and his indomitable spirit is one that we want our youth in Orange County to see and emulate as motivation to move beyond barriers in their own lives.”

Fauja Singh’s love of running can be traced back to a few distinct personal hardships. His poor health at a young age for one--once it improved and he started moving, no one was going to keep him down. Later in life, after the loss of his wife and eldest son, deep depression got a hold of Fauja and he had difficulty overcoming his grief. He has used running as a way to stay centered, healthy and positive. He remains a fun-loving person with a keen sense of humor as he interacts with family and friends and those who come to watch him race.

“Walk in my Shoes” is organized and hosted by OC Human Relations, a 501(c)(3) non-profit agency whose mission is to foster mutual understanding among residents and eliminate prejudice, intolerance and discrimination in Orange County. The agency annually hosts over 500 students and teachers to a day-long youth conference where participants explore issues of identity and culture, develop their leadership skills and be exposed to examples of successful youth activism. OC Human Relations has been working with local Sikhs and Muslims for the past year to understand the current status of these two communities who faced multiple hate crimes after the 9/11 terrorists acts on American soil. You can read more about the Sikh and Muslim community dialog sessions in the [OC Human Relations Commission report](#).

About OC Human Relations

Since 1971, OC Human Relations has worked to build bridges of understanding to promote a vision of our community where all people are valued and included and our diversity is realized as a source of strength. For more information, visit www.ochumanrelations.org. Connect with us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/WeAreOneOC.