

CAROLINA ECHEVERRI



THANK YOU, CAROLINA, FOR SHARING YOUR STORY WITH MAPLE RIDGE. LEARN MORE AT MAPLERIDGE.CA/2016.



“I WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS COMMUNITY AND TO HELP OTHERS. IF I DON’T DO IT, WHO WILL? I AM A WOMAN OF ACTION WHEREVER POSSIBLE.”



TELL US ABOUT YOUR STORY.

My story starts in Colombia, where I grew up. Colombia is a beautiful country, but there was also political unrest starting around 1965 that affected many of our lives. As a result, my husband José and I decided to move from Colombia to Miami in the United States in 2001.

From Miami, we moved to New York. Unfortunately, we were living in New York on September 11, 2001. José worked close to the twin towers. It was truthfully traumatizing and we left New York as quickly as possible for Orlando, Florida only a couple of weeks after the attack.

Jacobo, our eldest, was born in Orlando. By this time, our refugee application status had been pending for six years and was, to our great disappointment, denied. It was at this time that we decided to make the move to Canada.

We moved to Montreal in 2007 and applied for refugee status in Canada. Within eight months, our application was processed and accepted! Sophie, our youngest, was born in 2008 and when she was, 8 we moved to Maple Ridge, British Columbia. We’ve now been in Canada for eleven years and I’m staying here. This is home. I love Maple Ridge.

WHAT’S YOUR FAVOURITE THING ABOUT HOME?

I love that Maple Ridge has a deep connection with nature. I grew up in a town called Armenia that is surrounded

by trees, animals and coffee plantations. I grew up immersed in a beautiful, natural area and could not live somewhere that didn’t hold the same respect for nature. This is also why it is so important for me to live somewhere where my family can create a deep love for the outdoors.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.

It’s just the four of us (myself, José, Jacobo and Sophie) here in Maple Ridge. For me, my family is my motor; they are why I wake up every day and why I go to work. José and I have always been very close. Seeing him involved in our community and happy is what makes me happy.

WHY DO YOU VOLUNTEER?

I want to contribute to this community and to help others. If I don’t do it, who will? I am a woman of action wherever possible.

Volunteering has also given me an opportunity to meet people and explore things that I never thought could be possible. We don’t have a lot of blood relatives here, but volunteering has contributed to building our family and connections here in Maple Ridge. It’s important to me to expose my family to new people, opportunities and to teach them the importance of contributing to their community.

And volunteering is fun! People often refer to me as the ‘multiculturalism lady’ and that makes me proud.

WHY IS MAKING SPACE FOR A DIVERSE AND MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY IMPORTANT?

When José and I moved to the United States and then to Canada, I could not believe how many smells, sights, sounds, colours and different clothes there were! Multiculturalism is so important for Maple Ridge because, if my life has taught me anything, we are all in this together. Multiculturalism is happening whether people like it or not, so let’s celebrate the joys of our differences.

Sometimes people fear what is different and I think that education is a huge part of where I have dedicated my work. Both kids and adults need to learn that it is okay to look different or to be different. Multiculturalism gives everyone the opportunity to meet wonderful people and to try new things. Through my work as a Local Immigration partnership coordinator at The Family Education and Support Centre (a multiservice agency that offers different programs and services for newcomers and immigrants) I have been able

to learn and participate in different community events. Meeting people from all over the world has been a fantastic experience.

HOW DID YOU BECOME THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE RIDGE MEADOWS MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY?

In 2017, I worked for Immigrant Services Society of BC in Maple Ridge. I was stationed at an information booth at the Canada Day event in Memorial Peace Park when a stranger approached me, explaining that their group was having trouble finding places to change and get ready for the event.

After helping to orient them to the amenities near the park, the stranger introduced himself as the Yves Chinnapen, President of the Multicultural Society. He invited José and I to a meeting and we never stopped attending. It was the perfect fit; my background in multiculturalism and my passion for local community made me fall in love with the role at first sight.

TELL US ABOUT THE AWARD-WINNING CULTURE PLAN.

Developing the Maple Ridge Culture plan was a very interesting process. I learned a lot about how the City works in relation to the Culture Plan and how Maple Ridge fits in the larger scope of multiculturalism in Canada.

This plan is important to me because it is so heavily connected to the work that I have done throughout my career. Change can be frightening, but the Maple Ridge Culture Plan helps to direct us where we are going and how we get there.



GET INVOLVED

RIDGE MEADOWS MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY
rmmcsociety.ca

THE FAMILY EDUCATION & SUPPORT CENTRE
familyed.bc.ca

LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP
ridgemeadowsnewcomers.com

BUILDING INTERFAITH BRIDGES
facebook.com/interf8th

IMMIGRANT SERVICE SOCIETY OF BC
issbc.org

MAPLE RIDGE CULTURE PLAN
mapleridge.ca/1462

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR NEWCOMERS TO MAPLE RIDGE?

Volunteer doing something you like to do! Don’t be afraid to talk to people about you and who you are, whether you are moving from another Canadian community or come to Maple Ridge from another country.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LIVED IN MAPLE RIDGE FOR THEIR ENTIRE LIVES?

Ask questions! Don’t be afraid to ask about new people but be honestly invested in their answers. If you find yourself feeling afraid of change, remember that education and learning can transform your fears of the unknown into excitement and maybe even turn into lifelong relationships. That has been my truth. I want to take this opportunity to encourage people to get to know immigrants. They are facing the same challenges as you: the family budgets, dealing with teenagers, getting ahead at work, etc. We are all in this together.