

MURTY DEVATA (1929–2021)

By Tony Sangiuliano and Sheila Devata-Chochinov



The Southern Ontario and Canadian geotechnical communities recognize the passing of a great colleague who touched many of us over the years. Murty Devata passed away on October 12, 2021 with his family by his side. He will always be remembered as an honourable and beloved engineering mentor and friend. An extraordinary engineer with a passion for geotechnical engineering, Murty was a great human being. Having practiced geotechnical engineering for over 60 years, Murty helped many to kick-off their careers and directed many others in their career development.

Murty was born and raised in India and received his BSc in civil engineering from the University of Bangalore in Mysore. He obtained his MSc in civil engineering at the University of Kentucky in Lexington.

Murty emigrated to Canada in 1957 and started his career as a project engineer with the Foundations Section of the Department of Highways of Ontario (DHO) in 1958. There he progressed from project engineer to Chief Foundation Engineer. As Chief Foundation Engineer, he took a lot of pride in his technical leadership and became a strong ambassador for the Foundation Section; both by strengthening relationships within the Ministry and with consultants, contractors and suppliers external to the Ministry. He was responsible for the initiation and development of a state-of-the-art laboratory amongst his numerous accomplishments at the Ministry.

His desire for foundation engineering was contagious and his enthusiasm catching. His great works included deep foundations and embankment design over soft ground. In total, Murty provided 38 years of service to first the DHO and then the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO), offering his knowledge, experience and wisdom on hundreds of capital program delivery projects and also in the development and implementation of several foundation related policies and standards. Along the way, Murty wrote numerous technical publications and papers reflecting his skill and craft. He also collaborated with academia; both in Canada and overseas, providing numerous lectures on the practical aspects of the design and construction of bridge foundations and embankments.

His commitment to the Foundations Section created the pathway for foundation engineering in the DHO and MTO, a pathway that remains today. He had an incredible memory that gave him a wealth of knowledge that he graciously and unconditionally shared.

Murty retired from the MTO in 1994 and then worked with Golder Associates as a Senior Internal Advisor. In this position, he continued to leave his mark on foundation engineering. In a profession that requires balance between art and science, Murty revolutionized the foundation engineering state-of-practice that bridged the gap between theory and practice.

In addition to his technical and business activities, Murty was involved with professional associations such as the Canadian Geotechnical Society and the Tunnelling Association of Canada, rising to positions of leadership in both. He was a member of the Executive of the CGS Southern Ontario Section for many years, and championed geotechnical activities in his position as Chairman. He was also a member of several national and international committees including the Foundations Technical Subcommittee of the Canadian Highways Bridge Design Code.

Murty was recognized throughout his career with numerous awards. The CGS Southern Ontario Section recognized his contributions in 2007 with their annual award. In 1993, he was recognized as a Fellow of the Engineering Institute of Canada. Most recently during GeoNiagara 2021, the 74th Canadian Geotechnical Conference, Murty was recognized in a GeoNiagara Heritage Lunch Video Tribute.

Aside from his dedication to geotechnical engineering, Murty was instrumental in pioneering the India-Canada Association to promote diversity and cultural exchanges. He spoke proudly of this association.

Murty was a family man and was true to his saying "That a man is not a man who doesn't spend time with family." With his late soul-mate, Santha, they raised three children: Meena (Childcare Educator), Sheila (Urban Planner, Graduate Lecturer) and Nagesh (VP Finance, Marketing, Payoneer) and had five grandchildren.

Murty will be missed but his legacy will last forever, never to be forgotten.