



“Donors are an integral part of any organization that exists to fulfill a mission that better serves our community. However, the time put forth by donors and volunteers is just as valuable in providing hope, strength and joy to the children we serve.” Mike Wlotzki, executive director of Make-A-Wish Eastern Ontario

## LOTUS BUILDING

# Visionary appeals for funding to advance extraordinary building with charitable purpose

In 2011, Dr. Mohan Vijay, a highly successful inventor, announced that he had a dream of epic proportions. “I want to create a building in Ottawa that will rival the Taj Mahal,” he said. “Another Wonder of the World. But with a much different purpose.”

The building would be a dramatic structure in the shape of a lotus flower, a symbol with great meaning to the 75-year-old philanthropist. He remembers growing up impoverished in India and his mother telling him to be like the lotus flower.

“She said that when the lotus leaves are floating in a pond the water doesn’t stick to them because they are hydrophobic,” he says. “So in your life you should be as pure as a lotus so that even if you are living in dirt you will be untouched by it.”

The Lotus Building, however, would not just be a thing of beau-

ty. “I want to use the net profits from renting its office spaces to support charities around the world on an ongoing basis,” he says. “It would also have movie theatres, clinics and playgrounds for children.”

In the year since launching his initiative, Dr. Vijay – along with his wife Hari, his daughter Sheela, his daughter Sangeeta

**“I was lured into this because it was something completely different from anything we have ever done. Mohan inspired me.”**

**Brian Kowalchuk**  
is global director of design at architecture firm HDR

Sicking and her husband Stefan Sicking – has continued to drive the project forward. A major step was to engage HDR, a global architecture firm with offices in Canada, to create a 3-D model of the lotus design.

Brian Kowalchuk, HDR’s global director of design, who is based in Princeton, NJ, was impressed both by the man and his vision.

“What he described was sensational,” he says. “Unlike most meetings between a potential client and architect, this was a discussion. I was lured into this because it was something completely different from anything we have ever done. Mohan inspired me.”

Mr. Kowalchuk knew the design would be quite the challenge. “Mohan’s vision – taking a lotus flower and all that it symbolizes and enlarging it to actually become a building – is something that has never been fully realized in Western architecture.”

HDR found a way to do it, however, and by last September they had produced the architectural renderings and a small scale model. “It was incredible to see my vision come to life,” says Dr. Vijay.

There is still, however, a much bigger challenge to overcome: raising the \$200-million that Dr. Vijay estimates will be needed to fund the building’s construction.

“We need people to invest in this project knowing they won’t get a traditional return on their investment,” says his daughter Dr. Sheela Vijay, an internist at the University of Alberta faculty of medicine and dentistry and a member of the board of directors of the VLN Reach Foundation. “Instead, they would be investing in other peoples’ lives. Helping those less fortunate.”

For Mohan and his wife, Dr. Hari Vijay, helping others has been a long-time commitment. “Hari is a key part of our team,” says Mohan. “She is also an inventor and has a provisional patent application for a mould allergy vaccination. Whatever money we make from her inventions, just the same as from mine, will go towards the Lotus project.”

He’s often asked why he doesn’t just give money directly to charities. “I’ve seen charities receive money one year and not the next,” he says. “I want to have a source of revenue that’s always there for them, and that they know will be available year after year after year.”

Willie Bloom, vice president of business development for VLN Advanced Technologies Inc., the company that operates Dr. Vijay’s business enterprises, has heard the disbelievers but says he has unwavering faith in Mohan’s ability to succeed. “He is an incredibly compassionate and caring person,” he says. “But he’s also totally determined. This is definitely an ambitious goal, but it’s doable. I really believe that.”

The Vijay family knows that raising money could take some time. And they’ve heard the skeptics who think it can’t be done. “I just need a Bill Clinton, Bill Gates or Warren Buffet, with their charitable initiatives, to come on board,” says Mohan. “Or someone like Oprah to take up the cause. I believe there’s someone out there who will want to help make this happen.”

To learn more, e-mail [lotusbuilding@vln-tech.com](mailto:lotusbuilding@vln-tech.com).

Architectural renderings of the proposed Lotus Building are bringing Dr. Mohan Vijay’s ambitious plans one step closer to fruition.

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED



## MOHAN VIJAY



### Gratitude, compassion spurs philanthropic giving

“My father is the ultimate Energizer Bunny,” says Dr. Sheela Vijay, an internist at the University of Alberta faculty of medicine and dentistry. “He has amazing energy and has worked so hard all his life.”

As a young man, Dr. Mohan Vijay realized that if he studied hard and won scholarships he could escape the poverty of his upbringing. His plan succeeded and he moved first to England and then to Canada, where he earned a Ph.D. from the University of Manitoba in nuclear engineering.

After teaching at his alma mater for eight years, Mohan joined the National Research Council of Canada in Ottawa in 1975. Two decades later he resigned and formed VLN Advanced Technologies to manufacture advanced water-jet products.

“We were told he was crazy, that what he was doing could never be done,” says Willie Bloom, VLN Advanced Technologies’ vice president of business development, who has worked with Mohan for 12 years. “It took ten years but he did it.”

In April 2011, Pratt & Whitney US purchased Mohan’s patent for a forced pulse water jet that could remove coatings from parts and equipment in the aerospace and other industries. The multi-million-dollar deal allowed him to pursue his ultimate dream.

“I always thought my father worked on his inventions so he could fund the Lotus Building, an idea he’s had for at least 20 years,” says Sheela.

That work continues, even though Mohan, who has published more than 100 papers and technical reports on all aspects of water-jet technology, is now 75. “I have several new patents pending in the same field,” he says. “If everything works out they could bring in more millions for my dream.”

Some people think Mohan is now dreaming too big, that his Lotus Building can’t become a reality. “I have never doubted my father’s vision,” says Sheela, who is actively involved in raising funds for the project. “I have seen him make other seemingly impossible things come true. Why not this one?”

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## GIVING

# Generous giving helps those in need

It makes absolute sense that one of the first charities Dr. Mohan Vijay has supported through his VLN Reach Foundation is Make-A-Wish Canada, an organization that grants the special wishes of children with life-threatening medical illnesses. “I grew up in poverty as a child, as did my wife, and we have always been moved by stories of children suffering from hunger or illness or any other kind of deprivation,” he says.

In 2011, Dr. Vijay invited Mike Wlotzki, executive director of Make-A-Wish Eastern Ontario, to sit on VLNF’s board of directors in an advisory capacity on philanthropic matters. “Since then,

**“My board has told me I say yes too often. But it’s hard for me when I see people in real need.”**

**Dr. Vijay Mohan**  
Philanthropist

Mohan has helped us not just with financial donations but also with advice,” says Mr. Wlotzki.

An example of the latter involved the charity’s website. “He saw that it wasn’t as effective as it could be,” says Mr. Wlotzki. “But we didn’t have the money to fix it. We now have a new website thanks to Mohan’s contacts and his sponsorship.”

But VLNF has not just contributed to charities that focus on children. “I learned last year that the Ottawa-Carleton Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities had no money to buy Christmas presents for the disabled people it supported because of a funding cutback,” says Dr. Vijay. “They come and

clean our office building once a week and they’re wonderful people. I was shocked and gave the Association money to pay for the gifts.”

His foundation has also helped the Brain Injury Association of Canada and a charity that supports children with autism. “My board has told me I say yes too often,” says Dr. Vijay. “But it’s hard for me when I see people in real need.”

If his Lotus Building project becomes a reality, Dr. Vijay says it will support many charities in Canada and around the world. “It is my utmost hope that we can help those in need by having an ongoing source of revenue for this kind of essential work.”