

# Saanich youth group organizer receives national recognition

By Salwa Farah

Saanich News contributor

The young girls swing in and out of a loose circle. They stretch their arms to the ceiling and hit two red sticks together to the steady rhythm of Indian music. They still have a few more steps to learn before they can perform the traditional Punjabi stick dance this Saturday.

Now the girls weave around one another in a complicated figure eight move. They are part of the Shan-e-Punjab Dance Group, a youth group organized by Sonia Grewal.

It is this dedication to enriching the lives of youth that helped Grewal win the 1998 Flare Volunteer Awards presented by the fashion magazine earlier this May. She was one of five recipients to receive the award honoring Canadian women for their significant community volunteer work.

Grewal is also the instigating force behind starting the Indo-Canadian Community Awareness Committee of Victoria — a group that's dedicated to giving youth an opportunity to participate in a constructive way in their community.

One of the perks of winning was a return trip to Toronto and a stay at the Four Seasons Hotel. Grewal also received a complete make-over from *Flare* magazine make-up artists and a new outfit for a professional photo shoot. The award was presented by Hilary Weston, lieutenant-governor of



SALWA FARAH: PHOTO

**Sonia Grewal, creator of the Shan-e-Punjab Dance Group, was recently honored with a national award for her work with youth.**

Ontario.

Grewal explains that there is no better way to learn about a culture than through dance.

"One aspect of keeping culture alive is through song and dance — we're very motivating with the kids and try to boost their self-esteem."

"This is what the kids enjoy," Grewal says about dance. "Then you can take them to the next level — It could be drama or traditional customs."

Most of the participants are children whose parents are

third and fourth generation Indo-Canadians, but the youth group is geared to children from all cultural backgrounds.

The group was started in 1993 with only a handful of people who just wanted to dance, says Grewal. Now the group includes over 60 children between the ages of four to 20.

Shan-e-Punjab has also expanded to include a summer day camp as part of St. Margaret's School program. The program includes everything from traditional dance, crafts

and even making roti — an Indian flat bread — out of play dough.

"The key to our success is we gear everything to the specific age groups," says Grewal. This way, children grow up with leadership skills and can share their knowledge with the younger children.

Shan-e-Punjab will perform this Saturday, June 20 at UVic's David Lam Auditorium at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$6 and are available by calling 389-4719 or 216-1279.