



Attorney Ritu Chokshi leads the Chugh, LLP office in Indianapolis, where she specializes in immigration law. (Photo by Adam Seif)

## Feeling at home: Personal journey inspires Carmel attorney to help other immigrants build a life in central Indiana

By: Jeff Decker on July 11, 2023

Carmel Cover Stories

Hamilton County is fast becoming one of Indiana's most diverse areas, attracting immigrants for many of the same reasons U.S.-born residents relocate to the northside: quality of life, top-rated schools, high-paying jobs and proximity to Indianapolis in a suburban setting.

Those are among the reasons Ritu Chokshi moved to Carmel 14 years ago. She and her parents immigrated to Toronto from India in 2002, when Chokshi was a young adult. She moved to Indiana thinking she would convince her husband, Karthik Raghupathy, whom she had met online, that they should make Canada their permanent home. But they never left, now have two children (Rhea, 9, and Ira, 5) and have no plans to leave.

"In the context of Carmel, we chose and stayed here as it was important to me as a mother to raise my children in spaces that reflected them and included them," Chokshi said.

Chokshi and her family are part of a growing demographic locally. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 11.1 percent of Carmel's nearly 101,000 residents (as of 2021) identify as Asian. About 13 percent of the city's population is foreign-born.

But moving to a new nation still brings challenges, many of them legal concerns. Chokshi knows about these issues from her own experiences and those of her clients. She is the head of the new Indianapolis location and a partner with Chugh LLP, 8500 Keystone Crossing, Suite 330, a law office specializing in immigration issues, including those that affect business owners and entrepreneurs. Chugh is in its 38th year of operation and has 23 offices in the U.S. and India.

Chokshi was considering her own practice in May 2022 when Chugh’s managing partner and founder, Navneet Chugh, asked her to open the Indianapolis office.

“I believe Indiana is at the threshold of great economic activity. We are finally attracting great talent and industry,” Chokshi said. “With access to great quality of life, opportunities to buy and grow businesses, and our Midwest hospitality, I absolutely think it’s the right time for a firm like Chugh that is very deeply entrenched in the startup ecosystem and intrinsically aware of how to facilitate cross-border transactions to be here so we can partner in this growth.”

Arianna Gonzalez, client services manager for Chugh, said that though the Indianapolis office opened in March, expanding to the area had been in the works for some time. She said Chugh was excited about better serving Indianapolis and the state.

“Like many immigrants across the United States, our clients face a range of challenges, from cultural adaptation and language barriers to understanding and complying with complex immigration laws and regulations,” Gonzalez said. “Legally, we often help clients with issues related to visa applications, work permits, permanent residency and naturalization, among other services.”

Chokshi said the local immigrants she connects with usually are worried about long processing times for their families or how to fill employment gaps in their businesses. For example, if a legal permanent resident of the United States marries a foreign national, it can take more than two years to complete the first step of the application process, Chokshi said.

When Chokshi moved to the U.S., her husband was on an H1-B skilled worker visa. As the spouse of a skilled worker, she could not immediately get a work permit. She started attending Indiana University School of Law, and her work permit arrived within the first month of starting school. Raghupathy became naturalized in 2020; Chokshi followed suit in December 2022.



*Ritu Chokshi and her husband, Karthik Raghupathy, on the day Chokshi became a U.S. citizen in December 2022.  
(Photo courtesy of Ritu Chokshi)*

The path to residency and citizenship often can be daunting. Chokshi described immigration laws as outdated. But she also has seen progress and a change in attitudes in the past decade.

“In Carmel, we have had divisive debates around DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion), and I think it signals to a family like mine that we are still very much in a nascent stage of figuring out what it means to live in a multicultural society,” Chokshi said. “I think it is healthy to have these conversations and to unpack what we need to continue to grow, to continue being a reflection of the world and still be the great Midwest heart that believes in service, humility and hard work.”



*Ritu Chokshi, second from right, with her first cousins and siblings in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. Chokshi said it was one of the last group shots taken before her family moved to Canada in 2002. (Photo courtesy of Ritu Chokshi)*

## **Landing in Carmel**

Sasi Noothalapati left India in 2001 and came to the United States to get a college education. His journey led him to Hamilton County, first in Fishers, and now in Carmel. And he's glad to be here.

“I really enjoy Carmel,” said Noothalapati, a part of the city's growing foreign-born population. “I travel a lot, and Carmel is a really, really beautiful place.”

Noothalapati has owned Frankfort Plastics, a recycling business, since 2018. He has found the business climate in Clinton County and Indiana welcoming, with business leaders and government officials eager to help when issues arise.

After completing his studies at the University of Memphis in Tennessee, he moved to Indiana in 2008 and has seen the state evolve when it comes to immigrants. He and his wife, Rajani, have two daughters, ages 13 and 7.

“Where we live is surrounded by so much diversity, so much opportunity, how can I ask for anything more than that?” he said. “We're still in the minority, but diversity is always good.”