

Risks Relent Reward For Indian Immigrant In Bergenfield



BERGENFIELD, N.J. — Kal Patel stands in the parking lot of the new Lightbridge Academy on S. Washington Avenue in Bergenfield, watching the construction underway on the building.

He was only 17 when he moved to the U.S. from India, and never could've guessed that he'd one day be managing preschools.

All he knew was that he had what he took to make it.

"If you're willing to work and you have different ideas and creativity, you can always make money in this country," said Patel, a father of two from East Brunswick.

Patel's first few months in the U.S. were an uphill battle. He spoke little English and longed for familiarity back in India.

Things became easier, and he began studying engineering at Steven's Institute of Technology in Hoboken.

But he wanted to go into business, which is why he went into wholesale and garnered expertise in selling candy and tobacco.

It wasn't long before he wanted something new.

"I wanted something recession proof," Patel said. "I knew that if people had money they would put their child in daycare. If they didn't have money, both parents would work and would also have to put their child in daycare."

He didn't want just any childcare business, though. He wanted something local and just as eager to thrive as he was.

Four years ago this October, he opened the first Lightbridge Academy in Clifton and several others in New Jersey.

It was a big risk, he said. But one he was willing to take.

"It's all about taking risks," said Patel of business in the U.S. "Americans want teady, smooth income flow to count on something, but I don't want to work under someone with that thinking.

"So I take risks."

Patel is hoping Lightbridge Academy will open in the fall.