

Komal Mehta

How does a brand new robotics team gain what appears to be overnight success, winning not one, but two Rookie All-Star Awards, the Xerox Creativity Award, the Highest Rookie Seed Award, the Underwriters Laboratories Industrial Safety Award, the Regional Championship Team and earn an invitation to compete in the First Robotics International competition?

The answer lies in having a founder with spirit, with passion, with heart. The answer lies in having someone with business savvy and a quiet humility. The answer lies in having a visionary champion like Komal Mehta.

When Komal came to Oshkosh several years ago, she envisioned a First Robotics Competition team that would bring together students from all area high schools and home schools for a robotics program with a purpose. She knew that by bringing students and adult mentors together during a six-week build and a two month competition season, students would begin to see careers in science, technology, engineering, math and business in a whole new light.

But, Komal knew she couldn't build this program alone. So, Komal did what she is very good at doing... she asked for help. She first approached Oshkosh Corporation and asked them to sponsor the inaugural season and support the team with exceptional mentors. They agreed.

Next, she turned her attention to schools, getting the Oshkosh Area School District and Unified Catholic Schools on board. Community groups and business leaders were the next to hear her passionate pleas. She worked with the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation to set up a charitable fund for the program and the Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce to build support with the business community.

What are the fruits of these labors?

After just one year, 33 students are seeing their futures differently because of their experience in the First Robotics Competition. This year, others will follow in their footsteps.

And, still the program grows. This summer, Komal and the mentors she works most closely with – Tyler, Tom, Jake, Jon, Chris, Connie, Seth, John, Brent and others – worked to launch the First Lego League program, which introduces 4th-8th grade students to robotics. Already 7 teams have formed in the Oshkosh area.

Komal has now turned her attention to ensuring this program thrives for years to come. This summer, she persuaded FIRST Robotics Competition founder Dean Kamen to be the special guest at a community event at EAA and share his vision for the program. She has established a Steering Committee for the program and currently serves as its president. She hopes to work with area schools to enhance the engineering curriculum at area schools.

Quietly and carefully, Komal has built an alliance that engaged businesses, educators and community leaders around a powerful idea – that introducing Oshkosh area students to future-focused careers would pay dividends for our community long into the future.

As you can see, Komal is an advocate, promoter, communicator, innovator and steward. If you haven't yet met her, please do so. You'll likely be so inspired that you'll want to be part of the effort, too. And, knowing Komal... she'll find a way for you to get involved.