

ROLLA

Kaleidoscope gains a new volunteer, and a big heart



Jyoti Malhotra, Kaleidoscope's Director of Strategic Planning and Government Relations, said she refused to accept payment for the position, and chooses to volunteer in order to give back to the community, with whom she is passionate about sharing her education.

CORBIN KOTTMANN
rdnnews@gmail.com

The Kaleidoscope Discovery Center is run by individuals who are passionate about educating our community, and recently gained a new member of their workforce. Jyoti Malhotra, Missouri S&T alumna and former Brewer Science employee, is serving as the Kaleidoscope's Director of Strategic Planning and Government Relations, and doing so entirely as a volunteer.

After graduating with her Ph.D in Chemistry from Missouri S&T in 2002, Jyoti continued to perform postdoctoral research with the Argonne National Laboratory until 2004, when she joined the Brewer Science team. STEM education, which

focuses on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, has always been an important part of her life, and Jyoti said she wants to share this passion for education with the

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- Jyoti Malhotra

town that has been her home for more than a decade.

"Being here in town for almost fifteen years now, I said okay, we have to do something for the community," she said. "You can't just take, you have to give back."

Jyoti explained how education is a personal matter for her,

having been encouraged by her parents to pursue higher education as she was growing up in India.

"My parents were very intelligent, very smart, but they couldn't go beyond high school because of fi-



Jyoti recently represented the Kaleidoscope Discovery Center at Rolla Middle School's Math and Science night, leading students in an experiment. PHOTOS BY CORBIN KOTTMANN

nancial constraints.' Jyoti said her parents always en-

couraged her to speak with her teachers and seek

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guidance while in school in order to be able to learn at higher and higher levels.

Her experiences with STEM education, both in and out of school, led Jyoti to feel the need to pass on that learning to the community, according to her.

"I feel so strongly about doing something for the community. It's been almost twenty years since I left India, and out of that, almost fifteen or sixteen years (have been) in Rolla. I have a deep sense of belonging here," she said.

As part of her outreach as Kaleidoscope's Director of Strategic Planning and Government Relations, one of the key points Jyoti wants to get across is how accessible STEM and ESTEAM education really is in the community when the motivation is right.

"It doesn't have to be that your parents are professors or a doctor for you to be a professor or a doctor. It really starts with what kind of motivation you have from your parents or your teachers, or yourself," she said.

The benefit of this type of education, according to Jyoti, is the way it broadens students' thinking.

"It makes you aware that it's okay to do certain things differently, that there are different ways to achieve the same thing," she said. "Education is very important, because it gives you a tool to help you see your future. It gives you a tool to shape your future." Jyoti added that the role of teachers is to help give students the ability to dream, and the resources to achieve those dreams.

Jyoti also has the goal of combating a drop in students interested in the STEM fields and a lack of federal programs aimed to promote them. According to her, federal STEM programs dropped 50% back in

2010, and in the last four or five years, only 30 percent of students are interested in STEM fields. Of those students, only 12-14 percent are girls, according to Jyoti.

Jyoti said this pipeline of STEM talent doesn't begin in college, or even in high school, but much sooner, and her goal is to reach students at a young age to make them aware of these opportunities.

"I truly think...we have so much hidden talent in our districts," she said. "They can go and they can aim higher for the dreams which may not be too close to them."

Jyoti will be trying to bring these dreams a little closer through the Kaleidoscope Discovery Center through communicating the KDC's message of what they do and why they do it, educating the community about robotics programs, summer school and mentoring, their belief that every child in the community deserves hands on exposure to advanced programs in the engineering, science, technology, environment, art and mathematics (ESTEAM) fields.

Jyoti also gives parents and students some advice on pursuing their educational goals.

"Go talk to your teachers, come to the KDC or talk to the professors at the university to get that guidance," she said. "Push your kids to get that exposure and then let them think on it if that's what they want to do." Jyoti said this is where the Kaleidoscope Discovery Center comes in, to provide this exposure.

While engineering and science fields can appear far off and distant, Jyoti will be spending her time making sure students and parents understand the only requirement to achieving these goals is motivation.

"My parents were not professors or doctors, but I did my Ph. D, did my post-doc, worked in the professional industry for almost sixteen years. If I can do that, anyone can do that," she said.