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Rajesh Voddiraju

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Serial entrepreneur and angel investor are two labels that describe the significant contributions WMU alumnus Rajesh Voddiraju, a native of Hyderabad, India, has made to the computer science industry since completing his master's degree at Western Michigan University in 1993. He was honored in October 2014 by WMU's Department of Computer Science when he was selected as the recipient of the department's annual Computer Science Alumni Excellence Award.

Voddiraju is the founder and CEO of HealthiPASS Inc, a healthcare patient-payment service provider in what is now a $5 billion per year industry. Another of his recent ventures is CVM Solutions, a software system that helps companies streamline supplier management processes. “CVM grew from a bootstrapped idea to being named as ‘Inc. Magazine’s’ 500/5000 fastest growing private companies in the United States,” Voddiraju said. “CVM has served over 300 Fortune 1000 firms nationally using its Software-as-a-Service and Supplier Intelligence data. It was acquired by a $2 billion firm in late 2011.” HealthiPASS and CVM Solutions are both located in the Chicago metropolitan area.

One of Voddiraju’s nominators for the distinguished alumni award was Dr. Ajay Gupta, a professor of computer science and CEAS graduate program director, who grew up in Jaipur, India. Gupta has always believed it inevitable that Voddiraju would be very successful. “Rajesh’s achievements have been one of our great success stories,” Gupta said. “He excelled at a very fast pace and climbed the ladder of the corporate and entrepreneurship world quickly. If I recall his student days, he stood out as one of the top. He showed out-of-the-box thinking on various ideas, class-work and research problems we discussed. In fact, during our discussion of the research problems, it was quite apparent that he was seeing them from a commercialization perspective instead of just the pure academic interest of the problems. His story should be a great inspiration to our current and future students.”

Voddiraju followed his best friend from India to Western in the early 1990s to earn a master’s degree, intent on pursuing every opportunity to maximize his time at WMU. He was taken under the wing of Dr. Donna Kaminski, professor of computer science, and Gupta. He said he was given many great opportunities, including working in a variety of labs, serving as a teaching assistant, and an internship with the Upjohn Company—now known as Pfizer, Inc.—focused on the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals. These experiences as a WMU student set the precedent for Rajesh’s future accomplishments.

For the last 22 years, Voddiraju has evolved from a hands-on techie, to executive management roles in management/IT consulting, and then on to his recent entrepreneurial successes. In addition to his work at HealthiPASS Inc., he is well known as a technology entrepreneur and as an angel investor in health care and technology ventures. He followed a passion for improving the health care industry when he founded HealthiPASS, Inc. “Healthcare is a large portion of the United States gross domestic product and it is an industry that is going through a major transformation,” he said “It was a couple of personal experiences that helped me decide to start HealthiPASS because I am passionate about simplifying the commerce between patients and their healthcare providers.”

As an angel investor, Voddiraju has invested in a new group of immediate care centers in the Chicago area and nearly a dozen technology startups. He has mentored many young entrepreneurs through his involvement with The Founders’ Institute, AngelPool, Cornerstone Angels, and other groups.

Voddiraju earned his master's in computer science from WMU in 1993. He graduated at the top of his class with a bachelor's degree in engineering from Nagpur University, Nagpur, India, and attended management programs at the University of California at Los Angeles and Tuck School of Business in Hanover, New Hampshire.

It is important to Voddiraju that other immigrants be able to experience the same opportunities for success he has enjoyed in the U.S. His advice for international students is simple. “Always be curious; always be hungry,” he said. “Colleges like Western provide a fantastic atmosphere for you to explore things. The current CEO of Microsoft was also an immigrant. The United States is a phenomenal environment for opportunity, there is no limit to what you can accomplish.”