

A LEADER IN TECHNOLOGY

Meet Chellam Manickam, CIO of Ukrop's

by Libby Carty McNamee

Chellam Manickam is not your average Richmonder, unique in both her personal background and professional accomplishments as chief information officer (CIO) of Ukrop's Super Markets, Inc. A native of India, she moved to the United States with her husband from an arranged marriage to attend graduate school at Old Dominion University in Norfolk to study aerospace engineering. However, upon arrival, she quickly realized the vast majority of jobs in that field are defense related. As a foreign national she was not eligible for the appropriate clearances, so she switched to computer science at her first opportunity.

Although this is a male-dominated field in the United States, Chellam was quite used to women working in technology. Her hometown of Bangalore is the India's third-largest city as well as the nation's leading information technology (IT) employer, aptly nicknamed the "Silicon Valley of India." Women often wrote code or were part of mid-level management.

Her first job after obtaining her master's degree was at General Motors in Indianapolis. However, finding the area too cold a climate for their liking, she and her husband moved back to Virginia, where she worked as a senior associate at Booz Allen Hamilton, a leading consulting firm in Tyson's Corner, Northern Virginia's commercial hub.

In 2001, her husband accepted his dream job at the College of William & Mary, so they relocated to Williamsburg. Since becoming Ukrop's first female CIO, also commonly known as an "IT director," she has commuted to Richmond daily. In her professional capacity she provides the vision for the use of technology while managing all technical aspects of the chain of grocery stores.

When Chellam entered the business community here, she joined the Greater Richmond Technology Council (GRTC) as a member of the board. However, she was disappointed to find that, unlike Northern Virginia, Richmond did not have an established networking group for women in technology. Not one to sit idly, she gathered eight other local female CIOs at the Jefferson Hotel and threw out the idea, "Let's start something!"

These technology-oriented corporate women formed the Women in Technology Management Forum within the GRTC, of which Chellam is co-chair. The group has grown to almost 100 women and offers quarterly events, the most recent entitled "Today, Tomorrow, and the Day After," designed to help members assess their finances and skill sets, promote readiness to



make major career changes, examine benefit options, and discover hiring opportunities in today's challenging economy.

With a chuckle, Chellam declares herself to be "the worst diversity person," because gender and ethnicity are irrelevant to her. Her hardest adjustment has been leaving the cosmopolitan environment of Northern Virginia and trying to break in here in Richmond, where so many people have long-term ties dating back to childhood. "You have to know what you want. Anyone can be a stumbling block in your life, man or woman. It all comes down to you as an individual and what people think of you aside from all of that."

We think you're great, Chellam. **V**

For more information about the Greater Richmond Technology Council as well as the Women in Technology Management Forum, visit www.richtech.com or e-mail Alicia Durham at Alicia@richtech.com.

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