

A more efficient way to use energy



Grid smarts

Jennifer Indovina, Tenrehte Technologies Inc. president and CEO, has big ideas on how to change the way the world uses energy. See Fast Start on page 12.

Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

At Tenrehte Technologies, Jennifer Indovina and partners are rethinking the grid

By **SALLY PARKER**

Jennifer Indovina is an electrical engineer. Like most engineers, she likes to tinker and find new ways to do things. She has big ideas on how to change the way the world uses energy—and she illustrates them by drawing pictures of electrical grids in the air with her finger.

Despite all the hype around wind energy and other alternatives, new energy sources are not the whole answer, Indovina says; we just have to get smarter about using what we have. The president and CEO of Tenrehte Technologies Inc. is focused on the efficient use and distribution of energy already available.

"We're different from (energy) generation. We're more about infrastructure and creating scale," Indovina says. "Sometimes the message about efficiency can get lost."

Tenrehte makes WiFi-enabled products that manage energy use in homes and offices. Its primary product is PICOwatt, a smart-grid wireless plug that helps consumers identify

energy loads of electronics. It has a real-time readout of electricity usage that lets the user control appliances from a central point. The company makes two versions, one to handle up to 15 amps and the other 50 amps.

Indovina says Tenrehte is on the cutting edge of smart-grid technology with its "plug and play" connectivity.

"We are enabling demand response and two-way communication with utilities, (while) our competitors are distracted by trying to sell energy consumers monthly subscription fees," she says.

Tenrehte is turning heads. PICOwatt won in the green technology category at the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in 2010. Later that year, it won the Rochester Regional Business Plan Contest. And the company recently was selected as one of the top 50 most promising green startup companies in the world in the CODE_n13 Contest and will present at the CeBIT trade show in Hanover, Germany.

With the emergence of a global middle class, electronic devices are the fastest-growing energy load in homes and offices, Indovina says.

"The grid is over 150 years old, and we keep on plugging things into it," she says. "The existing structures are so overused; we can't sustain the development that's happening."

Most of Tenrehte's customers are outside the country. Unlike in the United States, where redundancies help the grid survive, in many parts of the world it is so strained that blackouts happen daily. In addition, Europe has put restrictions on the building of power plants. In these places, finding new ways to conserve and maximize resources already available is a popular idea.

"We're the retrofit kids," Indovina says. "If we innovate our way out of a problem we're going to have a much easier road."

Indovina, 29, earned an electrical engineering degree from Rochester Institute of Technology in 2007 and an MBA in finance and marketing from RIT's E. Philip Saunders College of Business in 2008. She co-founded Tenrehte in March 2009 with her father, Mark Indovina, chief operating officer, and Russell Priebe, chief technology officer.

With five employees who work remotely, Tenrehte is still a small startup. The company has secured funding from a variety of sources, including investors in San Francisco. In that deal, Indovina insisted company head-

quarters remain in Rochester. In 20 years she wants Tenrehte to be the biggest technology employer in her hometown.

"You can be anywhere and do great things," she says. "This city offers so many opportunities in terms of talent and resources."

She is intrigued by the people who have fueled Rochester's growth through the years. One of her favorites is Glenn Curtiss in nearby Hammondsport. He built motorcycles and airplanes, becoming an aviation pioneer and land-speed record holder. Though aficionados know his name, he is not widely recognized like the Wright Brothers.

"This is very similar to the culture in Rochester today," Indovina says. "You take (accomplishments) to the world for validation. Maybe that's why this generation is so attracted to this city."

She sees a lot of potential in Rochester and is eager to be part of its renaissance. Indovina is involved in Roc City 2.0, a collection of grassroots organizations that promote community events, and Roc City Design Week, gatherings in June that celebrate design in the public space.

"You hear about boomtowns. We were literally a boomtown," Indovina says. "This city has so much potential."

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Photo by Kimberly McKinzie