

# Women to Watch

By Mary F. Pols, Peter Crooks, Justin Goldman, Matt Isaacs, and Hannah Craddick



**Anita Khurana** - *Khurana nurtures future tech visionaries by letting kids play with computers and LEGO robots.*

By teaching kids to build robots, design computer games, and produce podcasts, Anita Khurana is getting them excited about science, engineering, and the kind of creative thinking that inspires future entrepreneurs and lifelong learners.

Khurana's VisionTech is a nonprofit Tri-Valley-based company that offers after-school programs and summer technology camps at more than 20 elementary schools

and eight city recreation centers around the Bay Area. Khurana herself is a creative thinker. Trained as a biologist in her native India, she became a self-taught tech whiz and started VisionTech in 2002 after her homeschooled fifth-grade son wanted to enter a robotics tournament. Even in our tech-savvy pocket of the Bay Area, prospective teammates were few. "I just couldn't find anybody in the East Bay who was interested," she says.

She learned robotics herself and decided to start a class at Danville's Green Valley Elementary. She continues to be one of the few women who teach robotics. "I have seen the kids look at me differently when I walk into the classroom. Everyone expects a man," says Khurana, who hopes to get more girls to sign up for her classes.

Her venture at Green Valley Elementary was an instant success, and Khurana expanded VisionTech to other schools and to community recreation centers throughout the Bay Area. "When I begin teaching [both girls and boys] game design, you should see the look of amazement on their faces. I can't get them to leave at the end of the lesson."

One of her projects allows kids to make their own robot sentry. Using a programmable robot, students add a wireless web camera so that the robot has vision and can work as a house sentry, beaming images to them while they are away on vacation. "Robotics includes engineering and computer programming," Khurana says. "The whole hypothesis of science is brought into understanding through robotics."

Khurana is gearing up to offer VisionTech classes at several middle schools around the East Bay, including Danville's Diablo Vista and San Ramon's Windemere Ranch. But she's not stopping there. She plans to take VisionTech to other cities (Los Angeles, San Diego, and Washington, D.C.), and to offer scholarships. She also plans to encourage local schools to integrate VisionTech programs into the regular school curriculum. "The kids are so brilliant," she says. "With the kind of entrepreneurial skills we have in America, adding some technology education early on in life [will put us] on top of the world. I do believe that."