

# Swati “Tina” Patel, a woman with spirit



Photos courtesy of Journal Marketing

## *Businesswoman in Education Winner*

By Journal Marketing

**T**ina Patel is a working mother and this is evident in her work as the Founder and Director of Montessori ONE Academy, located in Albuquerque’s Northeast Heights. A nurturing spirit shines through in her treatment of not only her students and their families, but also of her employees. It’s that spirit which has led this entrepreneur on a dynamic journey to create superior educational opportunities for both children and adults.

Her Montessori ONE office, which she refers to as her “hub,” is truly in the center of it all, complete with windows allowing Patel to watch children play. It serves as a constant reminder of the impact she is making on the children attending her school. It’s pretty endearing to watch a toddler smush their sunscreen-y face into the window with a cheeky smirk.

“As a working mom, I found that I didn’t have many options where I felt comfortable leaving my children for both quality care and education,” she said. “That was the seed that eventually grew into Montessori ONE Academy.” While getting her master’s degree in architecture, Patel researched and documented the effects of various learning environments on children and the eventual academic results related to educational surroundings.

“My work in education initially began with high school students. I co-founded two charter high schools and the Rio Grande Educational Collaborative, where we developed innovative curriculum to foster at-risk youth,” Patel said. “While it was incredibly rewarding work, I realized that I wanted to impact children at a much earlier stage in their development. The children I was trying to help didn’t have the foundation that I was providing to my own daughters and that is so critical in the first plane of development.”

Her daughters had begun their schooling in the Montessori system, and Patel was impressed with the method that empowers child independence, responsibility, and inspired learning and does so in a bright, open, collaborative environment. Patel began studying Dr. Montessori’s educational philosophy, which led to Montessori ONE Academy.

In 2007, with help from her husband who works with the architecture firm Dekker/Perich/Sabatini — along with a class of 14 children, Montessori ONE Academy’s Preschool program was born. The Preschool works with children from walking age through Kindergarten. Patel opened the Elementary school in 2015 to serve first through fifth grades and expanded again in June 2019 with the opening of the Nido

program—an authentic Montessori-based infant program serving infants six weeks through walking. Nido currently serves 21 infants, the youngest three months old. Patel’s mark is felt in every aspect of the 20,000 square foot academy as she blends her knowledge of function and design with Montessori pedagogy.

The school is currently Albuquerque’s only Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) recognized program and its one that has fulfilled her desire to provide an academically-sound foundation with superior child care. Montessori ONE employs 47 educators and administrators and educates 178 children. A true leader, Patel ensures that her employees are also a part of the academies’ wider community.

“We’re a family. I think Montessori ONE culture is about dedication, fun and harmony,” Patel said.

Patel’s business ventures in the educational sector don’t stop at her three award-winning and well-regarded Montessori ONE programs. Patel and her brothers have partnered to launch Amaran Senior Living facility, a Montessori-based assisted-living facility scheduled to open next year, next to Montessori ONE.

Patel said Montessori philosophy’s emphasis on cooperation and independence will be a boon to its residents’ spirits who are experiencing a decline in abilities. She has painstakingly guided the design, functionality, amenities, and activities to adhere to Montessori pedagogy. A cornerstone of Amaran will be its inter-generational programming that brings Montessori ONE children and Amaran residents together.

“Like children, the elderly experiencing dementia or Alzheimer’s need to be taught step-by-step,” Patel said. “This is all part of the cycle of life. As we get older, we need help and guidance. It harkens back to our childhood in many ways. They also have so much wisdom and experience to share that can only benefit our students. This felt like a natural evolution for our busi-

ness.”

The new assisted-living venture takes Patel back to her roots of a family business. Patel along with her siblings helped their parents with their hotel business growing up — instilling both a strong work ethic and a respect for family, service, and hospitality.

Patel’s passion for serving children goes beyond the boundaries of Albuquerque and New Mexico. In 2017 she created the Montessori ONE Teacher Training Institute—dedicated to educating and certifying adults as AMI-certified Montessori Guides—the Montessori term for teacher. The Institute, known as MOTTI, operates out of the academy’s campus. Graduates receive a globally-recognized AMI diploma that enables them to teach in a Montessori school anywhere in the world.

Patel partnered with Indigenous Montessori Institute to enhance MOTTI’s curriculum with the United States’ only Philosophy of Indigenous Education—a course that harmonizes Montessori education and Indigenous culture to respect and elevate the education of Indigenous cultures domestically and internationally. Montessori ONE’s inaugural class of 13 included five teachers from Standing Rock, S.D. who trained for 10-months in both Montessori method and Philosophy of Indigenous Education. Those teachers took their new skills back to their pueblos and will give back to their community in a measurable way.

When asked about what comes next for this entrepreneur, Patel looks across the globe to her home country of India where she would like to open a Montessori ONE Academy campus. It seems fitting that Patel would refuse to see borders and oceans as any sort of impediment to her passion for serving children and the power of knowledge.

**Montessori ONE**

9360 Holly Avenue, NE