

ALBUQUERQUE BUSINESS FIRST

Meet our Diverse Business Leader honorees: Montessori ONE Academy founder on education and starting a business in New Mexico

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Swati (Tina) Patel is founder and director of Montessori ONE Academy.

Albuquerque Business First's Diverse Business Leader Awards honorees are successful business leaders who are members of ethnic minorities or who identify as LGBT. Executives were nominated by the public and then asked to submit applications including further information about themselves. Applicants were evaluated on leadership, success, impact and community service.

Swati "Tina" Patel, the founder and director of Montessori ONE Academy, is passionate about education. To Patel, school isn't just a place you drop off the kids in the morning; it's a foundation for their future and success, she explained.

Patel hails from India, moving to the states at the age of 10 because of severe asthma. She grew up with her aunt and uncle in New York before moving to New Mexico in 1984 with her parents, who came to America the year prior.

After attending the University of New Mexico, Patel found her calling in education, particularly early

childhood development. She sees it as a way to give back to the community.

"Confidence should be built into children at a young age. By providing them with social counseling and positive role models who can offer support and show them what is possible, we shift the balance in favor of success," she said. "We need to provide more opportunities where they can utilize their skills and passions and gain work experience."

Patel started Montessori ONE Academy in 2005 and now has 31 full-time and part-time employees, 97 percent of which are women, she said. According to Business First's Largest Private Companies List, Monessori ONE had [\\$1.63 million in revenue](#) in 2016.

Patel was a co-founder of the Rio Grande Educational Collaborative (RGEC) and is also a founding board member of the New Mexico Montessori Network and provides \$85,000 to \$100,000 in scholarships and

reduced tuition annually. In addition, she is an active member and past board member of Cultural Association of India, which brings the Indian community together and provides children with opportunities to learn about their heritage and culture, according to Patel.

While she says New Mexico supports culture and diversity, there were some hurdles to overcome when she decided to start her own business.

"I was often turned away because I lacked a degree in education. People tend to have a very narrow view of what education must be," she said. "Innovation and unique ideas are not easily accepted. If we are to rise in the national rankings, we must put children and their needs ahead of any norms."

This year's judges are Michael Canfield, president and CEO of the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center and Indian Pueblos Marketing; [Matt DiGregory](#), CEO of Home on the Range Inc.; and [Beth A. Mohr](#), managing partner of McHard Accounting Consulting.

Join Business First on [Nov. 2 at 11 a.m. for a luncheon at the Sandia Golf Club](#) to honor our Diverse Business Leader honorees. Santa Fe Mayor Javier Gonzales will be our keynote speaker. See the rest of this year's honorees below.



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