



Jennifer Indovina

A local engineering company finds its niche in energy efficiency

→ She had to blow up a few toasters in the garage to get where she is today. But Jennifer Indovina's folks were cool about it.

"I liked to take things apart," says the Irondequoit resident. "I was a complete gadget geek from early on. I had parents who were fine with a little girl who would rather play with Legos."

When engineering runs in the family, you get an early start. Both of her parents are engineers.

"Both sides of my family are a bunch of nerds," she says. "I was fortunate to have a whole group of adults surrounding me who were completely OK with having a little nerdy kid running around taking things apart and putting them back together again."

But her mom and dad—and her grandfather—were interested in more than gadgetry.

"It isn't about just building electronics," she says. "My fam-

ily works on projects that are world-changing. When you have that type of legacy behind you, you don't just want to tinker; you want to make things that will have an impact."

You can't get much bigger than the energy business, which is where Indovina started making her mark before she turned 30.

Rochester-born, she moved with her family to Boynton Beach, Fla., and lived there for much of her childhood. The family came back as she was entering high school, and Indovina graduated from Bishop Kearney High School. She went on to Rochester Institute of Technology, where she earned an engineering degree in 2007, as well as an MBA in finance and marketing in 2008.

"When I graduated, I went to work for a semiconductor startup in Rochester," she says. "The company I was working for basically shipped all the jobs to China."

Newly out of work, she and a small group of colleagues started brainstorming about starting a company of their own. They wanted to make products that would make a difference in the world.

"I was very passionate about energy, and energy efficiency looked like a big market opportunity," she says.

The group of five started building prototypes in Indovina's father's basement and showed them around to their industry contacts. Out of that basement lab was born a winning idea: the PICOWatt. It's a wireless plug that shows consumers how much electricity their appliances are using, all from one central location. It lets people know when their electronics are sucking too much juice—and money—out of their household.

The team pitched the PICOWatt to heavy hitters in the technology and energy industries and quickly garnered attention with an appearance at the mammoth Consumer Electronics Show, or CES, in Phoenix.

From there, the team formed Tenrehte Technologies Inc. (pronounced "ten-rate") in March 2009. Indovina is president and CEO. Tenrehte's signature product—assembled, packaged and shipped from Rochester—has been winning awards and selling well ever since.

The company is as much about attitude as it is about energy. Case in point: Its tagline is "Spank the Grid."

What?

A few days before a trade show, the Tenrehte team was trying to come up with a line that would capture what the company stood for. Something catchy. Something that said "energy."

"Spank the Grid" was a winner.

"Russell came up with that gem," Indovina says, referring to chief technology officer Russell Priebe.

It's about challenging the status quo, bringing meaningful change to a global industry whose infrastructure has not kept pace with the times, empowering consumers to take command of their energy use at home and at work.

Oh, and there's a T-shirt.

But what else does it mean to "Spank the Grid"?

"We're the office of the future," Indovina says. "People work out of their homes. We have a facility in Webster; otherwise we're very lean."

It is a sign of the times. The personal and professional have blurred, which is not always a bad thing.

"We don't seem to have a separation between work and life," she says. "I think the future of entrepreneurial startups is letting people work where they're most comfortable. We meet for lunch, then everybody pretty much goes off and does their own thing."

She sees that model leading her company to a prominent future in Rochester. She says the tipping point will come when a major corporation becomes its first customer—a break-

through Indovina says was crucial for the likes of Microsoft.

"It's just going to take us some time," she says. "We're looking at all kinds of applications. We're looking for that first big customer to take us to the next level. Microsoft needed IBM. You need that first big strategic partner."

Whomever creates that tipping point for Tenrehte will have a few key characteristics, she predicts.

"We're pretty certain that it's going to be a corporation that's interested in getting into energy that wasn't there before, someone who's interested in the smart grid, but they haven't gone as far as we have yet—Cisco or Siemens."

Indovina speaks of the Rochester region as a perfect place to catapult her company. Her fondness—and conviction—for the region is clear.

"It's going to happen for us, and for our area," she says. "There are lots of amazing engineering students right here in Rochester, and there aren't enough jobs for them yet."

She hopes Tenrehte, in part, can change that, especially by offering a new generation of scientists the meaning they long for in their work.

"Social entrepreneurship is being ingrained in students now," Indovina says. "My generation doesn't just want to build throwaway products. This generation of college grads is demanding that type of company. We're trying to be what they're looking for."

Competition can be healthy. But the days of climbing corporate ladders? Extinct. Meaningful work, with a moral center, is the future, Indovina says.

"Stepping on people is old world," she says. "Only by elevating the people around you can you be elevated."

There's never been a better time to stay on the grid.

—Jonathan Everitt