

Kelowna's tech pioneer

Kelowna Chamber of Commerce

TOP 40 OVER

Presented by:



Editor's note: We're switching gears for this Top-Forty series.

For the past two years, Top Forty Under 40 profiled 80 Kelownians under the age of 40 who are making an impact through business, innovation and community involvement.

This year, it's Top Forty Over 40, a series that will profile 40 more mature businesspeople who are having great careers and giving back through mentoring and volunteering.

Every week in this space, we'll feature an exceptional over 40.

The series is presented by BDO Accountants and Consultants, Kelowna Chamber of Commerce and The Daily Courier.

If you know a deserving over 40 you'd like to nominate, email

TopForty@KelownaChamber.org

Raghwa Gopal, 58, CEO of Accelerate Okanagan, is the first nominee for the new Top Forty Over 40 series, which will run over 40 weeks in this newspaper.



GARY NYLANDER/The Daily Courier

By **STEVE MacNAULL**
The Daily Courier

It was 1977 and Raghwa Gopal was graduating from the University of the South Pacific with a degree in a little-known program called computer science.

"Computer science was totally unheard of then and everyone thought I was crazy to be taking such a course," said Gopal, now 58 and living in Kelowna.

"But I was good at math and physics and I thought this new computer stuff would be a good way for me to utilize that." How prophetic.

In 1978, Gopal moved from his birthplace and home of the University of the South Pacific - Fiji - to Kelowna.

His brother already lived here and was working for RV manufacturer Vanguard.

That same year, Gopal founded Vadium Software, Kelowna's first high-technology company, which made integrated financial

and billing software for municipalities to keep track of everything from taxes and building permits to parking tickets and facility management.

"I guess I'm Kelowna's tech pioneer or grandfather or whatever," said Gopal with a laugh.

Gopal built the company for almost three decades before selling it in 2006 and retiring.

Well, retirement didn't last long.

By 2007 he started investing in start-up tech companies and mentoring them so they could be successful.

He helped many businesses with his money and expertise, but two stand out.

Gopal was the first investor in Vineyard Networks, a Kelowna-based Internet security firm.

In 2013, Vineyard sold to California's Procera for US\$28 million.

Procera still has a satellite office in Kelowna.

Gopal was also the first investor in

Kelowna-based Just Be Friends an app that connects kids who are fans of sports teams.

Just Be Friends' clients include many NHL, NFL and NBA teams.

In retirement, he also volunteered with the Okanagan Science & Technology Council and the Okanagan Reserch Centre, which merged to become Accelerate Okanagan.

Gopal became an entrepreneur-in-residence with Accelerate Okanagan to mentor even more start-up companies and was also an entrepreneur-in-residence at Okanagan College.

However, it was enough of a retirement Gopal was able to spend winters in Fiji. Entire winters in the sun ended last year when he took the full-time job of CEO at Accelerate.

"I guess retirement isn't for me," said Gopal with another laugh.

Gopal is at the helm of tech support organization Accelerate at a time of hyper-growth.

Last week, he hosted the news conference where an Accelerate-commissioned study was released showing the tech sector is a \$1.3-billion-a-year economic engine in the Okanagan, a 30 per cent increase over two years.

Gopal forecasts in another two years the the 766-company industry will add even more businesses and hit \$2 billion in economic impact.

Gopal is honoured to be the first Top Forty Over 40 profile.

"I'm a low-profile-type of guy, so I'm flattered I was nominated," he said.

"But, I guess I am Kelowna's most sought-after volunteer."

His community-involvement roster includes Rotary Club of Kelowna, Okanagan College Foundation, YMCA, Project Literacy and United Way.

His accolades include B.C. Community Achievement Award and 2016 Kelowna Man of the Year.