

Community volunteer Gudeti matches words with actions

Average rating: 4.66

By Sheila Nero

Photo by Dave Mitchell

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Vani Gudeti (left), analyst, Electric Choice, and Srinivas Gudeti of SCADA Support, ITS, champion the cause of education. Srinivas was the national coordinator for the 2012 NSF Finals in Ann Arbor.

When **Srinivas Gudeti** of ITS says, "I believe in helping others," it's not just talk. Those five words prompted him to be the lead organizer of a national education competition for 900 Indian-American students, among other efforts that turned his words into actions.

Whether he's joining DTE Energy's Holiday Meals on Wheels program with his wife, **Vani Gudeti**, analyst, Electric Choice, or volunteering at a local temple, Gudeti follows through.

In his largest effort to date, Gudeti organized 22 DTE employees and contractors of Indian descent, who joined an overall volunteer team of 200 people to stage the 20th annual national academic finals of the North South Foundation (NSF) at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

The NSF, founded in 1989, promotes education for Indian-American students. Chapters, run by volunteers, hold academic contests to motivate students and build self-esteem and confidence as the scholars learn the extra knowledge needed to be a contender. Donors provide cash prizes of \$250 to \$1,000 and also donate scholarship money to eligible children in India, who receive the scholarships there through chapters of NSF.

Nationwide, the NSF circuit consists of 85 chapters. Of Michigan's five chapters, Detroit's is the largest, with 500 members and 250 students. Ann Arbor's chapter has 200 members and 150 students. There are also chapters in Grand Rapids, Lansing and Kalamazoo. The Ann Arbor event, held in August, combined organizing efforts of the Detroit, Lansing and Ann Arbor chapters. Six of the 15 categories featured winners from Michigan, in either first, second or third place.



Vijay Shankaran, director of Application Development at Ford Motor Co., distributes awards to spelling bee contest winners at the 2012 NSF Finals in Ann Arbor. Photo supplied by NSF.

Many of the DTE employees who participated in the NSF finals are parents of contestants. (See the sidebar for a list of DTE employee names.)

Gudeti says, "The Indian culture places an emphasis on education to have a good life. We show our kids: To brew confidence, you need to prepare and learn and compete."

Over 900 students from elementary and high schools across the nation competed at the Ann Arbor event held in August. Gudeti, the finals national coordinator, modestly says, "I have a team that helped me with this event. One cannot do all this alone."

Gudeti worked on the NSF finals project for almost a year, putting in eight months of leadership 10 hours each week, many in meetings and conference calls.

"I'm pleased to say that 93 percent of parents gave the 2012 finals a positive rating afterward," Gudeti says.

Along with DTE participation, the Ann Arbor event had support from Ford, GM, Chrysler, GE, Toyota, and other corporations.

Local to national

NSF contestants battle to excel in English: spelling bees, essay writing, public speaking, and vocabulary. They also enter geography bees, and competitions in math, science, as well as a brain bee that addresses neurology.

While the cash prizes for the NSF winners are smaller, the bigger payoff is at the annual Scripps National Spelling Bee, where the purse is \$40,000.

The NSF circuit, which began in 1993, is credited with creating an Indian-American "dynasty" at the Scripps National Spelling Bee, where in 2012 half of the top 10 contestants were from the NSF circuit.

The online magazine Slate.com refers to the NSF bees as a "nerd Olympiad for Indian-Americans" in an article titled, ["Why are Indian kids so good at spelling? They have their own minor-league spelling bee circuit."](#)

"We appreciate all the kids," Gudeti says. "Learning is the key and so all of them are winners. The kids are sometimes shocked when they see the size of a competition, but it's good for them. As they move

up in grades, you see them become more competent. The older students in spelling bees, for instance, will think to ask for the word's definition, origin and for it to be used in a sentence."

What's next for Gudeti now that the NSF finals are over? After eight years of major involvement with NSF, Gudeti will take a less rigorous role in that organization.

Does that mean he will have some spare time? No. Now that it's tax season, he's volunteered to fill out free tax returns for low-income Michigan residents.

Values in action

We act with integrity and show respect

... and understand this defines our company's character.

DTE volunteers

DTE employees and contractors who volunteered for NSF National Finals 2012 event:

- Chandra Annavarapu
- Radhakrishnan Balasubramanian
- Siva Balasubramanian
- Srinivas Dundigalla
- Saikrishna Gangeddula
- Srinivas Gogineni
- Srinivas Gudeti
- Vani Gudeti
- Sainath Lachhireddygar
- Srini Narayanappa
- Nash Nistala
- Kaliannan Raju
- Anand Shah
- Rajan Shrivastava
- Datta Sirigiri
- Prabhakar Vadivel
- Sunitha Zaveri

Note: Five other volunteers participated, but are no longer DTE employees.

Could you be in the bee?

Here are 25 spelling bee words that were used in the 2012 NSF Finals at the Senior Level for Grades 4 to 8.

1. allotropic
2. alpaca
3. lozenge
4. pangolin
5. triglycerides
6. knell
7. serendipity

8. juniper
9. taphonomy
10. diphthong
11. keratoplasty
12. vicissitudes
13. gerenuk
14. dyscalculia
15. coterie
16. gelignite
17. polystyrene
18. lochetic
19. zoomorphic
20. plumbeous
21. transcutaneous
22. flibbertigibbet
23. eburnean
24. sesquipedalian
25. syzygy

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