

## IMA Has Been My Beacon

By Lakshmi Tatikonda, CMA, CPA, Ph.D.



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On my path to success, there were twists, turns, hoops, challenges, surprises, potholes, roadblocks, wonderful people, and a few who didn't accept me (a nonwhite woman) as an accountant. I endured obstacles, rude comments, resentment, and sabotage attempts. But through perseverance, ignoring naysayers, taking alternate paths, and focusing on goals, I succeeded way beyond expectations. And throughout my accounting career, IMA® stood as the beacon and guiding light.

Since childhood I had wanted to be a teacher. But it wasn't easy because very few girls in my South Indian Vysya community went to college. My wonderful father defied social norms, ignored well-wishers' advice that "college will ruin her life, and no one will marry her," and instilled a fighting spirit in me to reach the unreachable. In 1962, my husband—who later became my colleague, coauthor, and strong supporter of my career—and I came to the U.S. to pursue Ph.D. degrees. At age 23, I earned a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Texas at Austin. Later I earned an MBA, CPA, CMA®, CIA, CFM, CPIM, and CQM. Certifications expanded my knowledge beyond traditional accounting boundaries and gave me a broad, in-depth understanding of accounting and business.

Active participation in IMA's Winnebagoland Chapter transformed me, once a docile and shy person, into an assertive and outgoing person. It gave me confidence, opened many doors, presented great opportunities to further my expertise, and was

instrumental in my accomplishments. I honestly feel that, without the mentoring of our Chapter directors, I could not have achieved what I did. When my workplace denied me the chance to offer seminars (reason: I speak with an accent), with the blessing of the Winnebagoland Chapter I presented many seminars on topics such as activity-based costing, the balanced scorecard, and Lean accounting. With the knowledge gained from these experiences, I designed and taught award-winning world-class cost management courses and published many innovative and interdisciplinary articles. I also taught all parts of CMA review classes. In fact, I was called the "CMA lady" for my promotion of the certification.

My work received many awards, including the Brummet Award from IMA, Distinguished Teacher Award from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Instructional Innovation Award from Decision Sciences Institute, and Certificates of Merit for journal articles. And I was named the outstanding member of Winnebagoland seven times.

I have had a long, successful, and gratifying career. I cherish the many accomplishments of my students, which include several CFOs and controllers, numerous CMAs, and a winner of a Gold Medal on the CMA exam. Realizing the value of teaching, our two sons earned Ph.D.s and chose to become university professors. I could not ask for anything better. Although I retired in June 2009, I am still active with IMA. IMA remains my guiding light. **SF**