

2008 TECHNOLOGY RISING STARS & ALL-STARS

CAREER COMMUNICATIONS GROUP'S

WOMEN OF COLOR *Magazine*

FOR TODAY'S CAREER WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY & BUSINESS

40-51

**40
AWARD WINNERS
BLAZE
NEW TRAILS**

**THE BEST IN
TEXAS:
10 WOMEN
YOU SHOULD
KNOW**

20
Great Organizations
for Women in
STEM



2008 TECHNOLOGIST OF THE YEAR

Olivia Hernandez-Rubio

Program Director & Mentor, Intel
International Technology Center, and Director, National
STEM Alliance, Texas

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"I really love influencing business on a day-to-day strategic basis," says Irene Hernandez Roberts whose outstanding technical portfolio spans

her 27-year career at IBM.

Roberts leads a global team of over 100 IT architects and specialists, with a budget of over \$15 million.

Irene Hernandez Roberts

Program Director & Master Inventor
Independent Software Vendor and Developer
Relations
IBM Software Group
BA Computer Science, University of Texas

Since 2000, she has served as program director in IBM's software group, working closely with independent software vendors (ISVs) to help partners integrate products and technologies into their business and expand market share. She is also responsible for IBM's virtual innovation center (VIC), the online counterpart to IBM's 40 Innovation Centers (ICs), which provide local access to technical, sales, and marketing resources.

"I love working with people," she says. "It is a great opportunity to think and collaborate about where we want to go strategically. You get to focus on nurturing: making sure people have what they need for growth and how to leverage it."

Over her career, the 54-year-old executive has learned that the most important asset an organization has is its people and their creativity. No one knows that better than Roberts who has more than seventy patents. Her eleven Invention Achievement Awards, along with her patents and 108 IBM technical disclosures, speak to her breakthrough contributions. Roberts was named an IBM Master Inventor in 2006.

While Roberts' body of work and technical contribution is impressive, her record for giving back is just as notable. Four years ago, she had an epiphany at the IBM Hispanic Leadership Symposium.

"Sitting in a room of over 100 Hispanic senior leaders," Roberts recalls, "the message was clear: as leaders at IBM we needed to do more to reach out to Hispanics inside and outside IBM." Roberts began to build mentoring programs focused on IT education, and career advancement. She also initiated a "Find a Mentor" program to help connect Hispanic employees, and brought in other executives to participate in professional development and career advancement panels. She was active in integrating the IBM Academic Initiative program through the Computing Alliance for Hispanic Serving Institutions and HACSI.

Roberts points to the shortage of Hispanic students graduating with engineering and computer science degrees. One study by the Texas Higher Education Board shows the number of Hispanics enrolled in higher education: 3.9 percent is abysmal when compared to the state's burgeoning Hispanic population.

In May 2008, IBM, in collaboration with Exxon Mobil, Lockheed and Univision, hosted America's Competitiveness: Hispanic Participation in Technology Careers summit. The goal of the event was to develop an action plan and timeline to address the critical shortage of talent and low take-up rate of STEM fields among Hispanic students.

"Our failure to address these trends has the potential to affect the future of America's economy," says Roberts, for whom the summit continues to reinforce a "critical need to build more skills and remove some of the barriers to achieving IT skills."

A Texas native of Mexican descent, Roberts was one of 10 children. "I got married young," she says. "I had my oldest daughter when I was seventeen. So the odds were I wouldn't go on to college and have a professional career."

Roberts worked as a secretary at UT as a young wife and mother. "Being in a college environment for that many years helped me appreciate the value of education," she says. Roberts eventually decided to pursue a degree in computer science. "I knew that if I was going to have a better life this was the field to focus on, back in the early 1970s."

With a bachelor's degree in hand, Roberts joined Big Blue in 1981 as a programmer. By 1989, she was named senior design manager for a key component of IBM's PC's software offering. Over the next two decades, she would be assigned roles with increasing levels of responsibility.

Four years ago, Roberts had an epiphany that Big Blue must do more to increase the number of Hispanics in STEM fields.

"There is this perception that computer science is an area where you can get stuck doing programming," she says, "but that is far from the truth." Hernandez affirms that one reason she has stayed with the IT giant for so long is because IBM offers great opportunities.

"I have done testing, design, and product development. IBM values diversity in the makeup of its employees and their portfolio of work," she says.

"When I think about my oldest daughter, who is 37, she was young when computers were in their infancy," Roberts says. "Today, there are an abundance of gadgets in the market for her 14-year-old daughter who is currently taking computer science and engineering classes in the 9th grade. Roberts' stepdaughter also has a degree in computer science.

Aside from her Blackberry, Roberts' favorite gadget is an iPod with video capabilities. All the better to listen to favorites from Elvis to Selena, The Beatles, and Cher and watch movies.

