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Learning Success

Education pioneer Lynda Weinman, co-founder of the eponymous online learning website Lynda.com, has been recognized for her successful effort to bring the classroom to everyone's computer. Weinman is the recipient of the 2017 Venky Narayanamurti Entrepreneurial Leadership Award.

Presented annually by the UC Santa Barbara College of Engineering's Technology Management Program (TMP), the award is conferred on individuals who have demonstrated success in high-technology leadership, particularly those who have been influential on the Central Coast or who have an affiliation with UCSB. Weinman and co-recipient and partner Bruce Heavin are the honorees for the award's 18th year.

"What it's really all about is the ability to change people's lives for the better," UCSB College of Engineering Dean Rod Alferness said on the role of technology and entrepreneurism in the wider community. "It's about people who, through what they do and who they work with and how they think about the world, come up with ideas and find ways to make them happen. That's what the Venky Award is about."

The seed of what would become one of the world's earliest and largest online learning websites was planted in the 1980s, when Weinman got her first personal computer.

"I became enamored and obsessed with it," she recalled. But, like many people who encountered computers for the first time as adults, she had difficulty learning how to

use it through the operations manual. Determined to understand her new machine, she instead explored it through curiosity and experimentation. Along the way, she found that she had an aptitude for explaining technical topics to others, a talent she would couple with her background in visual arts and film, resulting in books, written tutorials, classes and eventually the online learning portal that would bear her name.

“What technology allows is for this incredible personalization,” Weinman said, and that insight — in contrast to other education websites that emulated the traditional academic system — would contribute to the popularity of Lynda.com for those who were motivated to learn skills in design, technology and business, but who didn’t have the money, schedule or proximity to attend classes at brick-and-mortar institutions.

Meanwhile, the venture that began in Ojai moved into Ventura and eventually headquartered its operations, film studios and hundreds of employees on 12 acres in Carpinteria. Millions of subscribers later, Lynda.com sold to professional social networking site LinkedIn for $1.5 billion in 2015, achieving the rare “unicorn” status.

No longer involved with the website, Weinman nevertheless stays active in the community, serving as the president of the Santa Barbara International Film Festival and on the advisory board for UCSB Arts & Lectures.

The Venky Narayanamurti Entrepreneurial Leadership Award is made possible through an endowment to the TMP in the College of Engineering. The endowment honors Professor Venkatesh ‘Venky’ Narayanamurti, whose tenure as dean of the College of Engineering at UCSB was distinguished for its leadership and support of the development of a thriving local entrepreneurial economy, and dedication to the infusion of entrepreneurial spirit into all aspects of the College of Engineering and UCSB.

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draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.