

A private look at professional people

BY RICK DESLOGE
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When President Obama called Americans to provide constructive suggestions in health care, it lit a fire under Ebrahim Moshiri.

Moshiri, who holds a doctorate in engineering, has an expertise in developing computer software used to run complex business and government systems. He is among those pushing health-care reform by creating a computer network that will allow medical professionals to share records — a practice that holds the promise of eliminating millions of dollars in duplicate tests and reducing medical errors. And Moshiri and his company have helped build such systems before.

“Hospitals and other medical providers are 20 to 30 years behind on the technology curve,” Moshiri said. He, along with members of his 100-person staff at Object Computing Inc. (OCI), have been sharing their knowledge with Missouri government officials, health-care providers and health policy professors at both Saint Louis University and Washington University.

“This is not a new concept,” Moshiri said. “It’s something we’ve done in other industries for 15 years.” Clients of his business, which has revenue of about \$20 million, have included government agencies such as NASA, financial businesses such as Bloomberg and other Fortune 500 businesses.

“He’s clearly ahead of his time on this concept,” said Dr. Sam Page, a former Missouri state representative and a practicing anesthesiologist. “He could implement his plan as a private enterprise and charge people for it, but that’s not his style.”

So far, OCI has borne all the development costs of the effort, which primarily has been his reassigning a half dozen of his software engineers to develop a prototype system.

Moshiri, 54, lives in Huntleigh with his wife, Soraya, and two cats. The couple has two grown daughters.

What piqued your interest in health care?

OCI has been talking to hospitals and health systems for some time. They always say they like our solutions but lack the budget. Now under the new stimulus plans, there’s potentially some funding for this. Given the engineering know-how, and the experience we have developed, we can save our state several hundred millions of dollars in the next five to 10 years. I heard the president talk about saving our health-care system, and I have a tremendous passion and drive to be part of this legacy.

What’s in this for you and your company?

I want to help develop the information exchanges and show political and health-care leaders how to do this with open-source computer languages. Over time, this will give people the tools to have more comparative pricing. Right now in



EBRAHIM MOSHIRI

BRIAN CASSIDY

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health care, there is no competition or leverage for patients. We've been doing this 15 years for the Department of Defense. DOD realized they could not afford to pay Boeing, Lockheed-Martin and other contractors for developing duplicate weapon systems, which is what we have in health care.

What's your challenge on this?

A lot of politicians are not savvy on technology or business solutions, and folks in the health-care profession sometimes are satisfied with the status quo. They don't all see the system is broken. I've supported candidates in both parties but never worked on campaigns. I respect parties on both sides of the aisle, but this health-care problem is not a Democratic problem or a Republican problem.

Most people with doctoral degrees have careers at universities or in research.

That's true. I was a faculty member and chairman of the computer science department at Portland College and Portland State University from 1981 to 1988. I received my doctoral degree in atmospheric science from Portland State in 1983.

How does atmospheric science figure in with computing?

The connection came during my five-years working on my Ph.D. I was doing extensive computer modeling — mathematical modeling in computer simulation of atmospheric dynamics. It was fairly complex, and I had to rely heavily on the use of computers. I was doing 80 percent computer modeling and 20 percent atmospheric research — sampling the air and

analyzing air quality. Because of that five-year exposure to computers while I was in graduate school, I was asked to teach computer science classes at Portland State.

How did you get to St. Louis?

In 1988 I had an offer from McDonnell Douglas Aerospace Information Services (now part of Boeing). I was responsible for two artificial intelligence projects — one in St. Louis and one in Douglas Aircraft in Long Beach, Calif. When the Navy A-12 aircraft project was canceled in 1991, 4,000 people were impacted, and I was one of them. McDonnell asked me to go to Douglas Aircraft in Long Beach to continue leading the team where I was a principal investigator. I turned that down and stayed here.

Those are times you do a lot of soul searching. I started OCI and began working closely with Washington University and their computer science department, which is how OCI came to start its software engineering training business. We've trained several thousand engineers from our area. Clients saw us delivering the training, and they asked us to come on site. That started our consulting services.

Tell me about growing up in Iran.

I grew up in Tehran. We have a good family there, and most of them are out of Tehran and in Europe. I come from a family where education is very important. I'm the only non-medical doctor of three brothers in my family. Two others are doctors of medicine and one is an orthodontist. I have a sister in Germany who

has an MBA. I came to the U.S. for college before the change in regimes in Iran.

How old were you when you came here?

Twenty-three. I was valedictorian of my high school, and received a scholarship to George Washington University. It was quite challenging to start as I was taking three graduate level courses. I grew up speaking Farsi. It was taking me an hour to read and translate one page in English. The program was intense. What helped me was strong grade school and high school science and mathematics. Another thing that helped me was a wonderful family. I married my college sweetheart, Soraya — we've now been married 35 years.

Who are your role models?

Dr. Robert O'Brien worked with me on my Ph.D. He was an outstanding mentor. He taught me how to program. He saw me plotting a graph manually. This was 1977. He showed me how to do it on a computer. That introduction got me into computers, and I became a local expert in the field.

How do you unwind?

For exercise I play racquetball, usually at the MAC West. I've had to cut back as I recover from knee surgery. I also bicycle with my wife on the Katy Trail. We spend a lot of time together, and like to travel. I'm trying hard to get myself to learn Spanish at a higher level because I have a trip next year to Spain. Learning a language is more than learning the words. It's learning a culture, and that gives you a new perspective.

WHAT THEY SAY

"He has a significant interest in human beings. He wants to know people first and then see how he can use his skills to help you. He sees ways to trim the fat from the (health-care) system."



Dr. Saaid Khojasteh, medical director, chief of the department of psychiatry, St. Joseph Hospital in St. Charles

"He's a big supporter of the Little Bit Foundation, a 3-year-old nonprofit that helps inner city school children. I sent a letter to friends three years ago in the winter saying we needed coats. Ebrahim and his wife immediately responded and brought a stack of a dozen coats, most so nice we were able to sell them and buy many, many more coats. He's now become one of our biggest supporters and has hosted events."



Suzie Andrews, sales development specialist, Stark & Associates

"Many times he has provided free technical training to unemployed applicants and has used his staff to encourage and coach them through their trying times simply because it was the right thing to do and he had the means."



Ken Totten, general manager, OCI/Advantage

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