

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

Celebrating Black History

by Bernice Powell-Jackson

February is a very important time of the year for African Americans. It is Black History Month, a time set aside for lifting up and celebrating the contributions of African Americans to this country's rich and varied history.

Begun as Negro History Week nearly 70 years ago by Dr. Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in Washington, D.C., it has evolved into a month-long period of study and focus.

But for too many Americans, Black History Month and the many contributions of African Americans are still unknown.

Often, we concentrate on those familiar names in African American history—names like W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman and Mary McLeod Bethune.

But there are thousands of others who have made history as well, often overcoming nearly insurmountable odds created by racism and sexism.

There are hundreds of African American inventors who have made our lives better and easier to live.

Garrett Morgan invented the gas mask and the traffic light in the early decades of this century.

In 1881, Lewis Latimer invented the first incandescent electric light bulb with a carbon filament and later supervised the installation of electric lights in the cities of Philadelphia, New York, Montreal and London.

African American women were inventors also—Sarah Boone invented the ironing board and Sarah Goode invented the folding cabinet bed, both in the late 1800s.

There are African American physicians who have made enormous contributions to the life of our country. Charles Drew invented a technique which separated blood plasma and saved thousands of lives in World War II.

James Derham, the first African American physician, was born a slave in 1862, and after purchasing his own

freedom, became one of the outstanding doctors in New Orleans.

Susan McKinney became the first African American woman physician in the late 1800s and served the Brooklyn, New York community for 20 years before moving to Ohio.

Despite the myth that African Americans have never owned businesses, there are African Americans who built significant businesses.

Maggie Walker built the Consolidated Bank and Trust Company in Virginia and West Virginia.

Barney Ford became a prosperous hotel owner in Denver and Cheyenne during the 1860s, while at the same time George T. Downing was a Rhode Island caterer and hotel owner who ultimately managed the House of Representatives restaurant in Washington, D.C.

Paul Cuffee was a wealthy ship builder in the late 1700s.

There is a rich legacy left by these business owners and thousands of others like them.

Indeed, African Americans have made enormous

contributions to the fields of science, the arts, sports, religion, and education ever since we first arrived on these shores.

But, in the words of Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., executive director of the NAACP, "the best way to celebrate black history month is to make some history yourself."

And today, there are thousands of African Americans across this country doing just that.

There is Rachel Robinson, chairperson of the Jackie Robinson Foundation and widow of the famous history-making baseball player.

She is working to provide college scholarships and mentoring programs for young people all over the country, and thereby furthering her own and her husband's vision for a better tomorrow for our youth.

There is Rahim Jenkins, executive director of the Righteous Men's Commission, a people's organization in Washington, D.C. which is working with gang members and planning a gang summit as

their way of celebrating Black History Month.

There is Reverend Margaret Hairston of Black Community Solutions in Columbus, Ohio, a program she founded and designed to rescue African American youth and families from the court system and assist them through counseling, tutoring, mentoring and a generous dose of love.

There is Raymond Reid in Cleveland, Ohio who on his own initiative, during his own time, using his own money, began a community basketball team which works with young African American men and teaches them not only the rules of the game, but the rules of life.

These are my heroes and as we celebrate African American history month, I not only give thanks for those who have given so much in the past, but to those who make their own African American history today.

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Kitsap County
Chronicle

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The Kitsap County Chronicle is published twice a month by Inner Visions Foundation, with additional special issues published periodically. The Kitsap County Chronicle focuses on the African-American community and culture on the Kitsap Peninsula. The Kitsap County Chronicle welcomes articles for consideration and information about upcoming events and activities. Deadline for all material is 5 p.m. Friday preceding publication date. Publisher is not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts or photos. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope to guarantee return.

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Business and editorial office located at Kitsap Business Center, 843 Sixth Street, Bremerton. Hours of operation: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The Kitsap County Chronicle is available by subscription at the rate of \$20.00 per year.

The Kitsap County Chronicle is a member of
NABJ—National Association of Black Journalists

BRUNELL ON BUSINESS

Employer Attitude is Key to
Family-Friendly Workplace

by Don C. Brunell

President

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Creating a family-friendly workplace starts with the boss and must permeate throughout the company.

A pro-family attitude also increases the bottom-line. Addressing family needs whether they be for elderly parents or newborns is part of creating an environment where productivity can flourish.

Those points came through loud and clear at the annual Child Care Advantages Conference sponsored by the Association of Washington Business (AWB) and Washington's departments of Trade and Economic Development and Social and Health Services.

Clearly, the most articulate business leaders addressing the conference was Phyllis Campbell, president of U.S. Bank-Washington.

Campbell believes that all of the wonderful programs and policies won't work unless managers are sensitive to work-family issues and responsive to individual needs.

Addressing family concerns up front saves money. For example, the Child Care Action Campaign estimates

businesses lose nearly \$3 billion a year when employees must take time off to deal with child-care concerns. This figure doesn't take into account lost productivity from reduced concentration and employee turnover.

Campbell believes creating a family-friendly model is like building a house.

A home must first have a solid foundation and for the workplace that base is a commitment to make it happen.

One wall of the structure is for the employer to know his or her employees.

Paramount to knowing one's employees is recognizing age groups are separated by generations and have different needs, desires and priorities.

Next is to ask employees what they want and need. Many businesses use frequent surveys or focus groups to determine benefits and work scheduling.

Thirdly, empower managers and employees to act to make the workplace friendly to families.

Finally, is to measure results. One way is measuring employee turnover. For example, Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, indicated

his turnover is 60 percent compared to an average 300 percent for his industry.

Think of the training costs and new employee mistakes eliminated by curbing turnover.

As economic times and life in general get more difficult and complicated, creating a family friendly workplace becomes more important. It is good business and the right thing to do.

"The tie to employee productivity is solid; however, this investment pays dividends beyond dollars and cents: Strengthened families and children are prepared, not just for school, but for life," Campbell concluded.

How does a family-friendly workplace happen.. "It starts at the top with the CEO," Phil Nudelman, president and CEO of Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound said. "It's an attitude that you treat employees as customers and meet their needs."

For additional information about family-friendly workplace, either contact Verna at AWB (1-800-521-9325) or Marsha Holand at the Washington Business Assistance Center (206-753-5632).

Words of Life

The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives.

—Robert Maynard Hutchins