

# COURAGEOUS

## AFRICAN AMERICANS



by Ron Weber

### Black Women Inventors

BY RON WEBER  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Decades before women of any color were allowed to vote, America's black women were working their way into the mainstream of American business, an area long reserved for white men.

Nearly 300 hundred years ago, Sybilla Masters developed an invention for cleaning and curing Indian corn growing in the American colonies. Almost a century later in 1809, Mary Kies, another black woman, invented and patented a process for weaving silk.

Many black domestic servants worked diligently to develop better methods in performing household chores. One of these women was Ellin Elgin, who invented the clothes-wringer in the 1800s.

Sadly, too many early inventors of color were forced to sell off their inventions cheaply. If they did not give up their invention to whites, the idea would be stolen anyway. The privileged majority simply did not want to admit that blacks were just as smart as they were.

It did not take a college degree to be bright-minded and inventive. Many early inventions came from uneducated workers who found better ways of doing hard menial tasks. After selling off the rights to her wringer, Elgin received a mere \$18 dollars for it. When asked why she let it go so cheap, she told friends she was afraid if

white women found out the device was the product of a black woman they would not use it.

In 1885, Sara E. Good patented a "Folding Cabinet Bed," similar to sofa beds used today. Miriam E. Benjamin invented a "Gong and Signal Chair," in 1888 that was used in hotels and even in Congress to signal pages. Just a few years after this, Anna Mangin, of Woodside, N.Y., designed a new and improved

and the Illusion Transmitter by Valerie Thomas in 1980.

One of the most successful African-American business leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Madam C. J. Walker. In 1905, she designed, manufactured and sold haircare products. Her business grew to be the largest employer of black workers in the United States. With hundreds of sales persons throughout the country, she ran a company that would dominate her field for decades. Her famous hair straightening iron, hair grower and related beauty products became the staples of a company that diversified to many other products.

No other black woman of the times reached such fame in the white male dominated business arena. Madam C. J. Walker was not only considered the wealthiest black woman in America, she was also believed to be the first self-made woman millionaire in the United States. Thanks to her efforts, thousands of poor African-American men and women left low-paying domestic work to become well-paid successes in the workforce.

This American pioneer, born Sarah Breedlove, a poor black slave girl in 1867, gave our country hope by breaking barriers and becoming one of the most successful women in America.

Ron Weber is a local speaker and writer on African-American history. He is a regular contributor to the Portland Observer.



Madam C.J. Walker

pastry fork. Also that year, Sara Boone of New Haven, Conn. patented a better version of the ironing board.

The achievements of these women continued in modern times with Alice Parking designing upgrades for furnaces in 1919; Mary J. Reynolds inventing a hoisting and loading mechanism in 1920; and M. Thomas who created a float-operated circuit closer in the same year.

More recent inventions by black women are the digital toaster by Ruane Jeter in 1987,

### New Day, Place for Knauls Roast

A new date and location were selected for the roasting of Paul Knauls, the African-American businessman affectionately known as the mayor of inner north and northeast Portland. The event, which is a fundraiser for the Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, is from 6 to 9 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 22 at Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs Cascade Plaza, 4134 N. Vancouver Ave. For more information, visit [www.genevas.net](http://www.genevas.net) or call 503-823-4322.

### Make Your Vote Count

You must register to vote every time your address changes or your name changes. To check if your registration is current, drop by Multnomah County Elections at 1040 S.E. Morrison St. or call 503-988-3720.

## 89th ANNIVERSARY PARTY

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16**  
 NANOSAURUS · GYPSY CARAVAN · SIDESTAR  
 EZRA HOLBROOK · VAGABOND OPERA · SCOTT FISHER  
 BALLOON CREATIONS · STORYTELLERS  
 2 P.M. TO 10 P.M. · FREE · ALL AGES WELCOME

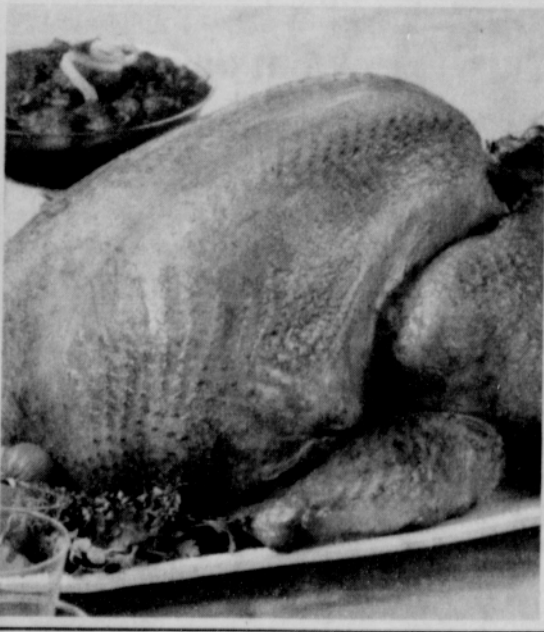
**McMENAMINS KENNEDY SCHOOL**  
 5736 N.E. 33rd Ave. · Portland · (503) 249-3983 · [mcmenamins.com](http://mcmenamins.com)

## Giving our best.

Join the Fight **Against Breast Cancer**

Visit Safeway's Web site at [www.safeway.com](http://www.safeway.com)

Available at Safeway:



**Honeysuckle Turkeys**  
 9 to 15-lb. size range. Frozen. Self basting with pop-up timer. Limit 2 Free.  
**SAVE up to 60¢ on 2 lbs.**  
**BUY ONE GET ONE FREE**  
 OF EQUAL OR LESSER VALUE FREE  
 Safeway Club Price



**Braeburn or Fuji Apples**  
 Lunchbox favorites!  
**SAVE up to 80¢ lb.**  
**69¢ lb.**  
 Safeway Club Price

**WESTERN UNION MONEY TRANSFER**

PRICES EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 2004						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
			13	14	15	16
17	18	19				

From Denver Wednesday, 4 to October 13 thru Sunday October 19, 2004

Items & prices in this ad are available at your local Safeway stores. No sales to dealers, restaurants or institutions. Sales in retail quantities only. Quantities of some items may be limited and subject to availability. Not responsible for typographical or pictorial errors. We reserve the right to correct all printed errors. On Buy One, Get One Free ("BOGO") offers, customer must purchase the first item to receive the second item free. BOGO offers are not 1/2 price sales. If only a single item purchased, the regular price applies. Manufacturers' coupons may be used on purchased items only — not on free items. ©2004 Safeway Stores, Inc.



**Safeway SELECT Bath Tissue**  
 24-single roll, Or 12-double roll.  
**SAVE up to \$1.86**  
**5.99**  
 Safeway Club Price



**Safeway French Toast Bread**  
 24-oz. Great for Breakfast. Card Price: \$1.25 ea.  
**SAVE up to 42¢ on 4**  
**4 for \$5**  
 Safeway Club Price

**Now the savings are in the Card!**

ALL LIMITS ARE PER HOUSEHOLD PER DAY!