

Unlocking Bloodline Mysteries

continued ▲ from Front

profit that aims to promote dialogue about new genetic research and its impact on people's lives.

He said there are more than 1,000 genetic tests on the Internet, and this abundance of quick answers to complex questions has become problematic — results can be highly variable and hard for the average person to understand. But what is most alarming about mail order companies is how much DNA is floating around the postal system.

Earlier this month a public forum, conducted by students linked to GeneForum, discussed the potential risks of sending DNA samples

field of genetic genealogy. Family Tree was the first worldwide company to offer genetic tests, and since 2000 they've been "unearthing history" daily. Their ever-growing database holds 57,148 Y chromosome DNA (male) records and 19,844 mitochondrial DNA (female) records.

Family Tree's vice president of operations Max Blankfeld said they've mailed home tests to 60,000 people over the past five years. This year alone they expect 35,000 clients to request kits, containing two brushes, two swabs and two vials.

Clients are instructed to scrape the inside of their cheek, where cells break loose with the most ease

beyond the scope of individual history, it challenges accepted social beliefs.

"We're all 99.9 percent identical at the genetic level," Fowler said. "We're dissimilar with that remaining 1/10th percent."

Jennifer Duncan, an English and social studies teacher at Jefferson High School, said the scientific explosion of information has strengthened the minority perspective.

"There was a social construct perpetuated through the educational system," she said. "Now it's very nice to have something we can point to and bring up the question."

Duncan has followed how genetic testing engages people in that respect. She coordinates and hosts Jefferson's multicultural film festival, held the first Monday each month at the school.

Doncan said she's not interested in mail order genetic tests, because she never had a doubt of where she came from. However, she sees a great benefit since the new exposure is debunking racial myths.

"Many anthropologists worldwide never supported the idea of separate races, and now science can say why they didn't offer their support," she said. "There is no plethora of characteristics that de-

termines a person's ability in anything intellectual. You can't account for motivation or success simply by looking at a person."

Fowler said despite the opportunities DNA provides, there is still much territory that we don't understand.

"Murky waters lie in the analysis of genes," he said. "The perception is that your genes are you. They don't tell all of your story."

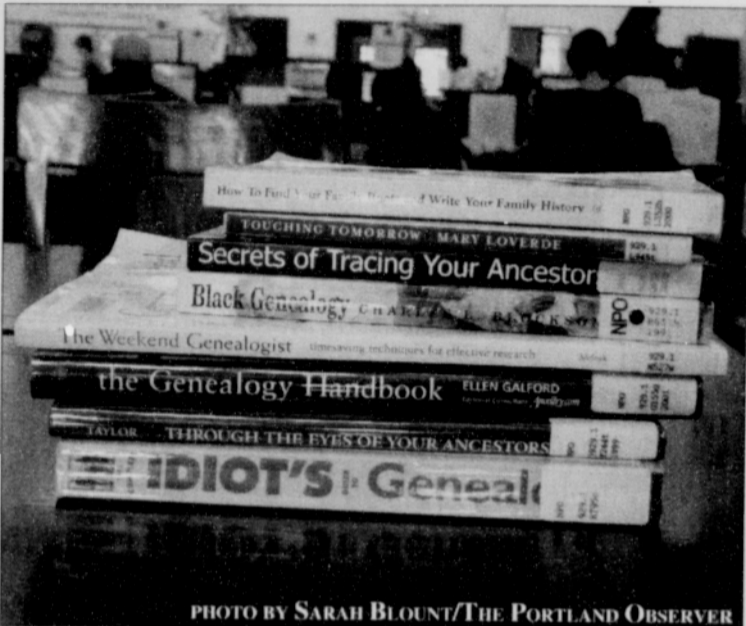


PHOTO BY SARAH BLOUNT/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Reference materials from the Black Resource Center at the North Portland Library, 512 N. Killingsworth St., offer tips on tracing your history.

to companies, who often give ambiguous privacy statements.

Aside from legal and privacy issues, Fowler doesn't find much fault in the technology, other than the incomplete picture it presents. He said accuracy is one of the central issues in using DNA to trace roots.

"They only focus on DNA from a mother's or father's line," he said. "Depending on how the test is carried out, that may not give you an accurate view."

Fowler said although results can be partial or confusing, the value outweighs the shortcomings.

"I think it's a unique situation with groups like African Americans," he said. "They have a unique history and many identity issues based on that history. It's not surprising so many are utilizing these opportunities, it's really rewriting their history."

Curiosity Fulfilled

"Your ancestors left clues in your DNA...unlock your deep ancestral origins with DNA testing."

The statement above is found online at Family Tree DNA, a Houston-based firm that pioneered the

and least pain.

They mail their DNA to Family Tree (\$129 for female clients and \$159 for males), who sends the swabs to a research lab with their partner in a joint venture at the University of Arizona. They draw a comparison between a client's specific genetic markers and those of others in the database. They notify the client if another person matches their results perfectly.

Because of a high volume, Blankfeld said clients wait four to five weeks before they receive results and a certificate by mail, along with a password for information on the client's personal web page.

Their website says samples are kept in a secure, private and confidential non-web-based genetic library for 25 years for a client's exclusive use.

Blankfeld said their research is limited to paternal and maternal lineage, and clients seeking information between those specific lines need to provide genetic information on other family members.

A Paradigm Shift

Remarkably, DNA testing moves



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Spare Room on Northeast 42nd Avenue was the first of a string of robberies at local taverns to shake up both bar employees and patrons.

String of Robberies

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scribed as white and in their 30s. She said they appeared to be under 6 feet tall, with a slim build.

The hold-up was believed to be part of a series of robberies that have taken place over the past couple weeks. The string started March 13 at a bar called The Spare Room on Northeast 42nd Avenue where police said six customers got robbed.

On March 20, Thatcher's Res-

taurant and Lounge at 7906 S.E. Stark St. got robbed. Then on March 22, two men armed with guns forced about 10 customers to give them their cash at the Wilshire Tavern on Northeast 42nd Avenue, according to detective Paul Dolbey with the Portland Police Bureau.

Police don't know if the tavern robberies are connected. Anyone with information that may help in the case is asked to call police at 503-823-0400.

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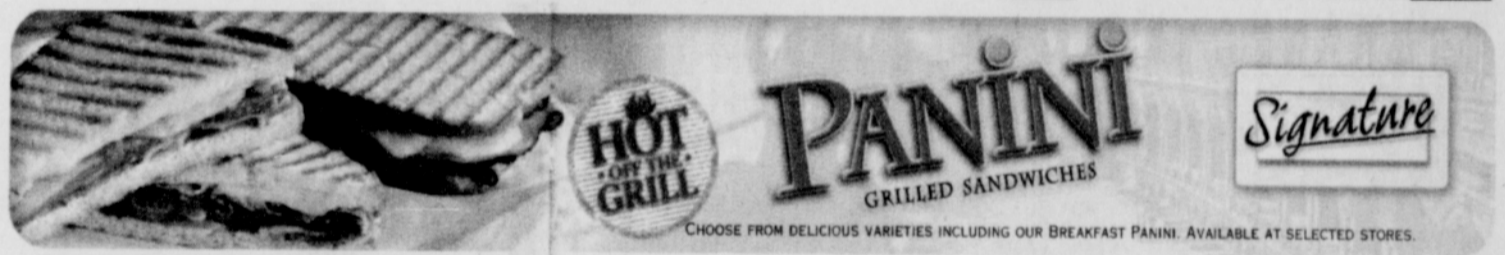
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