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DECEMBER 2024 Volume 40 Issue 12

Inventors

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Contents

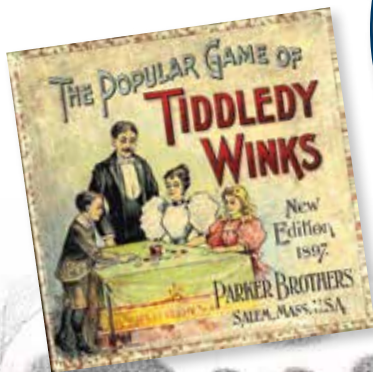
December 2024 Volume 40 Issue 12

They Said **What?**

- 4** "In the original book, Dorothy's slippers were silver."
- 9** "It should not be too much to ask that the [next] head of the patent office must believe in patents!"
- 15** "They don't have a copyright on this story, and they've never come to us for copyright on the story."
- 21** "The Boy Wonder has become a man of honor."



38



22

Features

- 26 10 Questions With ...**
Steve Greenberg, The Gadget Guy
- 32 Collegiate Inventor Awards**
Safer Surgeries at Forefront
- 37 IPOEF Inventor of the Year**
Groundbreaking Diabetes Treatments

Inventor Spotlight

- 22 Trays Bien**
Women's Covers for Cleaner Flights

Departments

- 4 Your USPTO**
A New Tabletop Game World
- 8 Editor's Note**
Optimism Prevails
- 9 Everybody's Talking**
Election Result and IP: Win, or Loss?
- 10 Bright Ideas**
Holiday Edition, Vintage Style
- 12 Time Tested**
A 'Wonderful' Mess
- 16 Lander Zone**
Shining a Light on AC
- 18 Social Hour**
Leveraging LinkedIn
- 21 Inventor Update**
Burt and Tracy Ward's Memorable '24
- 25 Inventor Update**
April Mitchell Honored With TAGIE
- 34 Think Marketing**
Overrated: The Logo Mojo
- 38 Prototyping**
5 Top Devices for 2025
- 40 IP Market**
More Change at the Top
- 42 Eye On Washington**
AI Copyright Suit Dismissed;
Judge and Crowd Stand Strong
- 46 Inventiveness**
Focus on the Fun and Fascinating

4

12



A New Tabletop Game World

USPTO-led discussion highlights American games' colorful history while providing guidance on IP and challenges for inventors

USPTO historian Rebekah Oakes showcased some vintage American tabletop board games. The first American print run of *The Mansion of Happiness* is at bottom.

The joy of opening a lovingly wrapped game of Monopoly or Scrabble is an enduring holiday memory. It's also an ongoing constant—part of a robust tabletop games market that offers great rewards and risks for inventors.

According to Allied Market Research, the global tabletop market was most recently valued at \$2.5 billion in 2021 and projected to reach \$4.1 billion by 2031. Protecting these creations through intellectual property (IP) has never been more important.

Today's tabletop games run the gamut from classic board, card and dice games to sophisticated digital miniature war games and role-playing games with beautiful artwork and ingenious original stories. The pandemic that kept millions of Americans indoors, along with online platforms such as BoardGameGeek, have helped fuel this cultural explosion that USPTO historian Rebekah Oakes says could be the second golden era of tabletop games.

A recent USPTO panel discussion, “Don’t Roll the Dice on IP: Creativity in the Tabletop World,” explored the rich history and contemporary challenges of protecting creative ideas in this flourishing industry. Oakes provided a backdrop by highlighting game patents and trademarks dating to the 1800s. The panel, moderated by USPTO supervisory patent examiner Ramon Mercado, also included Restoration Games President Justin Jacobson and IP attorney Brian Chellgren.

Oakes discussed how tabletop games dating to ancient Egypt set the foundation for today’s American market and the need for IP protections. In the context of American creators and manufacturers contributing some of the most popular and well-known games over the past 200 years, “the intellectual property system offered more options for protection for creators and inventors of games than ever before.”

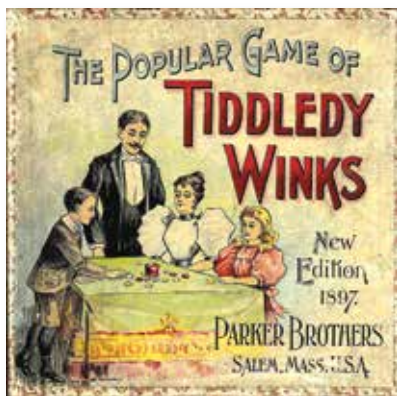
She said games “draw influence from their lived experience, and they also draw influence from what a society wants and needs.”

One constant with tabletop games through the centuries is that they often evolve from or borrow from previous iterations—much like innovation in general. This poses opportunities as well as cautions, Chellgren explained.

He noted that the book, “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,” was published in 1900 and within the public domain. However, the 1939 movie “The Wizard of Oz” is not in the public domain.

“In the original book, Dorothy’s slippers were silver. The movie studio decided to make the slippers ruby or red, to be more visible against the yellow brick road.

The next installment in the virtual “Don’t Roll the Dice” series, “Battling Fakes in the Tabletop Industry,” will be December 12 from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. ET. It will address challenges posed by unauthorized copies and counterfeit games. Register at www.uspto.gov/events.



WHAT'S NEXT

TRADEMARK BOOT CAMP RETURNS: The popular Trademark Basics Boot Camp returns on January 7—a free, virtual USPTO event series that provides a comprehensive overview of the process for federal trademark registration and maintaining a federal trademark. The boot camp is offered regularly throughout the year. The series covers one module weekly for eight weeks, each focusing on different aspects of trademarks

and the registration process, from filing and examination to post-registration requirements for keeping your registration alive. You can attend the entire series or just certain modules, but you must sign up for each module to attend. For details, visit www.uspto.gov/about-us/events/trademark-basics-boot-camp.

Visit www.uspto.gov/events for many other opportunities to attend free virtual and in-person events and/or training.

“So ... say I want to make a game, or even let's say I want to make a product like a flower vase and I want to have something relating to ‘The Wizard of Oz’ on it. I should have Dorothy wearing silver slippers— not ruby slippers—if I want to make sure that all the work I’m using is in the public domain.”

Jacobson said when his company is working with a game that has aspects of previous versions, he tries to contact the original designer.

“Even if they don’t have any protectable legal rights, we think it’s just the right thing to do ... It can eliminate a lot of ambiguities about where certain pitfalls might be for another property.”

Moderator Mercado encouraged getting legal representation whenever possible and to attend the USPTO’s Trademark Basics Bootcamp sessions, where much of these issues are discussed.

To see the entire “Don’t Roll the Dice on IP: Creativity in the Tabletop World”: youtube.com/watch?v=xgDx0K6vB7g

NEWS FLASH

Turning Over the Reins

Kathi Vidal thanks USPTO colleagues for accomplishments during her tenure as director

Kathi Vidal, under secretary of commerce for intellectual property and director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), announced November 12 that she is returning to the private sector. Her last day as director will be during the second week of December.

Derrick Brent, deputy under secretary of commerce for intellectual property and deputy director of the USPTO, will become director on an interim basis. His title will be acting under secretary of commerce for intellectual property and acting director of the USPTO.

In a correspondence to USPTO employees, Vidal wrote: “It has been an honor and a true joy to be with you on our collective journey these past few years. Together we have transformed the USPTO. We have executed on our mission to proactively defend and promote strong intellectual property to lift communities, create better jobs, and foster the American innovative spirit in everyone. And we have been successful because of our commitment to putting employees first.

“Though our work is not done, it is time for me to turn the reins over to Deputy Director Derrick Brent, who has worked alongside me every step of the way.”

Vidal invited the public to view a list of accomplishments during her tenure at lnkd.in/eZNXBaHh. She was nominated to be USPTO director by President Joe Biden on October 26, 2021.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CHIEF NAMED:

Nancy U. Kamei has been appointed the USPTO’s first chief public engagement officer and director of its Office of Public Engagement (OPE). Launched in spring 2024, the OPE advances the USPTO’s mission of increasing participation in the innovation ecosystem by consolidating many of the agency’s outreach, education, and customer experience leaders under one office, enhancing the agency’s commitment to reach more Americans with intellectual property resources. Before joining the USPTO, Kamei managed the national outreach program for the Small Business Administration’s Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) Programs.



JOURNEYS OF INNOVATION

Overseeing a Global Vision

J. Kevin White brings practical solutions to communities that lack basic eye health care **BY WHITNEY PANDIL-EATON**

Accompanied by his wife, Rebecca, and two teenage sons, military veteran and inventor Kevin White traveled some 7,000 miles by plane from Maryland to Namibia and then drove hours more through the rugged, baked Namib desert of Namibia to test the vision diagnostic equipment he had spent more than a decade perfecting and to ask a simple question: “What do you see?”

Standing at the base of the nearly 1,000-foot-tall hill that defined his small village, a 13-year-old boy answered through a translator that he could see the hill, but not much else.



A series of serendipitous events over a 20-year period helped J. Kevin White go from vision sufferer, to patented inventor, to becoming a global eye health advocate. He is working to bring practical solutions to communities that lack basic eye health care through his patented vision testing system and his Global Vision 2020 organization.

Handing the young man a pair of prescription glasses, its strength determined using White's invention only 15 minutes prior under a pop-up tent built next to his school, White again repeated the question.

“His mouth dropped,” White said. “He goes, ‘I can see that bush. I can see that rock. I can see that tree. I can see that goat. I can see my friend.’ And he goes up and up and up [the hill], and he’s just pointing everything out. And at the top of the hill were two trees. And he starts screaming, I mean, screaming and jumping up and down. ‘I can see the two trees! I can see the two trees!’”

Standing nearby, the school principal explained to the men that while the village had an official name, it was never used, with locals opting to say they were from “the village with two trees.”

Reflecting on that emotional day from 2018, White said: “That was [the boy’s] entire geographic identity. And he’d never seen them before.”

That teenager, who was on the verge of getting kicked out of school after being held in the second grade for years due to failing grades, moved up two grade levels within six months of receiving the eyeglasses.

Although this story has a happy ending, many others do not.

Globally, more than 2 billion people suffer from refractive error, often known as near or distance vision impairment, according to 2023 data from the World Health Organization (WHO). Of that total, the United Nations agency notes that more than half of cases could have been prevented.

This is a fact that White, an eyeglasses wearer since age 7, cannot abide.

Vision problems impact every aspect of life from education to employment. For children, WHO observed that many with vision impairment “experience lower levels of educational achievement,” while adults face “lower rates of employment and higher rates of depression and anxiety.” In total, researchers estimate annual productivity losses of \$411 billion globally due to vision problems.

Touching his own pair of eyeglasses in reflection, White said, “I couldn’t do what I’ve done. I couldn’t have gone to the Naval Academy. I couldn’t have done all of these things [without eyeglasses] ... I thought about the moms and dads and kids with vision problems ... I couldn’t live with it.”

White has gone from vision sufferer to patented inventor. He is now a global eye health advocate who is working to bring practical solutions to communities that lack basic eye health care through his patented USee Vision Kit and his Global Vision 2020 organization.

For the entire story, see www.uspto.gov/learning-and-resources/journeys-innovation.

Goal: More Innovation ACCESSIBILITY

First National Disability Leadership Summit echoes inspirational stories from USPTO

BY DERRICK BRENT

The USPTO is here to help all creators transform their innovative ideas into products and services that benefit society and grow the U.S. economy. Our focus on inclusive innovation is to help innovators from all backgrounds, including the 29 percent of American adults with disabilities.

Through key projects and initiatives, including our recently released National Strategy for Inclusive Innovation, we are working to make USPTO resources more accessible to people with disabilities so they can better navigate the intellectual property system and protect their innovations.

I was honored to join Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and other leaders at the Department of Commerce's (DOC's) first-ever National Disability Leadership Summit on September 17.

Dr. Robert Bryant, born with a visual disability, holds 30 patents.

As Secretary Raimondo noted in her remarks, in the 34 years since the Americans with Disabilities Act became law, “we’ve made incredible progress” but “there is so much more to do” to meet accessibility goals.

It’s important to share stories of differently abled inventors so more individuals living with disabilities can be inspired to blaze similar trails. One example is Dr. Rory Cooper.

Dr. Cooper is a distinguished professor at the University of Pittsburgh and a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) senior scientist.

He co-founded an initiative with his university and the VA called the Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL), where he leads a team of fellow inventors who have received 25 U.S. patents related to wheelchairs, robots, and wearable instruments.

Dr. Cooper was involved in a bicycle accident that left him paralyzed. Despite his injuries,

Dr. Cooper’s creative spirit remains strong.

“The wheelchair I use, the adaptive vehicle I use, the home modifications I use, they all allow me to be productive and creative and contribute to society,” he says.

Another inspiring innovator is Dr. Robert Bryant, who sees innovation in a unique way in part due to his visual disability.

Dr. Bryant was born with oculocutaneous albinism Type 2, which results in monocular vision. He holds 30 patents. His ability to see opportunities missed by others led him to develop a thin electrical-insulation material

known as the Langley Research Center-Soluble Imide (LaRC-SI) polymer—which is biologically inert, meaning the human body

doesn’t attack it. The polymer now extends the life of pacemakers in humans.

We invite you to interact with and learn from our stories on the successes of other notable innovators, including:

- Temple Grandin, who couldn’t speak for the first several years of her life, became a well-known inventor, author, and advocate for treating livestock humanely.
- Chieko Asakawa, blinded in a swimming accident as a teen, creates accessible products for visually impaired people.

If you know of innovators we should highlight through our Journeys of Innovation series and other channels, please email inventorstories@uspto.gov.

Derrick Brent is the deputy under secretary of commerce for intellectual property and deputy director of the USPTO.



Dr. Rory Cooper works with one of the groundbreaking inventions developed at his lab, an “assistive manipulator,” or robotic arm, with an interface that can be controlled by a person’s brain instead of being physically manipulated.

Optimism Prevails With Move on IP Act



The headline on the November 21 press release was joyful. Better yet, it included an essential word.

Can you guess which word that was?

The release came from the office of U.S. Sen. Chris Coons (D-Delaware), announcing “the bipartisan passage of their Promoting and Respecting Economically Vital American Innovation Leadership (PREVAIL) Act out of the Senate Judiciary Committee by a bipartisan vote of 11-10.” The legislation now moves to the Senate floor for a full vote.

The mention of the glorious “B word” twice might have been an oversight. Or maybe it was left that way for emphasis.

Either way, the timing is excellent in the climate of division that has dogged America for the past several years.

PREVAIL is a unifying hope for small inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs. Introduced in August by Sens. Coons and Thom Tillis (R-North Carolina)—the chair and ranking member, respectively, of the Judiciary Committee’s Intellectual Property Subcommittee—it would mean Patent Trial and Appeal Board challengers must have been sued or threatened with a patent infringement lawsuit before filing a challenge, while limiting multiple petitions against the same patent by “prohibiting any entity financially contributing to a PTAB challenge from bringing its own challenge.”

Wrote Coons: “Abuse of the Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB) has ended America’s run as the global gold standard for innovation and has caused us to fall behind China in the development of emerging technologies. Commonsense reforms to the PTAB” like those in the PREVAIL Act “will get our innovators out of the courtroom and back to the lab or field ...”

Sen. Tillis also celebrated the mission to “increase transparency, safeguard patents, eliminate duplicative legal proceedings, and encourage American inventors to design and create.”

Coons noted that the PTAB is used frequently and actively by Big Tech companies that try to get others’ patents invalidated. On the other hand, there are concerns that the legislation could limit the ability of patient advocacy groups and generic/biosimilar companies to challenge patents, which could maintain or add to high drug prices.

But the need for change prevailed—at least pending the next vote.

—Reid

(reid.creager@inventorsdigest.com)

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Election Result Good or Bad for IP?

IN THE AFTERMATH of Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 presidential election, those in IP circles are positing on the effect it could have on intellectual property and inventor rights.

Inventors Digest doesn't play politics. We're committed to being a safe haven from a mass media known for coverage that can be anything but objective on many topics, most notably politics.

That said, the question is so expected and persistent in IP circles we can't ignore it.

We can say factually that IP and inventor rights are always an afterthought in a presidential campaign, with the recent election no exception; that Trump has a strong entrepreneurial acumen and is known to be pro-business; and that the USPTO director he appointed during his previous term as president, Andrei Iancu, was generally highly regarded.

Along those lines, the incoming president's next choice for USPTO director will be a major factor in determining progress on IP and inventor rights during the next four years. Paul Michel, retired chief judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, said as much in post-election comments to IPWatchdog:

"Because IP will not be a high priority for the new Trump Administration, policy will be set

mostly by whomever finally emerges, perhaps in Year 2, as its choice for director of the USPTO.

"If that person does not favor strong, reliable patents, the policy will undermine patents as the incentive for the massive technology investments the nation needs. Conversely, if the appointee supports robust patenting and balanced and predictable validity reviews at the PTAB, economic security, global competitiveness, job creation and national security will all thrive. Names rumored to date include persons in both camps.

"We need to try to assure a director who actually understands how patents work to drive innovation. It should not be too much to ask that the head of the patent office must believe in patents!

"The president-elect would also be well advised to appoint an 'innovation czar' at the cabinet level to coordinate the many agencies involved so they all pull in the same direction."—*Reid Creager*

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COURT TO PLAINTIFFS ON SHEERAN SUIT: LET'S GET IT OFF

A second copyright infringement lawsuit against singer Ed Sheeran has been toppled like so many light building blocks.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit rejected an infringement lawsuit filed by Structured Asset Sales, which claimed Sheeran's 2014 hit "Thinking Out Loud" copied a chord progression and rhythm from Marvin Gaye's 1973 smash "Let's Get it On." Structured Asset Sales owns a small stake in the rights to the Gaye song.

The court's November 1 ruling said the lawsuit sought "a monopoly over a combination of two fundamental musical building blocks."

"The four-chord progression at issue—ubiquitous in pop music—even coupled with a syncopated harmonic rhythm, is too well explored to meet the originality threshold that copyright law demands," the panel of appeals court judges wrote. "Overprotecting such basic elements would threaten

to stifle creativity and undermine the purpose of copyright law."

The new ruling comes about a year after Sheeran won a similar lawsuit by the estate of Ed Townsend, who co-wrote the Gaye song.



VINTAGE BRIGHT IDEAS

FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Stitch Slimy

GOOEY PLAY TOY
cra-z-art.com



This super stretchy, soft, non-toxic “slime” comes in a Disney Stitch figure-shaped container with Stitch-shaped confetti to mix in.

The Stitch character is “the result of an illegal genetic experiment by mad scientist Jumba. But he’s the ultimate fighting machine—strong, smart, mischievous and destructive.”

When you’re finished playing, place the slime back in the Stitch container to keep it stretchy for next time.

There are many other products by Cra-Z-Art with a slimy theme, including one featuring Barbie.

For ages 6 and up. \$5.99.



Magna Doodle Retro

SPINNING DESIGN KIT
cra-z-art.com

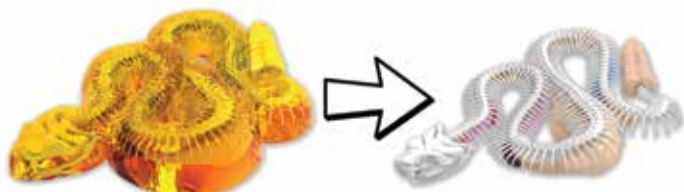


Cra-Z-Art Spiral Art allows you to effortlessly craft hundreds of mesmerizing designs.

Just place the wheel frame on paper, insert your chosen wheel, take your favorite pen, and start drawing by moving the wheel around.

The kit includes three mini gel pens, three large wheel frames, seven spiral wheels and 10 paper sheets.

For ages 4 and up. \$16.99.



Dissect-It Rattlesnake Super Lab

REALISTIC STEM TOY
dancingbeartoy.com/products



Odor free and child safe, the Rattlesnake Super Lab is Top Secret Toys' newest addition to the Dissect-It line of synthetic dissection STEM toys.

With a firm, gelatine-like membrane, this toy provides the realistic experience of scientific dissection without harming a real snake. Each set comes with a detailed, full color learning guide, safe surgical tools, and two refill mixes for repeat play.

A science experiment kit allows kids to learn about the 35 bones, organs and skeletal structure inside the toy.

The kit can improve hand-eye coordination, critical thinking and motor skills Ages 6 and up. \$29.99.



Snoopy Sno-Cone Machine

CLASSIC MAKER TREAT
cra-z-art.com



Kids and adults can create snow cones from molded ice cubes with this treatmaker that dates back more than 40 years.

Simply freeze your ice cubes in the custom mold. Put the ice cube in the Snoopy Ice Shaver hopper and give it an easy turn to fill your cup with perfectly shaved fluffy ice. Top your shaved ice with the included syrup bottle.

The machine includes a padded clamp for extra stability.

Each set comes with the Snoopy Sno-Cone Machine, one ice shaving cup, three paper cups, two ice molds, syrup bottle, shovel scoop, flavor drink mix, and easy-to-follow instructions.

No batteries required. For ages 6-plus. \$22.99.

Golden Oops-iversary

1974 COPYRIGHT LAPSE OF 'IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE' BEGAT A WILD IP JOURNEY **BY REID CREAGER**

GEORGE BAILEY'S life was a mess. The protagonist in the 1946 Christmas movie "It's a Wonderful Life"—disillusioned and frustrated by betrayal and failure at seemingly every turn—contemplated suicide until an angel showed him what life in his small town would have been without him.

Nearly 80 years later, this iconic serving of Americana holds a more dubious distinction as possibly the most complex intellectual property mess in cinema history. And it's a reminder that in our pursuit of money, the devil can be in the details in more ways than one.

The movie's IP saga is replete with behind-the-scenes intrigue—driven by mistakes, questionable actors not of the stage variety, and public misconceptions.

During holiday seasons from the mid-Seventies to the early 1990s, this \$525,000 write-off was shown on cable TV and sometimes locally in a virtually continuous loop—the result of a failure to renew a copyright due in 1974 that left it in the public domain and gave it, well, a wonderful life. The movie eventually became property of NBC, which shows it only a couple times each holiday season and aired it for a 30th consecutive year in 2023.

Not unlike a possibly memorable scene lost to history on the proverbial cutting room floor, the IP saga of "It's a Wonderful Life" is replete with behind-the-scenes intrigue—driven by mistakes, questionable actors not of the stage variety, and public misconceptions.

This mess apparently is still not cleaned up. But some clarity is emerging, via recent public comments from an heir to the original literary work that inspired the movie.



As George said when his sweetheart Mary was suddenly sans clothes after her robe slipped off in the bushes: “This is a very interesting situation.”

A book began the story

With the possible exception of the movie’s ending, very little about “It’s a Wonderful Life” has turned out as expected.

Director Frank Capra, who poured his heart and money into the venture—choosing a December 1946 release so it could be eligible for the 1947 Academy Awards—suffered much the same fate as George with the latter’s building and loan company.

The movie was based on a book by American writer and historian Philip Van Doren Stern, “The Greatest Gift,” completed in 1943. This fact is central to various copyright claims that still exist today.

RKO Pictures became interested and bought the motion picture film rights in 1944 but gradually lost interest, and reportedly sold the rights to Capra for the same amount (\$10,000) as its purchase price.

The movie’s initial disappointing attendance and reviews led banks to threaten foreclosure against Capra, prompting the sale of his company, Liberty Films. According to the carefully detailed, sourced and authoritative itsawonderfullifeplay.com, owned by playwright Jason T. LeBlanc, Capra sold his ownership in “It’s a Wonderful Life” in May 1947. This triggered a dizzying chain of ownership transfers during the next several decades (see sidebar).

National Telefilm Associates (NTA) Studios owned the rights to the film in 1974 when the copyright was set to expire on December 30 under terms of the 1909 Copyright Act—stipulating that this protection lasted 28 years. A clerical error prevented the renewal from being submitted and the film rights lapsed into the public domain, “where they remain today, despite claims to the contrary,” per itsawonderfullifeplay.com.

Conflicts and assumptions

The conflict over rights ownership is tangled by the fact that the movie had separate copyrights involving the musical score, film and radio rights,

and the original story. This confusion has been exacerbated by myths and perceptions about legal ownership, fueled by erroneous public perception.

After the film became public domain, TV broadcasters large and small assumed they could do anything they wanted with the movie—which led to TBS and TNT airing the movie almost nonstop during the holiday season for two decades and giving it angel wings with new audiences.

They assumed wrongly.

GOTTA BOUNCE

“It’s a Wonderful Life” rights have swung around more than George and Mary doing the Charleston:

- In 1955, Paramount Pictures Inc. sold its library of films, which included “It’s a Wonderful Life,” to U.M.&M. TY Corp.
- In 1956, shortly after the new organization National Telefilm Associates (NTA) was founded, it bought NTA U.M.&M., which moved the movie to NTA’s ownership.
- In 1984, NTA rebranded to become Republic Pictures Corp. due to the success of the film catalog it bought from Republic Corp. in 1967. Under this rebranding, the ownership and film rights of “It’s a Wonderful Life” were now owned by Republic Entertainment Inc.
- In April 1994, Spelling Entertainment (largely owned by Blockbuster Entertainment as of October 1993) purchased Republic Pictures Corp. and renamed it Republic Entertainment Inc., thus gaining ownership of the movie’s assets as well. This was key to the Tierney and Goldsmith plan.
- In September 1994, Blockbuster Entertainment merged with Viacom to create Viacom Blockbuster. Spelling Entertainment was majority owned by Blockbuster Entertainment, and its catalog was added to Viacom Blockbuster’s.
- By 2000, Viacom Blockbuster had fully acquired the rest of the rights of Republic Pictures’ catalog of titles and placed them under its Paramount Pictures division. Thus, the ownership of “It’s a Wonderful Life” and the film rights Stern had originally sold to RKO studios were now owned by Paramount Pictures.

Courtesy of itsawonderfullifeplay.com



Whether misled by the complex nature of copyright law or unaware of the legality of the various “sub-copyrights” involved, broadcasters were airing the movie despite the fact that the originator of the story that became the basis for the movie, Philip Van Doren Stern, had kept up his copyrights.

TRIVIA: COMMUNIST WHAT?

- The FBI put “It’s a Wonderful Life” on its list of suspected communist propaganda in 1946 and kept it there until 1956, according to *The Wire*.

An FBI memo dated May 26, 1947, reads: “With regard to the picture ‘It’s a Wonderful Life,’ [redacted] stated in substance that the film represented rather obvious attempts to discredit bankers by casting Lionel Barrymore as a ‘scrooge-type’ so that he would be the most hated man in the picture. This, according to these sources, is a common trick used by Communists.” (Makes you wonder who “redacted” was.)

- Cary Grant was slated to play the lead role of George Bailey at one point.

According to *Digital Spy*, Philip Van Doren Stern, who wrote the story that inspired the movie, had his book contents printed onto several Christmas cards and sent it to family and friends. Grant eventually received one of the cards from producer David Hempstead and loved it so much that he brought it to RKO Radio Pictures. But the movie ended up being produced by Liberty Films, which chose Stewart for the main role.



• The role of Mary could have gone to any number of actresses other than Donna Reed. According to *For Women First*, Jean Arthur—who co-starred with Jimmy Stewart in “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington”—was director Frank Capra’s top choice but was resting from performing. Others who were considered included Ginger Rogers and Olivia de Havilland.

- “It’s a Wonderful Life” was Stewart’s first movie after 20 months on the front lines of World War II. He reportedly suffered post-traumatic stress disorder during filming.



Stern theoretically would have been owed royalties from the thousands of times the movie aired on TV. But his granddaughter, Sarah Robinson, said during a 2023 iHeart podcast that Stern’s estate did not pursue action against the TV stations (for reasons she did not divulge). Stern died in 1984.

Robinson’s pronouncement contradicts the actions of a Santa Monica, California, prosecutor-turned-entertainment lawyer who was responsible for ending the “It’s a Wonderful Life” TV marathons more than 30 years ago.

In summer 1993—a few years before being sentenced to eight months in prison for his role in a conspiracy to stage the theft of two famous paintings and helping one of his clients collect \$17.5 million in a bogus insurance settlement—James Tierney sent a flood of cease-and-desist letters to programmers warning against unauthorized use of the movie unless they paid royalties.

He did so at the behest of Russell Goldsmith, CEO of Republic Pictures (the successor to NTA, the company that had lost the copyright to the movie). Compliance with the demand was reportedly immediate and universal.

According to *The Nation*, Goldsmith was working toward a \$100 million dollar merger between Republic and Spelling Entertainment that would make him president and CEO of Spelling under home video rental giant Blockbuster. The IP he could show was a big part of the deal.

So Republic bought ownership rights to the film score and music used in “It’s a Wonderful Life” from composer Dimitri Tiomkin, who had renewed the music copyrights. It also still had the exclusive film and radio rights Stern had licensed to RKO in 1944.

Tierney and Goldsmith are said to have told a Los Angeles Times reporter this gave them “two barrels of a shotgun.” Republic leveraged this ownership to negotiate an undoubtedly lucrative licensing arrangement with NBC to show it a few times each holiday season. (It’s now also available on Amazon Prime.)

Even today, Paramount Pictures—which owns Republic Pictures—still warns that “No project relating to ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ can proceed without a license from Paramount.”

The movie was based on a book by American writer and historian Philip Van Doren Stern, “The Greatest Gift,” completed in 1943. This fact is central to various copyright claims that still exist today.

Shotgun, or pop gun?

Although no one is known to have challenged Paramount’s claim in court, Stern’s heirs say the studio’s metaphoric shotgun is firing legal blanks.

“They don’t have a copyright on this story, and they’ve never come to us for copyright on the story,” Robinson said during an iHeart podcast last year.

“The only people who have ever held copyright in the story ‘The Greatest Gift’ are my grandfather Philip, his heirs—his only daughter and three granddaughters [who are] my mother and my two sisters and me—and the small family company that we heirs created to hold and manage ‘The Greatest Gift’ copyright.”

Also of paramount importance: In 2000, The Greatest Gift Corporation, led by Stern’s daughter, Marguerite, knocked a bullet out of Paramount’s holster. The family company, which held complete ownership of the story “The Greatest Gift,” exercised a right of termination and revoked the film and radio that Stern had originally sold to RKO and eventually ended up with Paramount.

Now, Paramount’s only claim to “It’s a Wonderful Life” lay only in the musical score—though its continued warnings about unauthorized use seem to presume much greater ownership.

Meanwhile, enforcing the copyright of Stern’s works is a full-time and seemingly endless job for his heirs. Per itsawonderfullifeplay.com:

“In theatrical stage works alone, there are at least three dramatic versions, five radio versions, and more than a dozen musical adaptations created since the ’90s.

“While originally most of these were not officially authorized, The Greatest Gift Corporation has since made six settlement agreements authorizing 12 dramatic/radio or musical stage works by 11 different writers and composers represented by five licensing houses. There have also been a variety of direct requests

to create derivative stage productions, which The Greatest Gift Corporation has extended licensing options to.”

As of 2024, Greatest Gift is issuing authorizations to playwrights on a limited, one-calendar year basis.

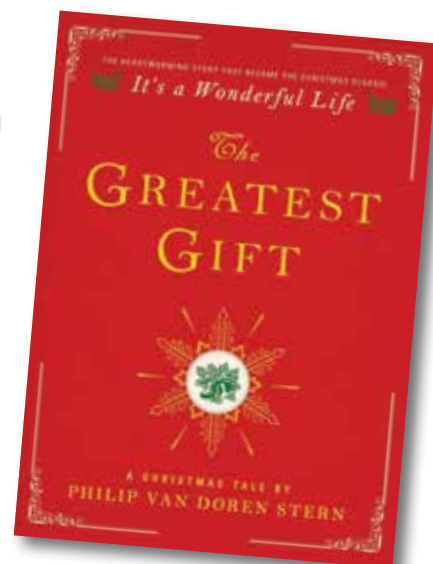
One mistake, myriad impacts

Without a fateful clerical error 50 years ago this month, none of this happens.

A long-forgotten movie may well have stayed that way. Generations of Americans would have missed out on what is now an important part of every Christmas.

A corporate merger would have unfolded differently, if at all. The heirs of Philip Van Doren Stern likely would have led radically different lives, albeit less lucrative.

Money, and who is entitled to it, is a theme in the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life”—as well as in its IP history. This would doubtless amuse Clarence Odbody, who said: “We don’t use money in heaven.”

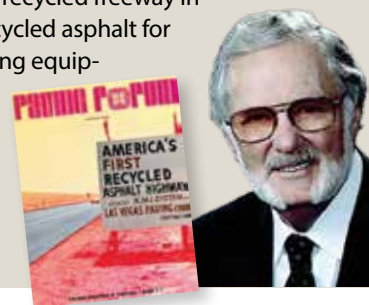


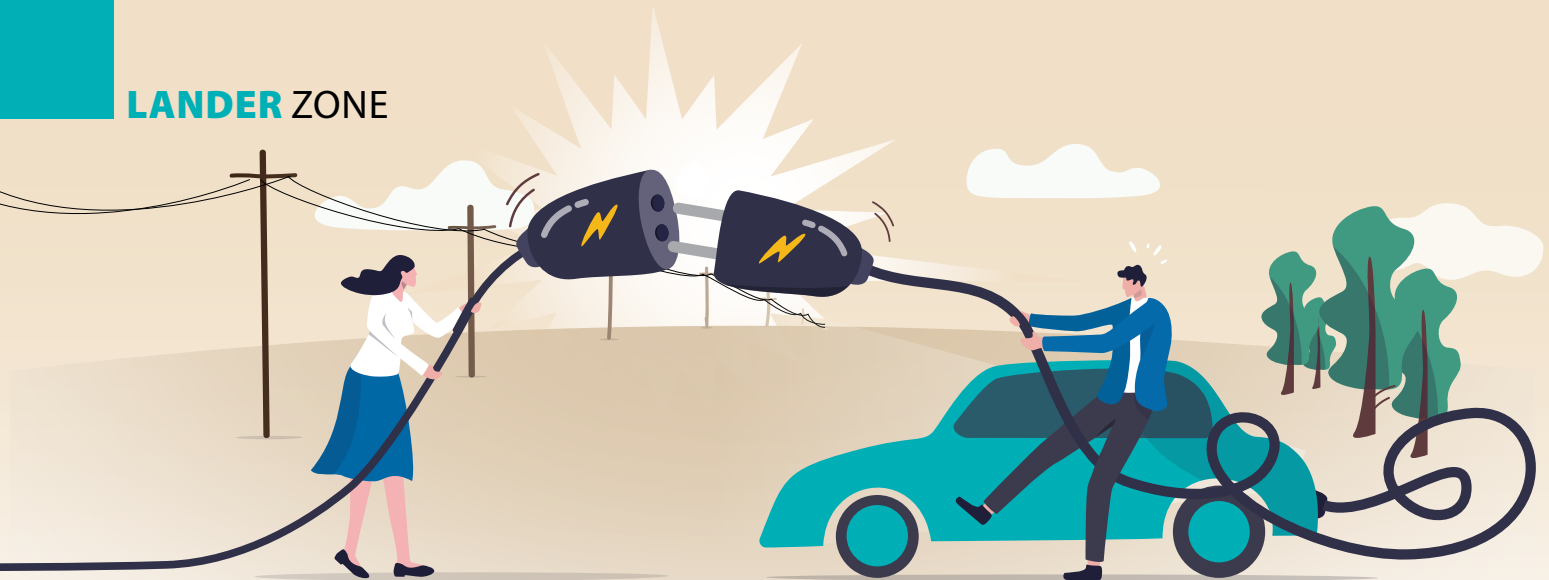
INVENTOR ARCHIVES: DECEMBER

December 28, 1976: The 4 millionth U.S. utility patent was issued to **Robert Mendenhall** for a process that recycles asphalt compositions.

Mendenhall began research and development on processes and equipment for the recycling of asphalt pavements in 1970. This paved the way for America’s first recycled freeway in 1975—featuring 100 percent recycled asphalt for construction, and completed using equipment Mendenhall designed.

A member of the Business Hall of Fame and Nevada Inventors Hall of Fame, Mendenhall had at least 47 patents dating to 2004. He died in 2018.





Shining a Light on AC

A TUTORIAL ON THE TESLA INVENTION THAT, IN A WAY, LEFT EDISON'S DC IN THE SHADOWS **BY JACK LANDER**

BECAUSE THE Tesla car is in the news these days, let's talk about the genius inventor who inspired its name.

Nikola Tesla invented the dynamo (electricity generator), voltage transformers, motors, the Tesla coil and alternating current. It's hard to say which of these is the most valuable.

But alternating current (AC) is universal. It's in our homes as the familiar power that emanates from our electrical outlets. But why is it alternating?

Our cellphones, flashlights and car batteries are all DC (direct current) devices that operate faultlessly. Well, most of the time.

We need AC because DC cannot be transformed—that is, increased from its generated voltage that was originally Edison's 110 volts. Using AC, we can transform the volts to as high as 35 thousand volts and send it across the country.

Edison was the pioneer of distributing electricity to homes. His DC was limited because it required increasingly heavier wire to conduct it farther than a couple of city blocks.

That meant dim lights if you lived at the end of the power line in Lower Manhattan, New York, in 1882.

He said Tesla's transformable AC could be dangerous—and yes, it can be. But it can be

transmitted for miles over copper wires without appreciable losses.

With AC, we can avoid dim lights entirely. Edison had to eventually admit that Tesla's system was superior.

AC, in powerful detail

So, why can we send electricity a long distance without losing its oomph? Because (patience; this is a bit arithmetical) electrical power, measured in watts, is the product of volts times amps, or electrical pressure (volts) times amps (current).

Got it?

Maybe not quite. The point is that power (watts) remains the same if we multiply high voltage times low current as it does if we multiply low voltage times high current.

For example, 35,000 volts times 1 amp = 35,000 watts, or, 1 volt times 35,000 amps = the same 35,000 watts.

If you thought that was wonderful, listen to this: we can manipulate the volts and amps using a device called a transformer—a hunk of iron with two coils on it.

If one coil (let's call it the input) has 100 turns of wire, and the other coil, the output, has only 10 turns, whatever voltage we apply to the input will be reduced to 1/10 the input voltage at the output. If we operate it backward, applying 10

volts to the output, we'll get 100 volts at the input.

So, let's say we generate 35,000 volts AC at the power generating station and we send 100 amps to 20 substations, but the voltage drops to 30,000 volts due to resistance in the copper wire. We still end up with 3,000,000 watts, or 150,000 watts per substation.

The substation can then transform the 150,000 watts down to 240 volts, which it sends to a transformer near your home. Then, that local transformer splits the 240 volts into two 120-volt circuits and sends one to your dwelling. You've probably seen one of those large transformers mounted on a tall pole and wondered what it was.

Now, there's one mystery left to explain: How are the 35,000 volts generated?

Imagine a large disk of insulated material. Fiberglass will do. It's 6 feet in diameter.

All around the outer edge is a series of magnets, perhaps 100 of them. Every other magnet has its "north" pole pointing outward, away from the center of the disk, and every other pole is pointing its north pole inward, toward the center.

Now, imagine this disk is revolving, and close to it, mounted stationary, is a bar of iron with wire wound around it. As each magnet on the disk passes over the iron bar, magnetism from the magnets transfer some of their magnetism to the iron bar—thereby generating electricity in the wire around it. Perhaps 35,000 volts.

Remember that every other magnet tip is of a different polarity: north-south-north-south, etc. (North and south are arbitrary textbook designations for the tips of the magnets. It doesn't matter how we designate them. We could use A and B or X and Y as long as we recognize that magnets have "polarity," a permanent direction of their magnetic field.)

Thus, the alternations of north-south-north-south, etc. passing over the iron bar create the same alteration of magnetic field in the iron, and it is this continually reversing motion of the magnetic field that generates the electricity from the coil of wire around the iron core—the alternating current.

We need AC because DC cannot be transformed—that is, increased from its generated voltage that was originally Edison's 110 volts.

Summary and postscript

OK, so it wasn't so simple after all. But you can now speak as an expert on alternating current, AC.

A summary of the various terms used above:

- **Watt:** a unit of electrical power. Watts = volts times amps.
- **Volt:** a unit of "electromotive force," the pressure that drives current (amps).
- **Amp:** a unit of electric current, the amount of the mass of electrons.
- **DC:** direct current. Batteries provide direct current. DC cannot be transformed.
- **AC:** Alternating current, a back-and-forth flow of current. AC is transformable.
- **Polarity:** Every magnet has a "field" with a distinct direction that polarity defines.
- **Field:** a detectable "cloud" of weak, detectable magnetism surrounding a magnet.

Before signing off, a few things about Edison and Tesla.

Edison's light bulb was the first to provide dependable and affordable illumination in people's homes. He patented the carbon-coated bamboo filament, which had a life of 1,200 hours. His filaments were eventually superseded by tungsten, a metal, and nowadays by low-wattage LEDs (light-emitting diodes).

Tesla, born in Yugoslavia, eventually became a U.S. citizen. He was granted many patents on the more than 100 electrically related items he invented. He became wealthy but died alone in his hotel room in 1943 at age 86. 🍷

Jack Lander, a near legend in the inventing community, has been writing for *Inventors Digest* for nearly a quarter-century. His latest book is "Hire Yourself: The Startup Alternative." You can reach him at jack@Inventor-mentor.com.



Leveraging LinkedIn

BASICS AND STRATEGIES TO GIVE YOUR INVENTION WORLDWIDE PRESENCE, BUILD RELATIONSHIPS **BY ELIZABETH BREEDLOVE**

I F YOU'D LIKE to grow your social media network and connect with others who can help improve your invention's marketability and results, consider investing your time in LinkedIn.

This platform offers inventors and entrepreneurs unparalleled access to professionals across industries, providing opportunities to build and nurture a professional network without geographical limitations. LinkedIn offers inventors a dynamic platform to connect with others in your field and grow your businesses.

Here's your guide regarding the essentials of leveraging LinkedIn, from optimizing your profile to engaging with content—and building relationships that drive professional growth and opportunities for further innovation.

Unique advantages

Inventors and entrepreneurs often face a unique set of challenges because they're innovators, creators and problem-solvers who often work in isolation, lacking connections that could help advance their inventions or ventures. LinkedIn bridges this gap by connecting users with over 1 billion professionals worldwide to give inventors access to resources, insights and networking opportunities essential for their growth.

Here's why LinkedIn is especially valuable for inventors:

Industry exposure. The site allows inventors to present their innovations to a global audience and attract potential investors, partners and industry experts.

Access to mentorship. Through LinkedIn, inventors can connect with mentors who have the knowledge and experience needed to overcome challenges.

Community building. The site fosters a sense of community, allowing inventors to connect with like-minded professionals who can offer feedback, collaboration or even licensing opportunities.

Credibility building. A strong LinkedIn profile can establish you as a thought leader in your field, making your ideas more attractive to potential investors.

Craft a strong profile

Your LinkedIn profile may be the first impression you make with a new connection, so ensure it's optimized to showcase your expertise. The essentials:

- **Professional headline:** Your headline is one of the most visible parts of your profile and should be more than just a job title. Consider including keywords related to your industry and interests. For example, "Inventor" with subtitles of "product innovator" and "renewable energy enthusiast" is specific and gives readers a sense of your focus areas.
- **Profile photo and banner:** Use a high-quality, professional profile photo that conveys approachability and professionalism. The banner can reflect your brand or invention. For instance, if you're working in renewable energy, your banner could feature images of solar panels or wind turbines.
- **Summary:** Your summary should tell a story. Explain your background, your journey and the "why" behind your inventions. For example, "Driven by a passion for sustainable energy solutions, I have dedicated my career to developing innovative technology in the renewable energy sector. With a background in engineering and a vision for a greener future, I am constantly looking for new ways to push the boundaries of what's possible."
- **Experience and skills:** List experiences relevant to your field, including any notable





LinkedIn is a platform offering industry exposure, access to mentorship, community building and credibility building.

inventions, patents or industry collaborations. Emphasize specific skills (e.g., “product design,” “project management,” “patent acquisition”) that relate to your invention work. This increases your visibility in searches.

Build connections

After optimizing your profile, the next step is building your network. There are several ways to effectively go about this:

- **Connect with industry experts:** Use LinkedIn’s search functionality to find experts within your industry. This could include engineers, R&D specialists or product designers who could provide insights on technical aspects of your project. Always include a personalized message when sending a connection request. Mention what you admire about the person’s work, and explain why connecting would be mutually beneficial.
- **Join relevant groups:** LinkedIn Groups are goldmines for inventors. Search for groups related to your industry or areas of interest. For example, if you’re an inventor in the biotech sector, you could join groups dedicated to biotech innovation, medical technology, or research and development.
- **Engage with potential investors and mentors:** Investors often frequent LinkedIn, exploring profiles that show promise. Consider following and connecting with venture capitalists, angel investors or organizations that fund innovation

in your sector. Engage with their content by leaving thoughtful comments, and connect with a polite message to establish rapport.

- **Expand connections through alumni networks:** Many people overlook LinkedIn’s alumni feature, which allows you to search for alumni of your university or organization. These connections can be a good starting point.

Showcase your invention, skills

LinkedIn provides several options for sharing your expertise and bringing attention to your inventions. Some key strategies:

- **Share posts and articles:** Post updates on milestones, whether it’s a prototype, a successful test, or even an award. If you’re comfortable writing longer pieces, consider publishing LinkedIn articles. For instance, a post on “5 Lessons I Learned Developing a Renewable Energy Prototype” could attract attention and establish credibility.
- **Showcase media and patents in your profile:** LinkedIn allows you to add media to your profile under the “Experience” section. If you have a promotional video, media coverage or patent documents, include them here.
- **Publish research or white papers:** If your invention is based on significant research, share summaries or highlights of your findings. Inventors with a scientific or technical background can benefit from sharing white papers, which also demonstrates thought leadership.



Use content engagement

This is crucial for inventors looking to build a professional network. Your presence on LinkedIn should be more than sharing your own content. Here's how to do it effectively:

- **Comment and contribute to discussions:** Thoughtful comments can attract interest from potential collaborators or investors. Avoid generic comments like "Great post!" and instead offer insights or ask questions that reflect your expertise.
- **Post regularly about industry trends:** This showcases your knowledge and interest. If you're developing a health care solution, for example, posting about the latest trends in healthcare innovation can position you as an informed inventor.

Build trust indicators


LinkedIn recommendations and endorsements are powerful trust indicators. Here's how inventors can use these LinkedIn features:

- **Request endorsements from colleagues and mentors:** Connect with colleagues, mentors or former clients and ask them to endorse skills that are crucial for your inventor profile. This boosts your profile's ranking for specific skills.
 - **Ask for recommendations from collaborators:** This helps promote your work ethic and innovation skills. These testimonials can make a big difference when potential investors or partners view your profile.
 - **Give endorsements and recommendations:** Networking is a two-way street. Endorsing and recommending others in your field can often lead to reciprocal endorsements, boosting your profile's credibility.
- By optimizing your profile, actively engaging with your network and sharing valuable content, you can open doors to mentorship, collaboration and funding opportunities.

Whether you're seeking feedback on a prototype, exploring funding options or looking for potential collaborators, LinkedIn can be the gateway for bringing your ideas to life in 2025. 🎯

Elizabeth Breedlove is a freelance marketing consultant and copywriter. She has helped start-ups and small businesses launch new products and inventions via social media, blogging, email marketing and more.





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Burt and Tracy Ward Honored; Gentle Giants Reach Expanding

IT HAS BEEN almost 60 years since Burt Ward threw his last punch and scaled his last building as Robin in the TV series “Batman.” But his energy level and commitment to making the world a better place are still strong—and definitely not fictional.

2024 has been a memorable year for Gentle Giants Pet Food owners Ward and his wife, Tracy, the subjects of an *Inventors Digest* cover feature in September 2017. On April 28, Burt was honored with The President’s Volunteer Service Award and President’s Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing his efforts in animal rescue. Burt and Tracy individually received the United Nations Association of the United States of America Humanitarian Award,

recognizing people and organizations for outstanding public service.

The Wards received the honors at a Royal Society of Saint George gala in Santa Monica, California. Burt, 79, told *Inventors Digest* he accepted the awards “on behalf of my wife, Tracy, and myself because we have accomplished everything together.”

Sandro Monetti, deputy chair of the Royal Society’s California chapter, said: “The Boy Wonder has become a man of honor.”

The Wards operate the world’s largest giant breed dog rescue at their home in Norco, California, and have rescued almost 16,000 dogs in the past 30 years, Burt said. Their love for animals led to starting Gentle Giants—which, in October, appeared in two store scenes during the season premiere of the CBS TV series “Matlock” and ultimately drew an audience of 10,670,000 viewers after being seen on multiple platforms.

Burt said that in 2025, Gentle Giants will be expanding distribution into 27 countries with more to come. The Wards do not draw a salary for the company, to make the pet food more affordable.

Tracy Ward emphasized that Gentle Giants is a natural non-GMO food. “Our animals are not having cancer issues,” she said, adding that one of their customers’ dogs will turn 31 in January.

The Wards have also created “Superheroes To The Rescue Inc.” to encourage and empower people to help animals and anyone in need. Superheroes To The Rescue Inc. is developing TV shows, movies, music, school programs and products in connection with the effort.



Trays Bien

WOMEN'S REUSABLE AIRPLANE TRAY COVERS ADDRESS HYGIENE ISSUES, PROVIDE SUSTAINABILITY **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

EVER SINCE COVID-19 wreaked havoc in 2020, travel—particularly by airplane—became an icky-sticky subject, especially for those like me with OCD-tendencies.

Because I experienced COVID even though I've been multi-vaxxed, I discovered an added tier of ick-protection in Go-Be Sleeves. The reusable airplane tray covers were created by Barbara Booth (cofounder and chief executive officer), and Cornelia Quinn (cofounder and chief creative officer), whose company is in White Plains, New York.

Cornelia Quinn (left) said her son's frequent illnesses could be traced to unsanitary airplane serving trays, according to friend and business partner Barbara Booth (right).

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Please tell us about yourselves, your relationship, and how you invented the product.

Barbara Booth (BB): Cornelia and I have been best friends since high school. When we were dining in New York City one night, she voiced her concerns to me about the number of germs she believed existed on the airplane tray tables.

Her concerns were justified: Her son Jake has autism and is severely immunocompromised. He also survived a long battle with leukemia. Cornelia believed the germey tray tables were largely to blame for Jake's frequent illnesses, which seemed to emerge immediately after air travel.

As a CNBC reporter at the time with years of investigative experience, I offered to explore this. And after talking to airline personnel, flight crew and researchers who studied airline hygiene, I quickly learned that airplane tray tables are rarely, if ever, sanitized—and are by far the germiest part of the plane. In fact, researchers from Auburn State University revealed the tray table is eight times germier than the lavatory flush button.

Cleaning protocols post-COVID have waned due to packed flights and quick turnarounds. Airline crew have admitted they sometimes have only 4 minutes between flights to clean, and the one thing that's always overlooked is the tray table.

Upon my research, though, I discovered another alarming issue: Most single-use disinfectant wipes passengers are using to wipe down their trays are made of synthetic fibers, which means they never decompose. With 2.65 million people flying domestically every day – and 6 million globally—that's millions of wipes heading to landfills every day!

We were committed to checking every box for quality, sustainability and environmental friendliness. And we also wanted our products to be made in the U.S. So, the first thing we did was research the best, safest antimicrobial technology—one that was non-toxic, non-irritating and hypoallergenic, then talked to mills that have used this technology and could also provide us with a high-performance fabric created from BPA-free, post-consumer plastic.

Once we found the proper mill, we spent months corresponding with them to figure out the perfect proportions of strength and stretch. It also needed to be extremely lightweight





without sacrificing quality, because when rolled up, it needed to be small enough to fit in our compact case.

Weight and size matter greatly to travelers. Being extremely compact is key. Airplane trays are primarily 10 inches by 16 inches, but they vary a little, so our covers needed enough stretch to fit universally.

We built our own tray table and sewed prototypes using fabrics of varying weights, thicknesses, stretch and texture until we found the perfect one. The one we settled on is super durable but soft, stretches perfectly so it glides on easily, and has enough texture that it prohibits items on the tray from sliding around.

We talked with several mills before deciding to go with one in North Carolina, and we based it not only on their personal service but also because they could be a one-stop shop for printing the fabric, sewing it, and coating it with the non-toxic, hypoallergenic antimicrobial technology we insisted on.

At the same time, we searched for and found a talented graphic designer to help design our patterns and hired an industrial engineer to design our case.

EGT: How many tries before you knew you had the perfect prototype?

BB: It took about 6 months before we perfected the case and created the perfect prototype of the sleeve. But it was a full year before we approved our cover designs and were ready to launch our website.

“Researchers from Auburn State University revealed the tray table is eight times germier than the lavatory flush button.” —BARBARA BOOTH

EGT: Where are you manufacturing, and how did you locate a reputable supplier?

BB: We manufacture all our sleeves in the United States and found our mill first by finding out who carried the advanced antimicrobial technology we wanted (because it's expensive and not a generic, this limited our options), and who could provide the cut-and-sew and printing as well. Most mills can't do that.

This one mill was willing to connect us with a printer within 10 miles of them and facilitate the process between all the moving parts. We also flew there and took a tour to see their operation and to meet with them personally.

It's extremely important to us to source responsibly and use an antimicrobial technology that is certified and non-toxic, which is why we haven't been willing to go outside the U.S. to get our sleeves made—even though it's much less expensive to do so.

EGT: Do you have any competitors?

BB: There are about eight others in this space, but none are an actual competitor because ours are the only tray covers made from BPA-free plastic waste, come in stunning designs embedded with a non-toxic antimicrobial technology,



and are stored in a case that holds two covers and clips to your carry-on.

EGT: Who “invented” the product name?

BB: Cornelia and I tossed around a lot of ideas but eventually hired an agency called “hello-Muller,” based in Belgium.

Our tagline at the time, during COVID, was “Lose the fear. Enjoy the journey.” We wanted to encourage people to have wanderlust, to be get-up-and-goers and joy seekers—to break through your personal barriers, whatever they may be.

So together, we came up with the name “Go-Be”—like, “Go be the best you can be and don’t hold back. Lose the fear and enjoy the journey, whatever that journey may be!” Because we are more than just a product; we are a voice for positivity, mindfulness and change for the better. In this case, we are transforming travelers’ habits to be more sustainable.

EGT: Any patents or trademarks?

BB: Our Go-Be name is trademarked, and we patented the case. The Go-Be case is uniquely designed with separate compartments so it can hold multiple sleeves, ensuring they always stay fresh. The Go-Be case is the only airplane tray-cover case that has multiple compartments. It’s dishwasher safe and fully recyclable.

EGT: Who is handling your PR?

BB: We do our own. As a career journalist, I understand what it’s like to be on the other side of pitches, so I reach out to the media myself, as

well as hire PR/social media interns and train them how to write pitches and contact the media.

Our interns are great at creating reels and posts, and we boost these on all our platforms—especially on Facebook and Instagram.

EGT: Where are you selling?

BB: We sell primarily online but also on Walmart Marketplace, AAA, retail boutiques and several third-party online wellness platforms.

EGT: Please tell us about working with Grommet.

BB: Grommet has been our greatest experience thus far regarding organically scaling our business.

We applied to Grommet and were accepted right away. They asked us to send images and video clips of our products, and their super-talented team created a page for us on their site.

Every Thursday, Grommet launches 20 new innovative products and blasts emails and Instagram posts to their 2 million subscribers asking them to vote on their favorites. The day we launched on Grommet, our sales exploded!

We won Product of the Week, having the most votes, and we are still trending. And they chose us to be on Grommet Live, in which they will showcase “Travel Must-Haves!”

It’s been a whirlwind experience, and I would recommend any inventors looking to raise brand awareness and scale their business to apply to Grommet.

EGT: How many SKUs are you now featuring?

BB: We currently have 31 SKUs: (13) “Go-Be 2-Packs,” which are sets of two coordinating sleeves in our patented carrying case and (18) “Solos,” which are our individual sleeves that come in a plant-based zipper pouch. Our collections include Classics and Kids.

EGT: Why are Go-Be Sleeves good for the environment?

BB: Go-Be Sleeves are not only knitted from BPA-free, post-consumer plastic, which means that with every purchase you are helping to clean up oceans and landfills, but each sleeve is embedded with a non-toxic antimicrobial technology that’s safe for the environment.

Moreso, our sleeves eliminate the need to use single-use disinfectant wipes—many of

which contain harmful toxins and are made of synthetic fibers—so they never decompose. Six million people fly globally every day. If just 20 percent of these passengers use a disinfectant wipe, that's 1.2 million heading to landfills every day!

EGT: Any plans for your business? Do you have any new products?

BB: We have a very exciting collaboration happening right now. We are encouraging artists around the globe to submit their interpretations of some of the world's most popular destination hot spots.

The winning designs will become our latest collection, called "My Happy Place." We envision this series to be both a great collectible and giftable.

EGT: What wisdom have you gained from inventing Go-Be Sleeves?

BB: I feel as though I'm learning every day. I think the biggest lesson we learned is to start slow. Don't try to be too fast out of the gate.

Test, test and test again. Be open to feedback from your customers. Listen to their needs and be willing to continuously adapt.

Continuous improvement is vital for staying relevant. If you don't get it right the first time—whether it's your logo, brand colors or messaging—know that you're still young enough to pivot. Setbacks are powerful learning opportunities if you can see through the clouds.

And of course, network, network, network! I'm on LinkedIn every day connecting with new people who can offer crucial support, advice and growth opportunities. Build relationships with mentors, peers and suppliers. Always have backups! ☺

Details: gobesleeves.com

Edith G. Tolchin has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000 (edietolchin.com/portfolio). She is the author of several books, including "Secrets of Successful Women Inventors" (<https://a.co/d/fAGlvZJ>) and "Secrets of Successful Inventing" (<https://a.co/d/8dafJd6>).



INVENTOR UPDATE

TAGIE! She's It!

Inventors Digest columnist April Mitchell was honored in November with People of Play's TAGIE Award as Game Innovator of the Year.

Within the past year or so, Mitchell had six new games released by various publishers: Foxmind's Slanguage; John Adam's Am I a Dirtbag; MoCo Games' Danger Hugs; Hootenanny's Disco Island Escape; Martinex's FormWorm, and Life is Better Outside's BamzBall.

"I've been in the game and toy industry for roughly seven years, and one of my major goals was to someday receive a TAGIE!" said Mitchell, who accepted the award onstage at the ceremony in Chicago. Almost 350 attendees from 20 countries celebrated the finalists, winners and honorees.

"I feel like it was a group award," she said in an interview on LinkedIn. "I feel like it belongs to so many people" who supported her and gave her opportunities.



WHAT THE HECK IS HE UP TO NOW?

10 QUESTIONS WITH: STEVE GREENBERG, 'THE GADGET GUY'

BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN

HE HAS LONG been known as “The Gadget Guy” and “The Innovation Insider.” I have long known him as an amazing person.

Steve Greenberg and I met in 2009 at the Charlotte offices of *Inventors Digest*. As then-board members of the United Inventors Association, he, longtime ID contributor Jack Lander, a few others and I were filming a video series for novice inventors.

I interviewed him in 2012 for *ID* when he hosted Food Network’s “Invention Hunters.”

Greenberg, a longtime journalist who’s won 12 Emmy Awards and is the author of “Gadget Nation,” is a frequent contributor on NBC’s “Today with Hoda & Jenna” and the host of YouTube’s gadget game show “What the Heck Is That?”—considered a cross between “Shark Tank” and “What’s My Line?” or “I’ve Got a Secret.”

In 2014, along with his brother, Gary Greenberg, Steve contributed to the Crowdfunding chapter

for one of my inventor series books, “Secrets of Successful Inventing: From Concept to Commerce” (Square One Publishers).

Greenberg demonstrates innovative products for top TV markets including WGN in Chicago; NBC in Washington, D.C.; and judges in innovation competitions around the world. He has a huge social media presence on X (formerly Twitter) @stevetv; on Facebook at Facebook.com/stevetv; Instagram (@stevegreenberg); and on LinkedIn at LinkedIn.com/in/stevetv.

I recently caught up with him for “10 Questions.”

Have you always wanted to be involved in media and journalism? As a child, what were your grown-up aspirations?

Journalism wasn’t even on the table when I was a youngster.

In eighth grade, I wrote a paper stating I wanted to be an ophthalmologist

One of Steve Greenberg’s favorite new gadgets is the Sofa Stud, a spill-proof cup holder for your couch invented by a couple in Littleton, Colorado. The longtime TV fixture and author never envisioned his career path.



when I grew up. I went to Rutgers College and then received a scholarship and early acceptance to Northwestern University Dental School in Chicago.

So, I became a full-time practicing dentist in New Jersey. Back then, I had no thoughts of a career on television; no journalism career was on the horizon for me.

So how did you go from dentist to journalist?

While doing dentistry, I had free time on Wednesdays and most mornings. I needed a hobby, and television really started as a hobby for me.

It was the 1980s, and suburbs were being wired for cable television. Part of the cable deals cut by towns included the creation of a public access television station. My New Jersey town had one of those deals, and I was involved in the creation of a public access TV station in my town. It was just a hobby—but I loved it.

From that relationship with the cable company, I was offered a part-time news job at WOR, a TV station which had just moved from NYC to Secaucus, New Jersey (the WOR move was forced due to some FCC violations). I worked the news desk and helped produce news stories. It was very exciting working in a newsroom, and I got hooked on the adrenaline rush of breaking

news. I put together a “resume reel” and mailed it to about 100 TV stations around the country.

After lots of rejections, I finally received a few interviews. I ultimately landed an on-camera, full-time TV news reporter job at WNEP-TV in Scranton-Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. It was an ABC station owned by the *New York Times*.

It was the perfect newsroom in which to learn my craft. The assistant news director liked me and trained me to be a fast, accurate, serious television journalist.

From WNEP-TV, I was then offered a reporting job at the CBS TV station in Miami. After years of doing that, I decided I wanted a new challenge, so I left CBS and started my own company doing freelance video stories for various television entities including HGTV’s “Dream Builders,” HGTV’s “House Detective,” DIY’s “To the Rescue,” Discovery Channel’s “Your New House,” WPBT’s “New Florida,” Wall Street Journal Television, E!’s E! News, TPE’s “Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous,” and many others.

How did you go from doing television segments to new products segments?

I was hired by Discovery Channel’s “Your New House” to do a daily segment Monday through Friday. The executive producer suggested I do a gardening segment or maybe “Cool Tools.”

Greenberg’s says his show “has evolved from a Zoom format to trade shows, to “man-on-the-street” formats. ... The show is a thinly veiled platform to introduce new products to viewers.”



“I became a full-time practicing dentist in New Jersey. Back then, I had no thoughts of a career on television.”

I lived in a high-rise, so gardening was out and I’m not handy enough to showcase various tools day in and day out. I suggested a daily segment called “Check This Out.” I wanted something wide open, so I wouldn’t run out of topics; and I really wanted to showcase gadgets.

I love gadgets and new inventions, so this topic seemed like a great fit for me. I would showcase five products a day, five days a week.

My apartment looked like a storage warehouse. It was insane. Boxes on top of boxes. Shipping products in and out every day. I had a great team—and we were making TV every day.

My segment aired at 6:55 p.m. weekdays on The Discovery Channel. (It) was the lead-in to the wildly popular “Wild Discovery,” so I had lots of viewers. And that’s how I met hundreds of Mom, Pop, and garage inventors.

In airports, in the grocery store, and at various trade shows, I met inventors who wanted their new products showcased in my segment. They all had a story to tell, and I thought that would make a great TV show.

So why didn’t you make it into a TV show?

Well, I wish it was that easy. Unfortunately, I couldn’t get any TV executives to agree with me. I pitched the idea to lots of TV executives and though most seemed truly interested, I never got the green light.

My TV show idea, which I called “Gadget Nation,” basically profiled Mom, Pop, and garage inventors who had come up with problem-solving gadgets and their journeys to bring those gadgets to market. I had some great inventor stories, but there were no catfights, no table tossing—so TV executives passed. But that’s not where the story ends.

One executive at truTV reached out to me and said he loved the show idea but couldn’t get the others in the room to agree with him. He suggested I turn “Gadget Nation” into a book. I said, “I’m a TV guy, not a book guy.”

He insisted, and I ultimately listened to him. I pitched the book to a few literary agents and

then to Sterling Publishing. I landed a book deal, and then I wrote the book: “Gadget Nation: A Journey Through the Eccentric World of Invention.”

The book did very well. I had lots of fun promoting it and demonstrating the gadgets showcased in the book.

Unexpectedly, the book opened so many new doors. I became a semi-regular guest on NBC’s “Today,” got on the board of the United Inventors Association, and became a judge and speaker at trade shows around the world.

But didn’t you end up getting a TV show on Food Network?

Yep—and it’s because of the success of my book, “Gadget Nation.”

Several production companies reached out to me to be the host or cohost of television shows that focused on the invention world. I participated in a few pilot episodes. Most of the shows died quickly and quietly.

One show made it to TV screens around the world. Food Network wanted to do a show about the Mom, Pop, and garage inventors behind new kitchen gadgets.

The show was called “Invention Hunters.” We did one season, and despite impressive ratings, we were canned.

The show was a competition format. Each episode viewers would meet a few inventors and their inventions. On the show, we would test the invention and finally pick one to be pitched for a licensing deal at Lifetime Brands. Then, in the boardroom of Lifetime Brands, they would decide if this inventor got a licensing deal or not.

It was a fun half hour—lots of laughs and some tears. I loved doing “Invention Hunters,” but I was told that by the time the episodes



A guest on NBC’s “Today,” Greenberg shares a smile with host Hoda Kotb and Jenna Bush Hager.

started to air on Food Network, the executives who had approved the show were long gone.

So, that didn't help our survival on the Food Network. You can still catch episodes of "Invention Hunters" buried on the Food Network's streaming platform.

Anyone who follows you on social media knows that you launched a game show called "What the Heck Is That?" Why the heck did you do that?

Great question, Edie!

Well, I was thinking about writing another book, and frankly, despite the success of "Gadget Nation," the world of publishing had changed so much it just didn't make any sense.

But I still wanted to showcase new inventions, and most shows such as NBC's "Today" really controlled what products got picked for any segment.

I wanted the freedom to pick the Mom, Pop, and garage inventors that I thought needed an exposure boost. I always loved game shows and thought that format might be a fun way to highlight new products and get viewers involved in the process.

That's how my game show, "What the Heck Is That?," was invented.

Each episode, I showcase one new product. The panelists try to guess what that gadget does.

The show has evolved from a Zoom format to trade shows, to "man-on-the-street" formats. And the episodes have gone from 15 minutes each to now just 2-to-3-minute episodes.

But despite the format changes, at its core the game show has remained the same: Here's a new gadget; can you guess what it does?

The show is a thinly veiled platform to introduce new products to viewers. I really hope the invention community embraces the show—because ultimately, if my game show gets a large enough audience, it will help inventors launch new products. As I often say to inventors, "Help me help you."

Where can people see the show?

It can be seen on YouTube, and on the streaming platform DBTV.

As I mentioned, the show can also be seen on DBTV. What is DBTV?

DBTV is a streaming network that can be seen on all smart TVs, and streams live 24/7 (600,000 monthly viewers); on Roku Live Stream; On Demand (reaching 60.1 million households); and on Amazon Fire, Live Stream & On Demand (reaching 50 million households).

DBTV can now also be seen on Roku in Canada, Mexico, Germany, Ireland, Australia, United Kingdom, and the country list keeps growing.



"If my game show gets a large enough audience, it will help inventors launch new products. As I often say to inventors, 'Help me help you.'"

If you haven't seen the game show, please check it out. And if you are watching it on YouTube, please Like and Share.

Also to support the show, subscribe to the YouTube channel. It's free, and if you click on the little bell next to "subscribe," you'll get a notification each time I post a new episode. Help me help you!

How can our readers who are inventors get their products showcased on your show?

It's really easy. There are two qualifications: If your invention is available for consumers to buy (on your own website or in a retail store or anywhere), and at first glance your invention is a "mystery gadget" (you can't tell what it does by just looking at it).

Meet both qualifications, and your product qualifies for the show.

Next, reach out to me. My email is on [stevegreenberg.tv](mailto:stevegreenberg@stevetv.com), and on gadgetgameshow.com.

Just go to either site and click on Contact. Then send me your product link, send a picture, and tell me what problem your gadget solves. That's it!

What about getting your new products on NBC's "Today" or other editorial shows?

In those cases, the process works sort of in the reverse. When I get a segment assigned to me on "Today" or another editorial show, if I don't already have gadgets for the segment, then I post on social media what I'm looking for.

If you see my post and your product "fits" what I'm looking for, reach out to me. So please follow me on Twitter (X) @stevetv; on Facebook. [com/stevetv](https://www.facebook.com/stevetv), and on LinkedIn.

What's next for Steve Greenberg?

Yikes! I don't know. I hope more of the same for many, many, many years.

I would love to see the game show grow and evolve—and maybe one day become a "real" TV show.

I really enjoy being a new products judge and speaker at trade shows. I hope I continue to get more speaking gigs moving forward.

And I love to travel. I hope that doesn't slow down. All I can say is, "Stay tuned!" 📺



STEVE GREENBERG

BORN: Paterson, New Jersey

HOME: Miami, Florida

EDUCATION: DDS and MPH
(Master of Public Health)

HOBBIES: Travel and dining out

AWARDS: 12 Emmy Awards, and several national awards including the American Heart Association's prestigious Blakeslee Award

PROUDEST PERSONAL MOMENT: Graduating from Northwestern University Dental School (a rough road to get to that day).

PROUDEST PROFESSIONAL

MOMENT: Seeing my book "Gadget Nation" selling in bookstores across the country.

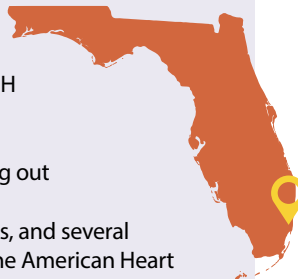
FAVORITE TV SHOWS: "Six Feet Under," "Golden Girls," "Frasier," "Law & Order SVU," "Friends," "Seinfeld"

FAVORITE MOVIES: "The Sound of Music," "The Godfather," "All About Eve," "Chicago," "Toy Story," "When Harry Met Sally"

FAVORITE GUILTY PLEASURE: Bravo

FAVORITE BOOK: Dr Seuss' "Yertle The Turtle and Other Stories"

FAVORITE QUOTE: "No good deed goes unpunished."



COLLEGIATE INVENTORS WINNERS

2 SAFER SURGERY TECHNIQUES HIGHLIGHT 2024 CLASS

A COUPLE OF groundbreaking techniques for safer surgeries were among the top four winners in the 2024 Collegiate Inventors Competition®.

An undergraduate team from the University of Wisconsin-Madison created a process that reduces the risk of unintentional damage in medical treatments, winning the first-place \$10,000 prize in that class. An undergraduate team from Johns Hopkins University created a system designed to ensure safer fetal surgeries, earning the runner-up \$5,000 prize.

Finalist teams (five undergraduate and five graduate) consisting of 19 students from nine colleges and universities across the United States presented their inventions to a panel of final-round judges composed of the most influential inventors and innovation experts in the nation—National Inventors Hall of

Fame® inductees and officials from the USPTO, which sponsors the annual event.

Winners (\$10,000 prize): The University of Wisconsin-Madison team of **Zach Spears, Molly Paras** and **Lauren Fitzsimmons** (adviser: John P. Puccinelli) won in the undergraduate category for the Nerve Ninja. Their invention enhances safety and efficiency in delicate carpal tunnel release surgeries, in which there can be direct damage to nerves and tissue from surgical instruments that have not progressed in decades.

The Nerve Ninja combines the precision of a scalpel blade with the utility of surgical scissors. Featuring a surgical forceps with a groove along one tine and a scalpel slider housed on top, the invention allows surgeons to safely and easily dissect and cut tissue.

Winning inventors (from left): Zach Spears, Molly Paras, Lauren Fitzsimmons, Selena Shirkin, Eric McAlexander, Linzixuan (Rhoda) Zhang, Zhuoran Han and Jaekwon Lee. Not pictured: Gloria Kalnitskaya and Ayeeshi Poosarla.



In the graduate category, Massachusetts Institute of Technology student **Linzixuan (Rhoda) Zhang** (advisers: Robert Langer and Ana Jaklenec) won for Nutrient-Stabilizing Materials. These offer an alternative to conventional methods of fortifying foods with nutrient supplements, which can lead to health and environmental issues. Based on metal-organic frameworks, crystalline compounds consisting of metal ions or clusters chemically bonded with organic molecules, Nutrient-Stabilizing Materials can be incorporated into foods or taken orally as supplements. This also won the 2024 People's Choice Award and \$2,000 prize.

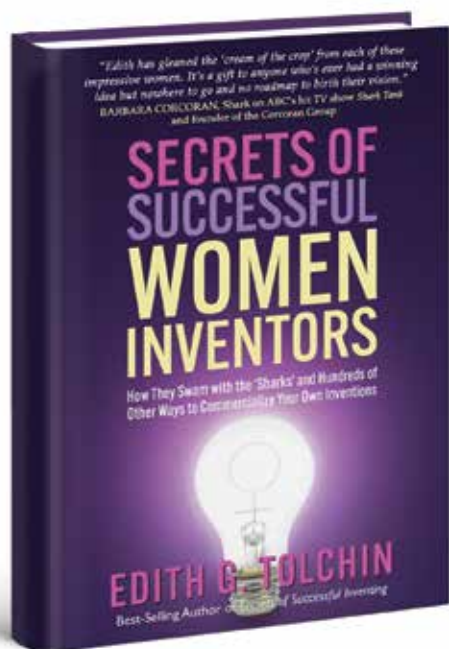
Runners-up (\$5,000 prize): The Johns Hopkins University team of **Selena Shirkin, Eric McAlexander, Gloria Kalnitskaya and Ayeeshi Poosarla** (adviser: Ahmet Baschat) won in the undergraduate category for the FetalCare Port System. It is tailored to the uterine environment, reducing risks of membrane rupture and pre-term births—crucial problems in fetal surgeries.

The system's unique design, with an obturator that allows for more precise cutting through the uterine membrane and a radially expanding port sheath, streamlines the surgical process and improves overall efficiency.

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign team of **Zhuoran Han and Jaekwon Lee** (adviser: Can Bayram) won in the graduate category for the Photoconductive Semiconductor Switch that addresses challenges faced by the aging U.S. power grid, transforming it into a more reliable and resilient grid. The diamond-based PCSS technology allows for faster recovery from outages and improves grid stability with rapid switching, high-voltage capabilities and exceptional reliability while reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

For more information on the competition, see invent.org/collegiate-inventors.

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Edith G. Tolchin
(photo by Amy Goldstein Photography)

Edith G. Tolchin knows inventors!

Edie has interviewed over 100 inventors for her longtime column in *Inventors Digest* (www.edietolchin.com/portfolio). She has held a prestigious U.S. customs broker license since 2002. She has written five books, including the best-selling *Secrets of Successful Inventing* (2015), and *Fanny on Fire*, a recent finalist in the Foreword Reviews INDIE Book Awards.

SQUAREONE
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(ad designed by
joshwallace.com)

Overrated: The Logo Mojo

IT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO HAVE A HEADLINE, SYMBOL, TAGLINE OR NAME AS AN IDENTIFIER **BY WILLIAM SEIDEL**

I OFTEN HEAR, "I need a logo!" And I say, "No, you don't!"

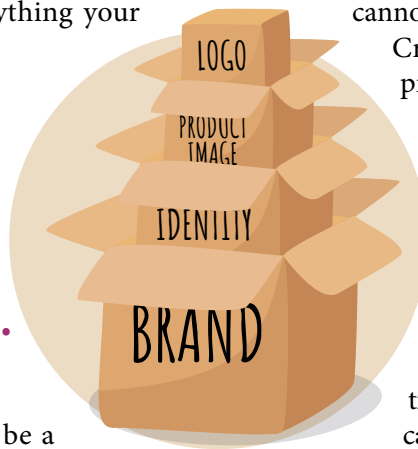
When starting a product or company, many of us quickly want a logo. It is good to have a flag to rally behind, but a logo should not be top of the list.

Before a logo, you need a clear definition of your customer, product and business.

A logo is a subset of your product image, which is a subset of your identity, which is a subset of your brand.

A logo reflects the value of your product and company. It reflects what your product stands for and everything your customer needs to know.

A logo is a subset of your product image, which is a subset of your identity, which is a subset of your brand.



Behind a logo should be a strategy for the image, identity and brand to work in concert with the advertising, packaging and all customer touchpoints. This helps create the position in the mind of the customer and defines the brand.

What is a logo?

A logo is a symbol, wordmark or icon that identifies a product, company or brand. It must be well planned, because it may become a trademark. Most important, it must be memorable and communicate the message.

A graphic logo like ARCO is visual but can be expensive to promote. It is meant to represent the explosion of an internal combustion engine but needs explanation.

Wordmarks are phonetic. They can be pronounced and remembered. Exxon has a clever little "X-Play" that is memorable and can be protected.

The value of an image can be great and speak more than words, but only if done right.

Michael Vanderbyl's award-winning graphics for the California Conservation Corp. communicate caring, parenting and stewardship that cannot be communicated in a word.

Creating a graphic image that is pronounceable is best, because it can say more than just the word.

The Case logo gives the feel of pistons and heavy equipment, capturing a better message than just the word.

Everyone recognizes the now-infamous symbol I♥NY.

In 1977, the state asked its advertising agency to develop a marketing campaign to promote New York. The agency recruited Milton Glaser, a famous graphic designer, to work on the campaign.

Glaser assumed the campaign would last a couple months and did the work pro bono. It was a major success; the original sketches are now priceless pop art in the Museum of Modern Art.

New York got more than it ever expected. Glaser never made a penny.

Designing winners

Nontraditional logos can be a color, sound, smell, texture or shape. The pink color of



Pepto-Bismol, the NBC Chimes, the smell of Play-Doh, the Harley sound and the Coca-Cola bottle shape are trademarked.

Graphic designers satisfy the people who hire them with something they like. However, their liking it has nothing to do with customer acceptance.

The designer is often given the responsibility for the success because a great product in a terrible package is likely to fail. The logo—like the package—is part of the identity and communication, and requires market knowledge.

The experienced designer requires marketing to test customer response, market position and message. If you work with a professional firm, it will test many designs with many customers for the best response.

Sophisticated marketing creates award-winning logos, but it's not required. Most startups and early-stage products hire local talented designers.

In 1971, Carolyn Davidson was a graphic design student at Portland State University. Her accounting instructor was Phil Knight, Nike's co-founder.

Ms. Davidson was hired to create a graphic that depicted motion, speed and success. Inspired by the wings of the Greek goddess of victory and a stylized checkmark, the result was the Nike Swoosh. Now one of the most iconic logos in the world, it became a symbol of quality.

One of the best deals ever—for \$35.

Taglines can mean more

The brand is what the product stands for in the mind of the customer. It is the reason American supermarket shoppers buy the same 159

products 80 percent of the time: It is “branded” in our brains, making us loyal customers.

Often, the logo is not enough. The world-recognized BMW logo represents the company but does not define the brand.

The iconic tagline, “The Ultimate Driving Machine,” defines BMW. This goes far beyond the logo. It is responsible for a dramatic increase in sales because it positioned BMW as the symbol of “ultimate” performance.

Unforgettable taglines may be more important than a logo. Remember the 1939 Rice Krispies’ “Snap, Crackle, Pop!” Or the historic 1976 Alka-Seltzer description, “Plop, plop, fizz, fizz—oh, what a relief it is!” And the 1993 simple question, “Got Milk?”

If your name is bad, you can make fun of it or change it. An unknown name that is hard to pronounce or has negative connotations must be overcome.

As Smucker's gained national distribution, rebranding was a constant issue for new customer recognition. The company kept the name but continually changed its logo, image and identity—very bad for business.

In 1962, an advertising executive confronted the problem head-on: “With a name like Smucker's, it has to be good!”

What's in a name? Everything

Some company identity problems can be solved by simply changing its name.

Walt Disney Studios had a problem attracting young adults. The company lost millions on the movies “Black Hole,” “Tron” and “Rocket Man”



and needed to increase draw to its family films.

By conducting surveys, Disney identified the reason for poor box office performance: the child appeal of the Disney name.

The young adult movie-going audience would not take a date to a Disney movie. The company solved it by changing its name to Touchstone and Hollywood Films, and experienced great success with “Splash,” “Ruthless People” and “Arachnophobia.”

A clever inventor came to my company having solved the hard task of deboning a fish. The product easily strips the bones, spine, ribs and tail off the fish with one quick flip of the wrist.

He raised \$500,000 for inventory and produced an expensive infomercial. He had several false starts, spent all the money, his investors fled, and he needed help.

The problem was the Wunder Boner name. It worked for a great laugh and was awarded one of the funniest infomercials ever, but it backfired because networks would not air the infomercial.

We structured two media deals with Fox and Paramount, got it on cable and online, and it sold for 20 years.

So, do you really need a logo?

What you really need is a headline. A symbol, wordmark, name or tagline will work. But that must be part of your plan to build an identity to support your brand. 📌

William Seidel is an author, educator, entrepreneur, innovator, and a court-approved expert witness on marketing innovation. In his career and as the owner of America Invents, he has developed, licensed, and marketed billions of dollars of products.



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2024 IPOEF INVENTOR OF THE YEAR

2 TEAMS TO BE HONORED FOR REVOLUTIONARY
DIABETES TREATMENTS



Bengt Krister Bokvist



Tamer Coskun



Robert Chadwick Cummins



Jorge Alsina-Fernandez



Paw Bloch



Thomas Kruse Hansen



Jesper Lau

According to the International Diabetes Federation, about 10.5 percent of the adult worldwide population (20-79 years) has diabetes, with almost half unaware they have it. One in 8 adults are projected to have diabetes by 2045.

The 2024 IPO Education Foundation's Inventor of the Year award goes to two teams of inventors who have revolutionized diabetes treatments. Their treatments began by first identifying novel compounds targeting incretin hormones.

Honorees are the inventors of Mounjaro, from Indianapolis-based international pharmaceutical firm Eli Lilly and Co., and Ozempic, from Danish multinational pharma company Novo Nordisk.

Mounjaro® is a once-weekly injection that helps the pancreas release more insulin, lowering the amount of

sugar the liver makes and slowing the rate food passes through the body to make a person feel full longer. Eli Lilly honorees are Bengt Krister Bokvist, Tamer Coskun, Robert Chadwick Cummins and Jorge Alsina-Fernandez.

Ozempic® is a medicine for adults with Type 2 diabetes that may improve blood sugar levels and reduce the risk of stroke, heart attack, or death. Novo Nordisk award recipients are Paw Bloch, Thomas Kruse Hansen and Jesper Lau. 📌

Details: ipoef.org

The IPO Education Foundation will honor the inventors during the December 12 IPO awards celebration at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C.

5 for '25

CONSIDER THIS HANDFUL OF MUST-HAVE PROTOTYPING TOOLS FOR THE NEW YEAR

BY JEREMY LOSAW

THE HOLIDAY SEASON is an opportunity to take a brief hiatus from prototyping and appreciate the hard work we have put into building some great prototypes and innovations from the past 12 months.

However, the inventor's mind is always active and keen to improve, and will not stay idle for long. We always want to build faster, more accurately, and more creatively. Here are five must-have tools that every prototyper should consider taking into the new year.

Form Labs Form 4 3D Printer

Launched in the first half of the year, the latest model in the Form series features the latest advance in resin printing. The Form 4 uses high-precision laser technology to cure liquid resin, with a design that slashes print times by upwards of 75 percent or more (depending on the part). It is also very easy to use and post-process parts.



Form 4's new automated resin handling system reduces the amount of time manually cleaning parts and reduces the mess from the resin process. It also features a wide range of material options with resins that are biocompatible, high heat, high strength and even elastomeric. If you have high-detail or high-volume printing needs, the Form 4 is a must-have. Website, price: formlabs.com, \$4,499.

Particle Muon

Iot development boards have come a long way in recent years, and the recently released Particle Muon is the most versatile one on the market.

The Muon combines cellular, WiFi, Bluetooth, LoRaWAN, Ethernet and satellite connectivity in a single board, which means it can send and receive data anywhere in the world. The board is laid out in a Raspberry Pi form factor, so it is compatible with any sensor or accessory hat that works with a Pi.

The device is powered by the Particle IoT Platform-as-a-Service, making it easy and intuitive to use while freeing up to a certain number of data used per month. The board can be used out of the box for production deployments, or the onboard MSOM chip can be ported to a custom design. Website, price: particle.io, \$69.95.



Creality Scan Ferret

Creating 3D models for reverse engineering and 3D printing can be difficult and time consuming, but not if you have a 3D scanner. The compact and lightweight Creality Scan Ferret gives high-resolution scanning power to the masses.

It uses structured light scanning to easily create models of scan subjects and can capture objects as small as 50mm cubed. The software is intuitive and easy to use, automatically



These new products feature the best in resin printing, IoT development boards, high-resolution scanning, laser cutting and electronics kits.



healing holes in a scan file and allowing users to manually edit or delete remnant data.

The scanner can be used with either a computer or smartphone, as the host and has modes for high-accuracy or large-object scanning. Files can be saved and output directly to a 3D printer for rapid creation of scanned designs. Website, price: creality.com, \$329.

Flux Beamo Laser Cutter

Laser cutters are one of the best prototyping tools, allowing you to build mechanical models in minutes. The new Flux Beamo brings powerful laser-cutting capability in a small-form factor. The device boasts a 30 Watt CO2 laser that can cut up to 7mm thick cypress wood and 5mm plywood, and can also be used as an engraver for labeling or decorative projects.

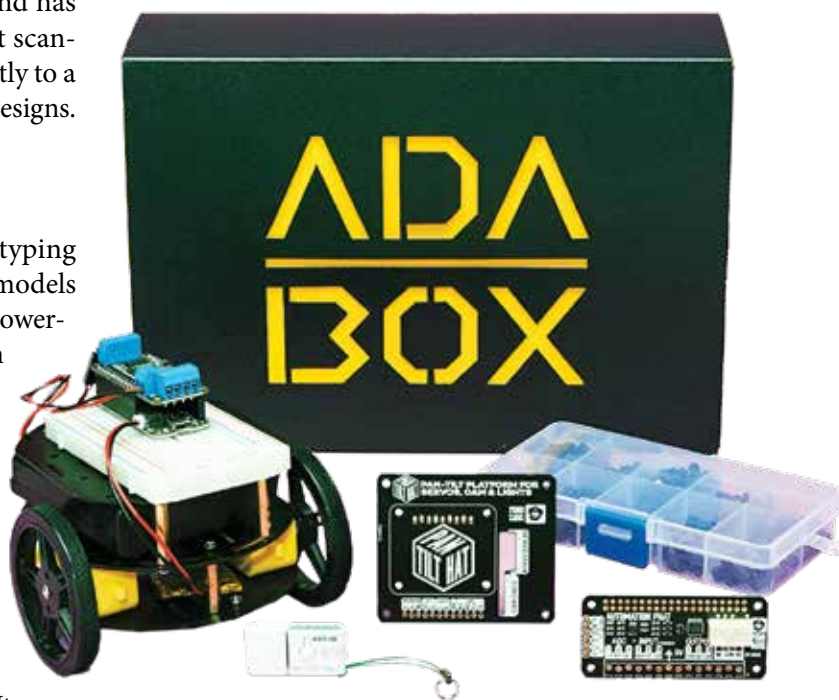
The Flux Beamo has a 300mm x 210mm work area that fits easily on any desktop and is compatible with standard-design software such as Adobe Illustrator, Solidworks, and many more. It has an HD camera function that allows for an easy preview of what the job will look like when the material is in the machine to limit wasted material from a misalignment.

For those seeking larger cutting areas, the Beamo is also available in two larger models that increase the work area up to 600 x 375 mm. Website, price: flux3dp.com, \$1,995 (\$2,995 with the recommended air filter system).

Adabox electronics kits

The Adabox is a curated box of electronic goodies that is delivered a few times a year from open-source hardware company Adafruit. These boxes have a kit of parts and custom PCBs that allow makers to explore topics including IoT, photography, LEDs and music.

Each box has associated tutorials and sample projects to allow novices and experienced electronics prototypers to get up and running quickly with minimum effort. These tutorials also provide a framework for which the intrepid prototyper can run with to make his or her own creations. Subscriptions are \$60 per box from Adafruit.com, with approximately 2-4 unique boxes per year. 📦



Jeremy Losaw is a Super Fab Lab Specialist at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He has run innovation training sessions all over the world.





More Change at the Top

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULT SIGNALS NEW APPOINTEE TO LEAD USPTO, AND A LOOK BACK **BY LOUIS CARBONNEAU**

EVERY FOUR YEARS, a new presidential election brings in a slew of administrative changes in the U.S. government from the top down, as most political appointees from the previous administration are soon replaced. This is no different for the USPTO (which reports to the Secretary of Commerce), whose director is appointed by the incoming president and must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

On October 26, 2021, Kathi Vidal was appointed by President Biden and confirmed into her role a few weeks later. During her confirmation, when asked about her stance on patent eligibility, she answered, “we can work together to build an intellectual property system that is more predictable, reliable and transparent.”

Mrs. Vidal also said there needed to be “more clarity when it comes to patent eligibility,” whether it “comes via legislation or whether the Supreme Court takes a case.

On the PTAB being a patent “death squad,” she noted her experience on “both sides” of PTAB proceedings and said she would consult with stakeholders and investigate potential reforms.

Here is what I wrote at that time regarding her testimony during the confirmation process:

“So, to me, these guarded statements by candidate Vidal bring very little comfort, as they can easily be read to appease opposite sides at the same time, regardless of their respective agendas.

“Let’s not forget that, according to the US Inventors nonprofit organization, ‘Vidal’s clients have filed a combined 2,381 challenges at the PTAB. She has been paid millions of dollars by Apple, Samsung, Microsoft, Cisco, Micron, Netflix, Dell, Roku, and HP. She is attorney of record in 14 pending cases at the PTAB, all on behalf of the infringer/petitioner.’”

Wide-ranging accomplishment

Four years later, it is worth revisiting Mrs. Vidal’s tenure—which was generally marked by a proactive approach to several critical areas within the IP landscape. She resigned her position, effective in mid-December, on November 12—one week after Donald Trump won the U.S. presidential election.

When she assumed the role, expectations were high that her extensive background in IP law, coupled with her experience representing both large corporations and independent inventors, would bring a balanced perspective to the agency’s priorities. Vidal’s focus areas included improving patent and trademark application processing, bolstering IP rights, addressing challenges related to patent eligibility (particularly under Section 101), and managing the often-contentious Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB) proceedings.

Key accomplishments:

- **Administrative reforms.** Vidal streamlined PTAB procedures and increased transparency in decision-making; implemented new guidance on discretionary denials under Fintiv; enhanced stakeholder engagement through expanded outreach programs, and introduced programs to expedite examination of key technologies like climate change solutions.
- **Access initiatives.** She launched Pro Se Assistance Program expansion; created the Council for Inclusive Innovation (CI2); expanded the Patent Pro Bono Program, and implemented fee reductions for small and micro entities.



- **Quality measures.** Vidal strengthened patent examination quality through enhanced training; implemented AI tools to improve prior art searches, and increased focus on Section 101 clarity following Supreme Court decisions.

One highlight with regard to patent quality was her work to reduce application backlogs. She introduced new measures aimed at reducing the pendency of both patent and trademark applications, which had surged due to pandemic-driven shifts in business and e-commerce.

Unfortunately, the situation is still dire: As of mid-2024, the backlog of unexamined patent applications reached approximately 785,387, nearing an all-time high. Total pendency—the time from application to decision—stands around 25.6 months, with an average of 20 months before the first office action on applications.

Her administration also focused on improving examiner training in emerging fields like AI and clean energy, ensuring that new technology applications are examined with rigor and accuracy

Nagging concerns

Vidal and her administration also received their share of critiques, notably around the following points:

- **PTAB policy decisions.** These included a perceived weakening of Fintiv discretionary denial factors; criticism that the PTAB remains too “patent owner unfriendly”; concerns about her involvement in specific IPR cases (like OpenSKY/VLSI), and arguments that the director review process remains too opaque.
- **Subject matter eligibility.** Critiques included a lack of concrete progress in clarifying Section 101 guidance; continued uncertainty in software and biotech patents; criticism that USPTO guidance hasn’t sufficiently aligned with court decisions, and perceived inconsistency in examination across art units.
- **Administrative decision-making.** There were claims of overstepping authority in certain policy decisions; criticism over her use of director review powers; questions about transparency in decision-making processes, and concerns about political influences on patent policy.

Kathi Vidal’s tenure as USPTO director was generally marked by a proactive approach to several critical areas within the IP landscape.

- **Small inventor advocacy.** Concerns included initiatives favoring large corporations over individual inventors; criticism that pro se assistance programs don’t address fundamental systemic barriers; concerns about rising costs despite fee reduction programs, and claims that patent quality initiatives disproportionately burden small entities.

- **Examination quality.** Some cited ongoing issues with examination consistency; long examination pendency times; over-reliance on AI tools in examination, and questions about examiner training and oversight.

Unfortunately for Mrs. Vidal, the most visible metric from the outside world is how many patents issued by the USPTO end up being declared invalid years later by the PTAB.

Based on what has been widely reported, the PTAB “kill rate” (i.e., the percentage of issued patent claims being invalidated) still hovers between 70 percent and 80 percent—depending on how one calculates it. Either way, this is absolutely unacceptable. No other industry than the government could survive with even a 20 percent product defect rate, let alone 80 percent.

Though Vidal’s tenure did not do the same substantial damage as felt under one of her predecessors (Michelle Lee), she certainly made patent owners feel nostalgic for Andrei Iancu, whom she replaced in 2021.

Next time, I will discuss what we see in our crystal ball when it comes to the next four years. How will a new president affect U.S.-based IP policy, especially combined with a new leadership in the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee?

A lot more changes to come. Stay tuned! 🎧

Louis Carbonneau is the founder and CEO of Tangible IP, a leading patent brokerage and strategic intellectual property firm. He has brokered the sale or license of 4,500-plus patents since 2011. He is also an attorney and adjunct professor who has been voted one of the world’s leading IP strategists.





AI Copyright Suit **Dismissed**

2 MEDIA OUTLETS' COMPLAINTS RULED TO NOT RISE TO THE LEVEL OF 'CONCRETE INJURY' **BY EILEEN MCDERMOTT**

All Eye on Washington stories originally appeared at IPWatchdog.com.

THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT for the Southern District of New York dismissed a copyright infringement complaint filed by Raw Story Media and Alternet Media against OpenAI, holding that the news outlets lacked Article III standing to bring their claims.

The court left open the possibility for the sites to file an amended complaint.

The complaint alleged that “thousands” of the news outlets’ copyrighted articles were scraped from the internet and then “stripped of their author, title, and copyright information, and input into at least three of OpenAI’s training sets (WebText, WebText2, and Common Crawl)” —then used to train OpenAI’s chatbot, ChatGPT. The responses provided by ChatGPT thus included information gleaned from the copyrighted works without noting the source.

The news sites also argued that the removal of copyright management information (CMI)

prior to training ChatGPT constituted a violation under Section 1202(b)(i) of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). They also sought an injunction to stop OpenAI from generating infringing responses to users via the current version of ChatGPT.

‘Substantial risk’ debunked

The news outlets said the removal of CMI from a copyrighted work constitutes a concrete injury and that the injunction was warranted because there was “substantial risk” that the new version of ChatGPT would generate the copyright-protected works” verbatim or nearly verbatim.” But OpenAI argued that “neither theory of harm identifies a concrete injury-in-fact sufficient to establish standing.”

The court agreed in its November 7 ruling. It said the plaintiffs failed to “allege that a copy of their work from which the CMI has been removed has been disseminated by ChatGPT to anyone in response to any specific query.”

The news outlets argued that the removal of copyright management information is akin to copyright infringement. The court said the plaintiffs failed to show the *information* in their articles was copyrighted per se.



Although the news outlets argued that the removal of CMI is akin to copyright infringement and generally constitutes interference with property—recognized under common law as a concrete injury—the district court judge wrote, “I am not convinced that injury for interference with property provides the necessary ‘close historical or common-law analogue’ to Plaintiffs’ alleged injury.”

The court said the plaintiffs improperly read Section 1202, which only protects against “specified interferences with the integrity of a work’s CMI,” and does not outright prohibit reproductions or derivatives of the work.

Because the copyrighted works with the CMI removed “were used to train an AI-software program and remain in ChatGPT’s repository of text,” the news outlets failed to show any “actual adverse effects stemming from this alleged DMCA violation,” added the opinion.

As to injunctive relief, which sought to have OpenAI “remove all copies of Plaintiffs’ copyrighted works from which author, title, copyright, and terms of use information w[ere] removed from their training sets and any other repositories,” the court said the plaintiffs failed to show the information in their articles was copyrighted per se.

The opinion acknowledged there may be some legitimate way for the plaintiffs to argue relief due to OpenAI’s “use of Plaintiffs’ articles to develop ChatGPT without compensation to Plaintiffs,” even though that question was not before the court here. 📌

Editor’s note: Article III of the U.S. Constitution establishes the judicial branch of the federal government. To lack Article III standing means to not have a sufficient challenge before these courts.

Many pending copyright lawsuits against OpenAI and Microsoft—Open AI’s main investor—by the New York Times and other publishers are still pending.

Eileen McDermott is editor-in-chief at IPWatchdog.com. A veteran IP and legal journalist, Eileen has held editorial and managerial positions at several publications and industry organizations since she entered the field more than a decade ago.



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Best wishes, Jack Lander



Judge, Crowd Stand Strong

SUSPENDED PAULINE NEWMAN, 97, MOVES AUDIENCE WITH HER DIGNITY AND DETERMINATION **BY GENE QUINN**

(Editor's note: Pauline Newman, circuit judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit and the nation's oldest active federal judge, was suspended in September 2023 from hearing cases for one year after she refused to undergo medical examinations and turn over medical records sought in response to concerns raised by her fellow judges and staff about her fitness to continue her work.)

The order involving Newman, 97, from the Judicial Council of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, was extended by another year this past September by a federal appeals court.)

AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER, we invited Judge Newman to speak during lunch during the final day of IPWatchdog LIVE, and many in attendance were quite moved by her remarks.

Judge Newman received a standing ovation—and those in attendance remarked that after listening to her speak, there was no doubt she wasn't suffering from any mental decline, despite what her colleagues on the court have charged.

IPWatchdog LIVE is so named because of the contemporaneous conversations and panels, and the fact that we don't record them. This is why I decided to

invite Judge Newman to speak at our annual Life Sciences program at IPWatchdog's Studios, where we

could record her presentation and remarks. Judge Newman accepted, and on Tuesday, October 29, she spoke to our assembly.

Those remarks were largely unscripted, although she did have some notes that she consulted from time to time during her nearly 45-minute presentation. This gave Judge Newman a platform to tell her side of the story in her own words and to discuss what the federal circuit is doing.

An emotional response

So powerful were her comments that at least several in the audience were seen shedding a tear, and she received a hearty standing ovation.

"I find that I will no longer conceal my concern about the federal circuit and how the judicial branch overall is serving, because our role is to serve the communities on which the public depends," Judge Newman said.

"My colleagues decided in some secret procedure, the nature of which I still don't know, that I am physically disabled and mentally incompetent, and they told me so, and that I would hear no more cases. As you can imagine, I protested—and after I filed suit in the district court to raise the Constitutional issue, they withdrew the charge of disability, physical or mental, but they didn't withdraw the penalty, which is still in effect."

Judge Newman is being wrongfully persecuted by her colleagues on the federal circuit.

She has taken and passed with flying colors the three different mental evaluations she has submitted to, all conducted by different, highly regarded evaluators. And in addition to the final mental evaluation she was given a cutting-edge CT scan of her brain, which showed no signs of cognitive decline—and in fact rather remarkably showed a healthy brain that looked to be the scan of someone in their 20s.

The federal circuit persists in excluding Judge Newman from hearing cases, which every day is becoming a more significant constitutional crisis. 🐕



Gene Quinn is a patent attorney, founder of IPWatchdog.com and a principal lecturer in the top patent bar review course in the nation. Strategic patent consulting, patent application drafting and patent prosecution are his specialties. Quinn also works with independent inventors and start-up businesses in the technology field.



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IoT Corner

IoT gardening system **Aerogarden** announced it will cease supporting its devices on January 1, 2025—leaving desktop gardeners in the dark.

The phased extinction of the WiFi- and Bluetooth-enabled product has begun, with sales from the Aerogarden website having ended in October and with availability on Amazon through the end of 2025. The company ambiguously announced that the app and its functionality will still be available for an undefined but “extended period of time.”

The product rose to prominence in 2020 during the pandemic when demand for home gardening spiked. It was a gateway for customers to learn how to garden from their desktop. —*Jeremy Losaw*



Wunderkinds

Thirteen-year-old **Tina Jin** of San Jose, California, won the \$25,000 first prize in the Thermo Fisher Scientific ASCEND (Aspiring Scientists Cultivating Exciting New Discoveries) competition for her research that proved the ability of animal

bones to filter water. She created an accessible and scalable water filtration system, usable anywhere, by using natural materials and common household supplies. Testing by the San Jose Water Co. showed her filter achieved potable standards.



What IS That?

These **prank envelopes** are said by Rhode Island Novelty to “promise laughter as unsuspecting friends open them, revealing the playful punchline within.” Seventy-nine percent of customers gave it 5 stars, but their comments did not reveal what’s inside.

Get Busy!

Applications for the Touch of Genius Prize for the 2025 calendar year are due January 10. The prize was developed to help inventors promote braille and tactile literacy for blind people worldwide. Details: touchofgeniusprize.org

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

1 When were electric Christmas lights invented?
A) 1780 B) 1850 C) 1882 D) 1920

2 Which Christmas invention came first: tree tinsel, or candy canes?

3 **True or false:** The Addis Brush Co. created the first artificial-brush trees in the 1930s, using the same machinery that made their toilet brushes.

4 The Hanukkah song “Light One Candle” by Peter, Paul & Mary, which is about Jewish freedom, was recorded in what year?
A) 1964 B) 1969
C) 1975 D) 1986

5 **True or false:** Alfred M. Butts invented the game Scrabble in 1931 to be a Christmas gift.



ANSWERS: 1. C. By Edward Johnson, a friend and partner of Thomas Edison. 2. Tinsel, 1610 in Germany; candy canes, 1947 in Wooster, Ohio, by German immigrant August Imhard (the first ones were solid white). 3. True. 4. D. 5. False.

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