

10 QUESTIONS WITH JAMES HOWARD

EDUCATOR, INDUSTRIAL DESIGN EXPERT AND MULTI-PATENTED INVENTOR DISCUSSES THE BLACK INVENTORS HALL OF FAME MUSEUM, SLATED TO OPEN IN LATE 2027 **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

James Howard is a man on a mission in New Jersey that he hopes will inspire the world.

Though I was born in the Bronx, I have lived in central New Jersey since 2012. And as a journalist who has interviewed more than 140 inventors and created 2 ½ books on this topic, I knew I had to speak with Mr. Howard. He has received much PR throughout local Jersey media and was able to take a few minutes from his busy schedule to speak with me about his overseeing the forthcoming Black Inventors Hall of Fame Museum and STEM Learning Research Center.

Please tell us about your background and how you got involved in creating this historic project.

With a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Master of Fine Arts degree and 40 years' experience in industrial design, I have successfully designed over 400 products and have been granted more than 20 patents. My career encompasses over 25 years of dedicated service as a college professor, where I have taught design and design history.

My involvement with establishing this museum is profoundly personal. As an African American inventor, I have firsthand experience with the biases that have historically affected us.

This connection fuels my commitment to creating the country's first museum dedicated to their achievements. We are on track to realize this vision within the next two years, and I invite your readers to join me on this important journey.

How did you locate the property in West Orange for the museum?

A year ago, one of my executive board members identified a vacant property that piqued my interest. At that time, we were under contract for a building in Newark; however, the West Orange (New Jersey) location presented several advantages, including cost effectiveness, ample parking and a supportive demographic. (*Editor's note:* The current address on the website, in Wharton, New Jersey, is for mailing purposes until the museum opens.)

BRANDU DESIGN/ART ARCHITECTS; PHOTOS COURTESY OF JAMES HOWARD

In which fields are most of your patents?

Many of them pertain to the medical field. Among my most valued patents is a single-use, disposable, pressure relief valve designed specifically for the resuscitation of infants at birth.

Your many traveling exhibits—such as those recently at Princeton, Hackettstown and the USPTO in Alexandria, Virginia—have been well received. Will any of these be permanent exhibits at the new museum?

The Three Eras of African American Invention Journey Experience has now successfully entered its second year of operation. This comprehensive exhibit features three distinct displays, along with an interactive kiosk and has primarily traveled throughout the eastern United States. Currently, it is showcased at the Burlington County Public Library (in New Jersey).

The exhibit highlights the contributions of nearly 70 African American inventors over 400 years, divided into three significant eras: the Era of Early Innovation (1700 to 1840), the Golden Era of Innovation (1840 to 1940) and the Modern Era of Innovation (1940s to the present). The exhibit will continue to travel across the nation, making stops at various venues—including schools, libraries and community centers.

What is the Bronx College Entrepreneurship Workshop, held at the Roscoe Brown Community Center at the Bronx Community College?

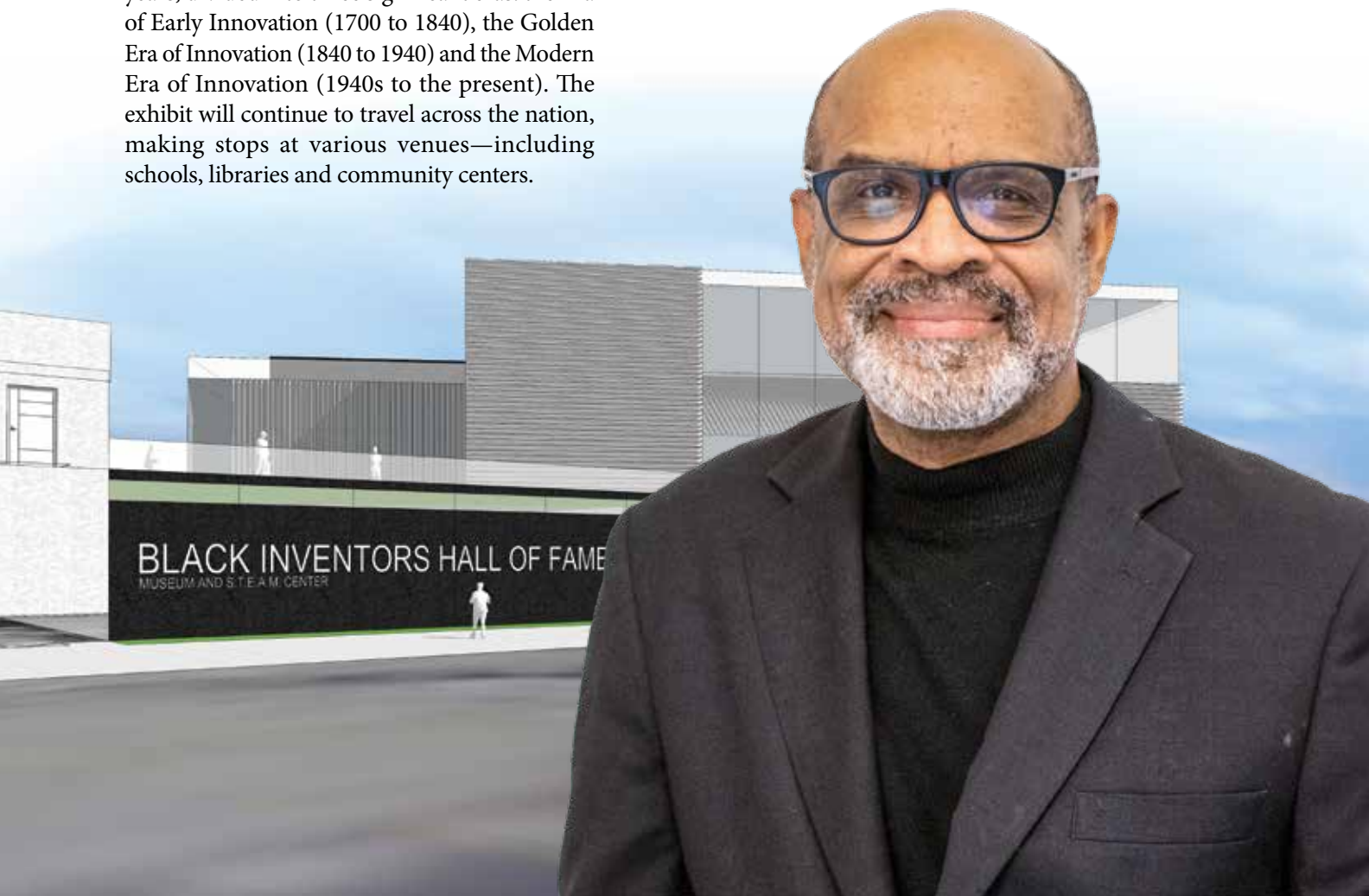
The workshop allows students and community residents to learn entrepreneurial skills. It serves as a repository of information for learning to start businesses.

I had the privilege of being a keynote speaker for the day, speaking on the intersection of innovation and entrepreneurship. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and I maintain ongoing connections with several students from the audience.

I know it's difficult to narrow this down, but can you put together this top 5 list: Black inventors (present or past) whose inventions have most affected the world?

Five individuals stand out due to their substantial impact on various industries:

Black Inventors Hall of Fame Director James Howard has a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Master of Fine Arts degree; 40 years' experience in industrial design; more than 25 years as a college professor; and more than 20 patents.



Granville T. Woods. His groundbreaking work in telecommunications, particularly the patented telephony device that he sold to Alexander Graham Bell. Woods' induction telegraph helped transform the railroad industry by enabling crucial communication between engineers operating fast-moving trains, significantly enhancing safety on the railroads.

Elijah J. McCoy. Known for his automatic lubricating device, McCoy's invention revolutionized the railroad industry by allowing trains to stay in motion and reducing wear on machinery.

Frederick McKinley Jones. He exemplifies the successful transition from invention to industry with his invention of ThermoKing refrigerated trucks—which enabled the efficient transportation of food items across the country, thereby playing a pivotal role in the rise of the supermarket industry.

Alexander Miles. An innovator in safety, Miles invented the world's first automatic elevator door and shaft closure system, which significantly enhanced the safety of elevator operations worldwide.

Dr. Charles Drew. His pioneering work in developing the blood bank system has had a lasting impact on health care, saving countless lives through improved blood storage and transfusion methods.

As a notable mention, Onesimus, an early 18th-century enslaved man, played a crucial role in combating smallpox in Boston by introducing an inoculation method in 1721 that closely aligns with the foundational principles of modern vaccines. I regard him as the “father of vaccines,” as his contributions laid the groundwork for advancements in immunology.

What programs are you creating to encourage STEAM for younger generations?

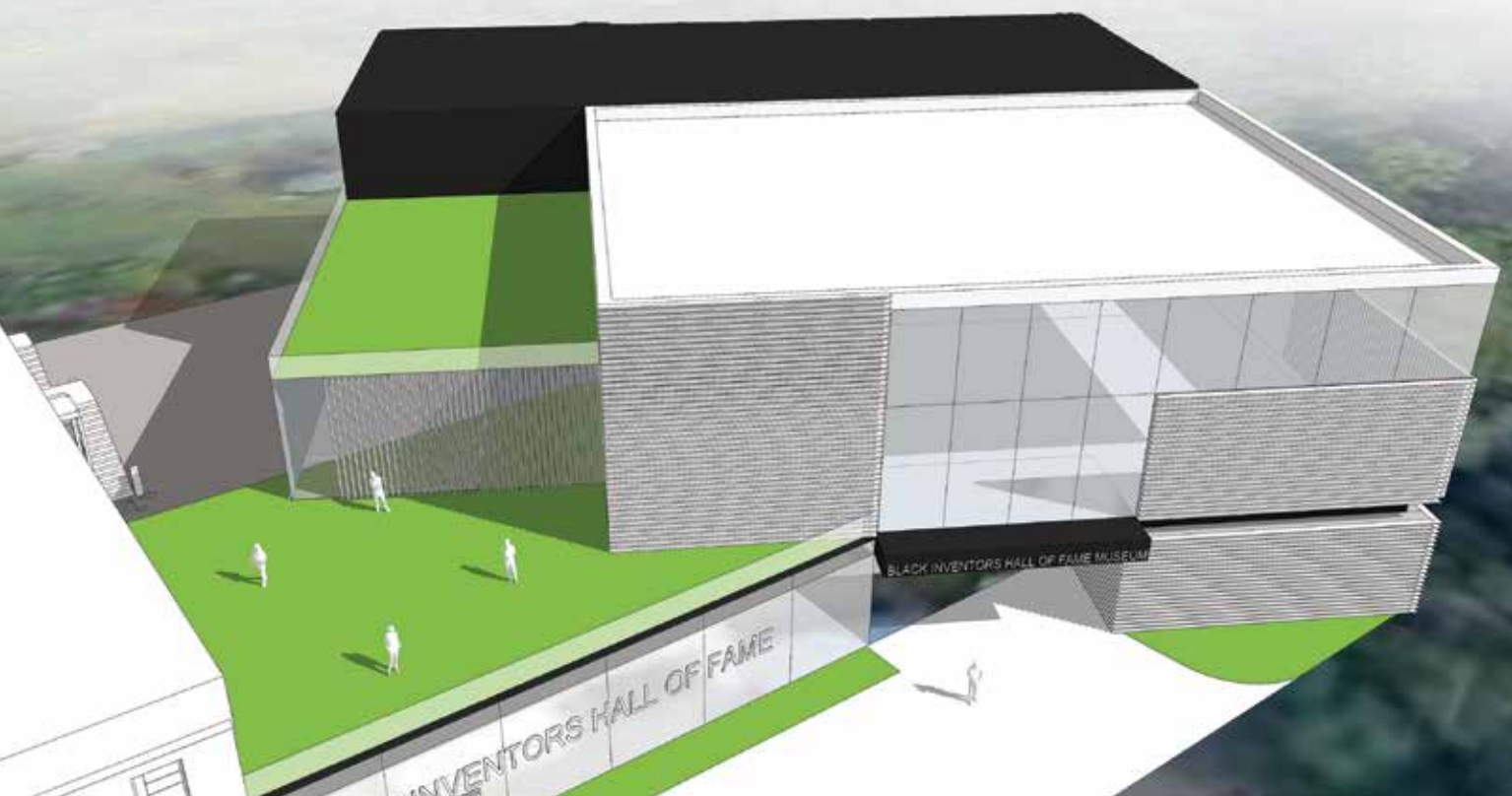
I am pleased to share some exciting updates regarding our museum and initiatives aimed at inspiring the next generation of innovators.

My team and I are in the process of developing an interactive, self-learning tool designed to empower youth in the creative process. This innovative app only guides students through a comprehensive seven-step journey of design and invention. Black and Hispanic influential inventors' contributions are also highlighted. As we continue to refine this app, I am actively seeking financial support to ensure its successful completion.

In addition, I am delighted to announce the planning of a state-of-the-art STEM Research and Development Center within our museum. Located atop the new building annex, this center will encompass over 20,000 square feet, creating a robust platform for research and innovation in the STEM fields.

The museum is envisioned to be a 110,000-square-foot facility with state-of-the-art, tuition-free STEAM classrooms, theater, Metaverse library, startup incubator, and a Legends Hall.

Opposite page: James Howard stands in front of the Three Eras of African American Inventor Experience Journey exhibit at the Burlington County Library in Westampton, New Jersey.



Please share a bit about your leadership team and board of directors.

Our board of directors is composed of exceptional leaders across various industries, including library science, agricultural studies, insurance and education. Similarly, our museum planning board features distinguished members such as Pat Sluby, the longest-tenured African American patent examiner; George Smith, a founding member of the National Society of Black Engineers; and Al Valentine, a pioneer in digital camera technology. Their combined expertise profoundly influences our planning and development efforts, providing strong leadership for our project.

When will the physical museum open, and what is its physical address?

The museum, scheduled to open in late 2027, is located at 481 Eagle Rock Ave, West Orange, New Jersey, the site of the former Mayfair Farms banquet hall. We plan to restore the Mayfair while constructing a connecting five-story annex to house the majority of our collections.

Our facility will also feature a 250-seat auditorium theater, a banquet room, a community room and a film studio.

How can readers get involved, get more information on your crowdfunding campaign, or donate?

For up-to-date information on the museum's progress, we invite visitors to explore our website at bihof.org. There, you will also find opportunities to contribute to our building campaign.

Additionally, we are beginning the staffing process for the museum. If you have a background in museum work or volunteerism, please feel free to reach out to me directly at jhoward@bihof.org.

Thank you for your continued support and enthusiasm as we embark on this meaningful journey. 🙏

“As an African American inventor, I have firsthand experience with the biases that have historically affected us. This connection fuels my commitment to creating the country’s first museum dedicated to their achievements.”



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I'M ALL YOURS!
POPEYE ANCHORS 2025 PUBLIC DOMAIN OPTIONS

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ANTICIPATION**

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BUILDING THE BLACK
HALL AND MUSEUM



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