

INSPIRING MINDS

New, permanent exhibition explores African American contributions to the STEM fields

Sometimes, a spark of inspiration comes from the unlikeliest of places – even, as 8-year old James Edward West learned, from 120 volts of electricity. Known in his family for dismantling things to learn how they worked, James received quite a jolt when he tried to plug the cord of a radio he had repaired into an electrical socket. Consequently, his fearless curiosity became a fascination with electricity. James went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree from Temple University while interning at Bell Labs. He spent the next 40 years developing technologies such as the foil electret microphone, the principles of which are used in 90% of today's telephones and recording devices. West's legacy includes more than 140 patents, and the Corporate Research Fellowship Program he founded that has helped women and minorities obtain more than 500 Ph.D. degrees.

James West's *shocking* experience illustrates an important point – a pivotal event in the life of a child can inspire a lifetime of curiosity and invention, and result in amazing advances for humankind. The desire to create that pivotal moment for thousands of children in the years to come led the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History to unveil its newest permanent exhibit, *Inspiring Minds: African Americans in Science and Technology*, in November 2012. Highlighting trailblazers, contemporaries, and careers in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, it is the Museum's largest long-term installation since the opening of its core exhibit, *And Still We Rise*, in 2005.

Designed for K – 8th grade students and the general public, *Inspiring Minds* details the achievements of over 500 African American scientists and technologists through interactive computer kiosks, a touch screen video wall, and hands-on activities and play areas. Included are vignettes on African American women in science, black aviators, black inventors, medical ethics, and key historical figures such as George Washington Carver.

"*Inspiring Minds* fulfills the wishes of the Museum's founder, Dr. Charles H. Wright, himself a man of science," says Robert L. Smith, the Museum's vice president of Education and Exhibitions. "Dr. Wright wanted children to know the contributions of African American scientists and inventors. He believed this knowledge would inspire them to see greater possibilities for themselves. *Inspiring Minds* promises to have a direct and meaningful impact on children who visit, increasing their appreciation and learning of the STEM fields and the individuals of color behind great inventions and discoveries."



The mission of this multi-year project is to inspire young people to pursue careers in the STEM fields using the personal stories of historical and contemporary scientists and inventors who have made important contributions to the world. The exhibit will feature educational programs including daily tours, weekend workshops with scientists, and a national robotics competition.

An opening reception and panel discussion took place Friday, November 9, 2012, with remarks by Yvonne Rodgers of The Renaissance (MI) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated - which provided significant funding for *Inspiring Minds* - as well as members of the educational and scientific communities who contributed to, or were included in, the exhibition.

Every child should be inspired to see greater possibilities for themselves, and for their contributions to the world. There's a safer way to do this than with 120 volts of electricity. It's by creating engaging experiences that place African American contributions to the STEM fields within the broader context of American history. The Wright Museum has done just that through *Inspiring Minds*.



Andrew Humphrey, meteorologist and WDIV-TV reporter, and young scientists at the *Inspiring Minds* opening reception