



A Tribute To The People Who Invent Things That Make Life Better

By Doug Bandow

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Hans Riegel recently died at age 90. He changed the world for the better. He brought us gummy bears, giving pleasure to millions of people.

Politicians routinely crusade against wealth and inequality, but much of that occurs naturally when people create products and offer services benefiting the rest of us.

Today people live on their cell phones. Once we didn't even have telephones. Thank Alexander Graham Bell, born in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The internal combustion engine-powered auto came from Karl Benz. He was a design engineer who in 1886 won a patent for a "motor car."

In 1903, Clarence Crane created a hard fruit candy, which he called Life Savers because they looked like ship life preservers.

Helen Greiner came up with the Roomba vacuum cleaner robot in 2002. A fan of Star Wars' R2D2, she formed a company, iRobot, with two fellow MIT graduates.

John Mauchly and John Eckert created the first computer in 1946, the Electronic Integrator and Computer (ENIAC).

Thomas Edison gave us light bulbs in 1879. Joseph Swan might have beaten Edison, but Edison bought his patent.

The 3D printer was created in 1983 by Chuck Hall. His first creation: a tea cup.

General Electric engineer James Wright attempted to make artificial rubber during World War II. He failed, but ad man Peter Hodgson later discovered the malleable material and began selling Silly Putty.

In 1836, Hiram Moore created a combine harvester, which cut the cost of harvesting by four-fifths.

Credit for television goes to Russian emigre Vladimir Zworykin. In 1920 he joined Westinghouse Electric Corp., where he developed an iconoscope, or television transmission tube, and kinescope, or television receiver.

Scottish Charles Macintosh created the waterproof Mackintosh raincoat. The store-clerk-turned-chemist in 1823 found how to make waterproof fabric with rubber.

Infections once were common killers. But in 1928 another Scot, Alexander Fleming, discovered penicillin.

Edward Binney and Harold Smith in 1903 combined industrial pigments with paraffin wax. By 1996 100 billion crayons had been produced.

It took three decades for Frederick McKinley Jones to produce portable air-conditioning for trucks. Jones became the first African-American elected to the American Society of Refrigeration Engineers.

John Pemberton, an Atlanta pharmacist, developed the original formula for Coca-Cola in 1885, in response to a ban on the sale of his wine-coca "patent medicine."

Canadian-born James Naismith studied theology and worked at a Massachusetts YMCA. In 1891 he developed basketball as a sport to be played indoors in the winter.

In 1884 Lewis Waterman developed the fountain pen. He took 10 years to perfect his invention.

Arthur Fry of 3M gave the world the "Post-It Note" in 1974. A member of his church choir, he wanted a bookmark that would cling to hymnal pages.

Ruth Wakefield came up with the chocolate chip cookie in 1930. Regionally famous for her cooking, she ran out of baker's chocolate while making cookies and substituted chunks of semi-sweet chocolate. Nestle then created chocolate chips, with Wakefield's recipe printed on the package.

In 1964, while seeking a new synthetic fiber, Stephanie Kwolek came up with the well-nigh indestructible Kevlar — commonly part of bulletproof vests.

John Harvey Kellogg gave us cornflakes in 1894. The vegetarian headed a Michigan sanitarium. Faced with wheat gone stale, he processed it into flakes.

Of course, these are just a few of the inventions which surround and enrich us. Human creativity and ingenuity — punctuated with a mix of luck and hard work — constantly transform our lives, leaving us far better off.

Some inventors just love to create. Others hope for money, glory, or something else. Whatever their motives, the rest of us gain. Like being able to enjoy gummy bears.

Hans Riegel, RIP!