National Inventors Hall of Fame: Honoring Past Inventors and Inspiring Future Ones

Most of us are familiar with halls of fame, such as the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, and the like. Inventors have a hall of fame, too—the National Inventors Hall of Fame. It was started in 1973 by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and the National Council of Patent Law Associations. Those inducted into the hall include inventors you would expect, like Thomas Edison (who was the first inductee), Alexander Graham Bell, the Wright Brothers, Nikola Tesla, Samuel Morse, Guglielmo Marconi, Luther Burbank, Cyrus McCormick, and Enrico Fermi. At this point, there are 547 inductees.

The National Inventors Hall of Fame Museum, located at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office in Alexandria, Virginia, includes unique exhibits and inspirational stories about the inductees. The museum has interactive kiosks and exhibits on previous inductees and their technological achievements. Information about the museum is available in [1].

Examples of earlier inductees in the fields of electronics and power electronics include

- Alfred Y. Cho (molecular beam epitaxy, U.S. Patent 3830654)
- Bernard Oliver and Claude Shannon (pulse-code modulation, U.S. Patent 2801281)
- Jack S. Kilby (monolithic integrated circuit, U.S. Patent 3138743)
- Calvin Fuller (silicon solar cell, U.S. Patent 2780765)
- Frank Wanlass (complementary-metal–oxide semiconductor, U.S. Patent 3356858)
- Martin (John) M. Atalla (MOSFET, U.S. Patent 3206670)
- Bantval Jayant Baliga (insulated gate bipolar transistor, U.S. Patents 4969028 and 5998833)

The hall inducts a class of new inventors each year in a ceremony in Washington, D.C. Howard S. Jones, Jr. (conformal antennas, U.S. Patent 4010470) and Arogyaswami Paulraj (multiple-input, multiple-output wireless technology, U.S. Patent 5345599) are being inducted in 2018, along with inventors in such fields as cryptography (the inventors of the RSA algorithm); dental materials; emulsified zero-valent iron, which helps neutralize pollutants; organic light-emitting diodes; and spandex fibers. Sports fans appreciate the invention of Stan Honey, who is being inducted this year for the technology showing the yellow line for first-down markers in television broadcasts of football games (sports broadcast graphic enhancements, U.S. Patent 6141060).

Inventors can be nominated by anyone for consideration. The hall relies on a panel of experts in science, technology, engineering, and patents to screen, vet, and make final selections from among those nominated. Nominations are evaluated based on four criteria. First, nominees must hold a U.S. patent for an invention that has enriched society. Second, the invention should have contributed significantly to industry, advancing and improving it. Third, the lives of nominees ought to be characterized by inspiring stories of determination, overcoming challenges, and beating the odds. Fourth, nominees should be leaders in their fields who understand the importance of developing the next generation of American innovators. See [2] for more information on submitting a nomination.

In addition to honoring and recognizing past inventors, the hall seeks to inspire future inventors by promoting a culture of innovation among young...
people. It has educational programs designed to impact young minds through fun, hands-on activities infused with the spirit of innovation. These efforts are led by local, certified educators at 1,400 schools and districts nationwide. The programs promote science, technology, engineering, and math concepts; information about intellectual property; critical thinking; and creative problem solving. These educational projects serve over 130,000 participants and are grouped into age-appropriate activities from preschool through college. More information about programs for younger people is available in [3]. Information about the Collegiate Inventors Competition is available in [4].

If you know of a potential inductee, consider making a nomination. You may want to spread the word in your community about the hall’s opportunities for young people. Or, if your local schools do not participate in any of the hall’s programs for young people, you may want to introduce your local educators to them.

About the Author
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References