

## BUSINESS

# Tech pioneers raising their community profile

By John William Templeton  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

He had just closed a \$20 million deal for his billion-dollar company, but Mike Beasley thinks the most interesting person he talked to all year is a homeless man in a garden outside the California African-American Museum.

"I saw a television segment that the homeless most hate the fact that people ignore them, so I've made a point to always make eye contact since then," says Beasley, just hours away from being cited by White House public liaison Jena Roscoe as the "most important African-American in technology."

"Once we made eye contact, we began a discussion that was so profound that we talked for more than a half-hour," recalls the CEO of Icing Software.

"It just made the point to me that you can't judge people's intelligence based on external factors."

That was a major theme during a Los Angeles celebration at the museum of the 50 Most Important African-Americans in Technology (see <http://www.Blackmoney.com> for listing).

Beasley won the Pinnacle Award not only for Icing's \$850 million in sales, but also for his service as chairman of MESA, a University of California program that mentors 25,000 California students from underrepresented groups in science and engineering. Lori Perine, White House associate to the deputy director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, noted that MESA will receive a presidential award for its work in December.

Prior to an awards dinner, participants crafted a set of priorities for African-Americans in the digital age — including the creation of entrepreneurial magnets and incubators in Black neighborhoods, in inner cities and rural areas, particularly connected with historically Black colleges and universities; the creation of a national digital educational network that provides curriculum and information to schools serving Black students and a concept for a national youth organization to inspire Black youth into technology excellence.

An overall goal is to increase the approximately 500,000 Blacks working in information technology jobs to more than 1 million.

Ron L. Jones, winner of an innovation prize, noted he grew up three blocks from the museum and was inspired to be an inventor by the science museums in Exposition Park. Jones' SongPro has created a plug-in that changes Nintendo GameBoy into a digital music player.

It is the latest of his 100 inventions including large-format color printing from personal computers.

Wesley Buford, CEO of Freedom Card USA, was recognized for special efforts to make African-American households able to operate in an e-commerce environment through not only offering credit cards, but also marketing user-friendly products like a set-top box that hooks to an existing television set and a branded line of fully-functional computers.

Roscoe noted that many policy makers do not realize the extent of the significant technical contributions that African-Americans have made and the number of jobs already filled by Blacks through their own initiative. She promised to help raise their profile.

Tim Lester, executive director of the

Greater Los Angeles African-American Chamber of Commerce, noted Jones and the other selectees as an example of the kind of talent throughout Black communities.

A number of participants came direct from the Comdex trade show in Las Vegas, where they had unveiled new software or hardware products.

The irony is that many are well recognized within technical circles, but almost unknown to the Black community.

However, all agreed that greater exposure is a benefit not only to the next generation, but themselves.

More than a dozen head publicly traded companies where their tenure is a function of investor interest and satisfaction. With more than \$36 billion in available capital among Black households, these technology companies offer the opportunity to increase that money from income to wealth.

There was an understanding that the better their ventures perform, the more they will be able to reach out as Beasley does.

John William Templeton is executive editor of Blackmoney.com.

## Let's substitute holidays for holy days

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

This year, as in years gone by, we will see Black people run to the malls and department stores to spend a large part of our half trillion dollars on gifts and other items in the name of Christmas. Prior to that, we will witness our people rushing to those same outlets on the day after Thanksgiving to do the same thing. And then next Easter we will once again spend millions on clothing, eggs, and chocolate.

All of this will be done in the name of holidays.

While everyone seems to get into the act of buying during the holidays, my concern is of course centered on the purchasing habits of Black people. Why? Because we are the primary targets of the marketing campaigns and spend more of our disposable income during these "holidays" than other consumer groups in this country. In addition, I am concerned because we can least afford to keep spending our money the way we do.

More importantly, Black people, as religious as we claim to be, have allowed our Holy Days to be turned into holidays by greedy retailers.

We sit back each year and allow them to ratchet-up their sales campaigns, extend their hours of operation, and even play on our sympathy when they do not meet their sales forecasts during Christmas.

And, boy, do we more than make up for it during those

after-Christmas sales.

I wonder what would happen if the merchants would do the same kinds of sales campaigns during Ramadan or Hanukkah. Do you think they would get away with it? I don't. Outrage by Islamic and Jewish groups would be the order of the day.

The merchants would undoubtedly be severely punished by these groups as they withhold their dollars from the offending stores thereafter.

As Black people look for ways to make an impact, to gain economic reciprocity, to increase our leverage, and to level the playing field, the answers are right in front of us.

All we have to do is refrain from our conspicuous consumption during the holiday season.

If we must spend money during that time, why not set up our own bazaars in which Black vendors and other Black business owners can sell their wares and services?

That way we would be killing two birds with one stone: Bringing back the respect we have lost for our Holy Days; and redirecting a portion of our tremendous spending toward one another.

Now that's the very kind of action that would warrant a brand new holiday.

It would surely be worth celebrating the day that Black people finally decided to make a drastic change in our economic destiny. What better time than this Christmas?

We could end the year on a high note and begin the next year on an even higher note by rallying our consumers and by using our dollars as the economic weapons they are. Talk about Ujamaa — it would be a fantastic celebration!

Let's face it. The only way for Black people to make a real move toward economic power in this country is to withhold our dollars from others and direct them toward our own economic efforts, such as business development and business support.

We cannot afford to continue being the victims of economic exploitation; we cannot allow our children's future to be mortgaged; and we must not get mired in credit card debt, especially if we want to move beyond our current status as the biggest and most generous consumer segment in the world.

In Cincinnati, (or Cincinnati, as I call it) where I live, our group, the Black United Front, has called for economic sanctions against the downtown businesses. We have a Black-owned shopping center and we are asking our people to shop there.

We are also seeking vendors and other businesses to bring their sales items to the mall and sell them there. I would love to see Black people give 100 percent support to this effort, like the brothers and sisters did in South Africa prior to the fall of apartheid, but I kind of doubt it.

Here in Cincinnati, one of the largest plantations in the country, many of our people are content with their positions and their status, and they are afraid that if they make waves they will not get that extra ration of biscuits from the massa.

But, that's all right. If we get 50 percent participation, I will be happy.

We must put an end to the exploitation our people and our Holy Days. Get a movement started in your city and help change the economic situation in which we find ourselves.

This Christmas, please make it a point to change your purchasing habits. You owe it to yourselves. You owe it to your children. Please don't end up owing it to the merchants. Let's return to our Holy Days. Enough with these "holidays."

## American Express CEO resigning early

NEW YORK (AP) — American Express recently announced that Harvey Golub will step down as chief executive officer at the end of the year, about four months ahead of schedule, to make way for his successor, Ken Chenault.

The charge card and financial services company also said that Golub will remain chairman until the company's annual meeting in April, when he will relinquish that position and retire from the board of directors.

Golub, 61, had set plans for succession in motion in April 1999 and had said at the time that Chenault would replace him in April 2001. Chenault, who is 49, will be one of very few black executives in the country.

"The CEO succession process from me to Ken has gone smoothly, and we have been able to move even more quickly than I anticipated," Golub wrote in a letter to American Express employees, which was made public.

He added: "In addition to my conviction about Ken, I'm also convinced that the company is in terrific shape: robust growth engines have been built; our brand and our reputation are stellar; our people and intellectual capital are outstanding; and our customer base is large and loyal. Accordingly, I have that there is no need to wait on my retirement until next April, as I originally planned."

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