



Esther Takeuchi will be inducted May 4.

UB professor to enter Inventors Hall of Fame

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The National Inventors Hall of Fame recognizes the most prominent innovators in U. S. history:

Wilbur and Orville Wright.

Henry Ford. Thomas Alva Edison. And now, Esther Takeuchi.

The University at Buffalo professor, whose pioneering work with battery technology has earned her more patents than any other woman in the United States, will be one of the inductees in the Hall of Fame's Class of 2011.

A ceremony will be held May 4 in Washington, D. C., for Takeuchi and eight other honorees, who include Steve Sasson, the Kodak engineer who invented the first digital camera.

"The number of people in the Inventors Hall of Fame is so small, it certainly is an elite group of folks," Takeuchi said Thursday. "It's a tremendous honor to be counted among the inventors who have changed the way we live."

Based in Alexandria, Va., the National Inventors Hall of Fame was founded in 1973 by the U. S. Patent and Trademark Office and a group of intellectual property lawyers.

Athletes and entertainers get their due. Why not inventors?

"What we're really doing is giving recognition to the people who have truly had an impact on our lives," said Rini Paiva, a spokeswoman for the Hall of Fame.

Some of the Hall of Fame's 460 inductees are not as familiar as their contributions.

Jane Cochran invented the first practical dishwasher, Otto Wichterle invented the soft contact lens and Art Fry and Spencer Silver invented Post-it Notes.

The selection process is lengthy, with scrutiny by a panel of experts, Paiva said.

Takeuchi has an impressive body of work involving battery

technology and energy storage.

Takeuchi, nominated by the American Chemical Society, is also one of only 19 women to be inducted into the Inventors Hall of Fame, Paiva said.

Takeuchi, 57, invented the silver vanadium oxide battery, which powers many of the world's implanted medical devices — a life's work that began more than a quarter-century ago at Greatbatch Inc.

The daughter of Latvian immigrants, Takeuchi grew up in Akron, Ohio, where she followed her father around the house watching him fix things.

“It wasn’t so much that one day I was going to be an inventor. I didn’t set out with that in mind,” Takeuchi said. “I think it was No. 1, kind of a natural curiosity, and No. 2, the belief that it’s possible to make things better by looking at things in a different way.”

Interested in chemistry, Takeuchi went to the University of Pennsylvania and then graduate school at Ohio State University, unimintimidated by the fact that she was entering a male-dominated science.

She met her husband, Kenneth Takeuchi, while in graduate school and then moved to Buffalo, where he took a job as a chemistry professor at UB.

She landed at Greatbatch, where she developed a new battery that was stronger than the typical pacemaker battery and able to power implantable cardiac defibrillators, which jolt the heart so that it doesn’t stop beating, in a fatal cardiac arrest.

Takeuchi, a UB professor since 2007, has been refining the batteries over the years, accumulating 148 patents.

In 2009, Takeuchi visited the White House, where she received the nation’s top award for technological achievement from President Obama.

“People hear batteries, and they think, ‘Oh, God, that’s old stuff,’ ” Takeuchi said. “But there’s so much happening, and the potential applications are expanding like crazy. It’s limitless.”

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Comments

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