

## Inventor Creates Mechanical Hair Braider

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**NEW INVENTION**—Inventor Paul Shipman says he has developed a mechanical hair braider which reduces the time and effort it takes to braid a head of hair. Here he displays his device next to hairstylist Andrea Hill, who had some of her braids done by Shipman with his braider. Shipman wants to get the device mass produced, believing it will revolutionize the hair-braiding field.—GEORGE TAYLOR PHOTO

By NICK BROWN  
Sentinel Staff Writer

Inventors are always trying to invent a "better mousetrap." It is a well-known fact — although historically Black inventors have not been given the recognition they so rightfully deserve for making their mark on mankind.

Paul Shipman, a 58-year-old retired L.A. County employee, has yet to receive any recognition for his invention, but is confident that once the word gets out about it, it will prove to be a revolutionary idea indeed, he said.

Shipman has invented a mechanical hair braider, which not only braids hair as well as your beautician (and in different sizes), but also gets the job done with a lot less effort and only a fraction of the time it takes to braid hair by hand.

"Right now it takes six, eight, or maybe even 10 hours to braid someone's hair and can cost as much as \$70, \$85, \$100 or more, but with my me-

chanical braider I can do the job in two hours or less," said Shipman who developed the device in response to his young daughter's inquiry about braids.

"When she was five years old she asked if she could have braids and made me start noticing women with their hair braided. I started asking them questions and they told me how it took some many hours to do and cost upwards to \$200."

That made Shipman put his thinking on and he wondered how he could speed the job up and make it cost less, he said. "About three years ago I started working on it. At first I came up with a bulky, heavy device. Then I kept refining it and refining it until I came up with my final product."

That final product is a canister, about 8 inches tall, with a handle to grip it and a lever that is pulled back and fourth to twist the hair into braids. Into the top of the canister is a slot in which three tubes are positioned after three sections of hair are parted (just as the braider does to make each braid) then each section is inserted into a tube.

After insertion into the canister, the lever is pulled back and forth and the device is pulled down the length of the hair as the braid is completed. You see how efficient it is and makes a neat, uni-

form group of braids," said Shipman, during a demonstration of several braids with the mechanical braider.

Having applied a patent on his device, Shipman is now attempting to interest some firm in mass producing it.

Originally from Tampa, Fla., Shipman has been an L.A. resident for 25 years. Before retiring from the L.A. County job where he worked as a stationary engineer, Shipman won three awards on the

job for making improvements on mechanical devices.

He has also invented a "crash-proof" door lock that he sold to a lock manufacturing firm, a "collapsible" coffee pot, for which he has a patent, but has not sold the idea. "I guess you could say I am mechanical-minded."

Shipman said he has not attempted to braid an entire head of hair with the mechanical braider, but claims it will not cause hair damage.

Of his mechanical braider, he says "I am confident it would catch on. Those who braid hair would have time to braid more hair. They would therefore get more customers and be able to charge less, allowing more people to afford it."

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