

It's brain boggling when Modestan recalls inventive life

By JEFF JARDINE BEE LOCAL COLUMNIST

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A half-hour conversation with Tom Wing can be mind-numbing. At 91, the former Modestan still possesses the mind of an inventor, always looking for ideas that could lead to his next great invention. Wing can talk — rapid fire and in great technical detail — about each of his inventions. Each has its own story, and he leaves you wishing you'd studied harder in science classes just so you could be part of the conversation.

Many of his gadgets are on display at the McHenry Museum, and Wing will be there Saturday to explain them to anyone with an inquiring mind. The session, which begins at 2 p.m., will include a book signing by Wing and his author-daughter, Carolyn Wing Greenlee, who penned "Eternal River." It's the sequel to her first book, "Son of South Mountain & Dust," both depicting Tom Wing's life.



Tom Wing stands by some of his inventions that are on display at the McHenry Museum. In the foreground are a radio paging device and a chair lift he designed for his wife, who died in 2004.
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He'll tell you about the dozens of machines he's created over the years, including a piece of physical therapy equipment used by Olympic track star Carl Lewis, basketball great Magic Johnson and scores of other professional athletes. He's donating one "minimal energy mechanical stimulator," as he calls it, to the athletic programs at Modesto Junior College and Modesto High School. Using microcurrent technology, his machine "is able to change a sick cell into a well cell," Wing said. "It sends a new signal telling it to get well." All of that expedites the healing process in soft tissues, Wing said.

He'll tell you about his exploits in shortwave radio, and how he developed the first pager system Motorola later parlayed into an industry of its own.

He'll explain how he invented a form of acupuncture that uses electric pulses instead of breaking the skin.

He'll describe how he created an emergency radio control station, donating to the American Red Cross a network that spanned from the Mexican border to north of Santa Barbara.

He'll show you his "computer aided cosmetology instrument" — also known as the CACI — which is a nonsurgical face-lift machine once used by Princess Diana. Available in many other countries, it was banned in the United States.

"The medical profession wants a monopoly on everything," Wing said. "They got the government to say it's not proven safe or effective." So he sold it to companies in countries such as England, New Zealand and Oman.

The son of a Chinese herbalist, Wing was born in Lodi in 1915, living briefly in Stockton before moving to Modesto as an 11-year-old. The family lived in a small house at the corner of Eighth and G streets, and Wing quickly found himself immersed in anything electronic. He attended Modesto High School, and Modesto Junior College, where he became involved in the school's radio club, and built his own ham radio transmitter.

Fifty years later, members of an amateur radio club in Turlock came across the machine at a swap meet, and it's on display at the museum. Wing became a chiropractor, using Chinese herbal medicine in his practice as well. But he never lost his interest in inventing, and his most recent creation became a labor of love for his ailing wife, Kay, who suffered from Lou Gehrig's disease. He designed a mobile vertical lift chair that made it easier to move her as her body wore down. After all, they had spent decades working as a team — Wing producing the concepts, Kay getting them to the production lines.

"I had the dream, she made it the reality," Wing said of his wife, who died in 2004. "Everyone dreams, but how many get it to reality? And how many can come home again to put their life's works on display in a museum?"

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