



2024 NATIONAL INVENTORS  
HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

**Born:** Dec. 13, 1955

**Primary Connections:**

- The Walt Disney Company: Disney Research Fellow; Senior Research Scientist; Head of Imagineering Research and Development; 1998-present
- Bell Labs: Executive Director, Information Networking Applications Research Department; Executive Director, Collaboratory on Information Infrastructure; Bellcore Fellow; 1978-98

**Education:**

- Columbia University: B.S., Electrical Engineering, 1978; M.S., Electrical Engineering

**Key Memberships/Awards:**

- Themed Entertainment Association: Master, 2020
- New Jersey Inventors Hall of Fame: Inventor of the Year, 1996
- Lewis Latimer Science Award, Oct. 18, 1996, from Metuchen-Edison Area NAACP
- 1995 Thomas Alva Edison Patent Award for “The Electronic Panning Camera” from the Research and Development Council of New Jersey
- R&D 100 Award for the “Electronic Panning Camera Research Prototype” from R&D Magazine, 1993
- US Black Engineer Magazine: Most Promising Engineer Award, 1987
- Popular Science, “The Best of What’s New” Award for “The VideoWindow Teleconferencing System” and for “The Electronic Panning Camera”

## 10 Things You Need to Know About

# Lanny Smoot

## Theatrical Technologies and Special Effects

U.S. PATENT NO. 7,273,280

1. Smoot was born in 1955 in New York City.
2. As a child, his STEM role models were from “Star Trek” (Uhura), and “Mission: Impossible” (Barney).
3. An early childhood memory: His father brought home a battery, an electric bell and a light bulb, and he wired them together so that the bell would ring, and the bulb would light. From then on, Smoot learned all he could about science and engineering.
4. He attended Brooklyn Technical High School and was named a Bell Labs Engineering Scholar, earning a full scholarship to Columbia University, summer work at Bell Labs and a guarantee of full-time work with the company after graduation.
5. At Bellcore, Smoot patented some of the very first fiber-optic technologies to be widely used in the Bell Telephone network, as well as developing and patenting early video streaming and teleconferencing systems. His Large-Screen Teleconferencing system was featured in the Smithsonian Institution’s “Information Age” exhibit, and his Bellcore VideoWindow system was demonstrated to Al Gore and Tom Tauke’s “Information Age” Congressional Subcommittee.
6. With 106 career patents so far, Smoot is Disney’s most prolific inventor. He has developed forward-thinking technologies that allow the company, and the theatrical community at large, to create cutting-edge experiences, illusions and entertainment.
7. He and his team patented an improved, realistic, extendable and retractable lightsaber that mimics movie special effects and another that enables theme park guests to battle a training droid and deflect laser blasts just as in the “Star Wars” movies. He also holds patents on large-scale interactive games, robotic eyes, new concepts for ride vehicles, creating free floating images, 3D without glasses and many more.
8. Since 2008, Smoot has been recognized four times by the Themed Entertainment Association, including three Thea Awards and being named a TEA Master in 2020.
9. Smoot has said: “I love technology in and of itself and being an individual contributor, but early on, I realized that each person has a special talent, sometimes multiple talents, but to be successful one needs to partner with other people who are good at what they do.”
10. Smoot has been featured in the “Breaking Barriers” exhibit at the National Inventors Hall of Fame® Museum.