

Black entrepreneurs face more challenges

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After 17 years of fits and starts, LeNardo Nelson Sr. of Chicago is ready to take his triple-sided windshield wiper to market.

A commercial lender at Harris Bank by day, Nelson has long dreamed of being an inventor like his father, who devised a sled with convertible wheels in the mid-1960s. But getting his wipers off the ground has taken far longer than Nelson imagined.

"I know I need finance and a mentor I can trust to move the business forward," said Nelson, who sold 20,000 of the patented wipers through infomercials in 2001, before the economy faltered following the Sept. 11 attacks and squashed sales.

The \$20 TriTrak wipers have a three-sided blade that can be switched to extend the product's life threefold, Nelson said. "We call it the wiper with the built-in spare," he said.

Nelson is among more than 64,000 African-American business owners in the greater Chicago area. Yet many, like Nelson, continue to face barriers to success, despite robust interest in entrepreneurship, experts said.

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