Person of the Year
Commentary

For Person of the Year there are many candidates more worthy than dot.com tycoons.
(John Ueland)

By Dianne Lynch
Special to ABCNEWS.com

Let me get this straight: Of the 6,033,123,755 people on the planet (give or take a few thousand born as you're reading this sentence), Jeff Bezos is the most important.

Not just the most important guy. Not just the most important entrepreneur. The most important person.

At the last millennial minute, *Time* magazine's annual self-congratulatory testosterone fest has gone PC: After 72 awards, its Man of the Year is now officially its Person of the Year.

And this year, that Person is Bezos, the "king of cybercommerce."

"Welcome, Jeff Bezos, to *Time*'s Person of the Year club," the magazine gushes. "At 35 you are the fourth-youngest individual ever, preceded by 25-year-old Charles Lindbergh in 1927; Queen Elizabeth II, who made the list in 1952 at age 26, and Martin Luther King Jr., who was 34 when he was selected in 1963. A pioneer, royalty and a revolutionary — noble company for the man who is, unquestionably, king of cybercommerce."

And pretty good press for a guy whose company stands to lose $350 million this year. But if there's anything His Personhood

If there's anything His Personhood, Jeff Bezos, has accomplished, it's to banish that tired capitalist notion that financial success has anything to do with making a profit.

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How's that for a social contribution?

Real Heroines

The Personization of Jeff Bezos set me thinking about the original dreams that fueled the Net revolution, way back in, oh, 1997. About a boundaryless and billboard-free cyberspace. A place where money held less sway than ingenuity, creativity and freedom of expression.

In that spirit, Wired Women closes out the century by acknowledging the Web women who are creating communities, challenging the status quo and making the wired world a better place to live. One click at a time.

Women like Ana Sisnett, executive director of Austin Free-Net, who has helped bring Internet access into the libraries, community centers and police stations of Austin, Texas.

Or Tara Ariano, whose hissyfit.com site sets new standards for style and pizzazz, even as it challenges our assumptions about everything from holiday shopping to Greek Orthodox baptisms.

Or Evelyn Hannon, a smart, generous Canadian who at 42 marched off to see the world and came home transformed. Hannon's journeywoman.com offers traveling women advice, insight, community and the courage to go it alone.

No Whining

And finally, there's Joan Korenman, director of the Center for Woman and Information Technology and a professor of English at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. And one of the Web's real unsung heroines.

Korenman established the Center for Women and Information Tech in July 1998 to address the problem of women's underrepresentation in IT and to help support research into the relationship between IT and gender.

When I started writing Wired Women,

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W E B L I N K S

Amazon.com
Austin Free-Net
Hissyfit.com
Journeywoman.com
Center for Women and Information Technology
Internet Resources and Women

Korenman was one of the first women I called. Author of a book on women and the Web, an unparalleled expert on current and historical issues surrounding the subject, Korenman is a gold mine of information, insights and contacts.

Since then, we've exchanged e-mails; I've sought her opinion; I've asked to include her in columns.

She consistently says no.

At one point, I wanted to write about how hard it is for programs like hers to find funding — even from the gazillionaires in Silicon Valley. It would help draw attention to the center, I argued. She laughed. Whining in the media isn't the most effective way to generate support, she said.

She was, of course, correct.

Nobody, Too?

Today, the center still needs funding. But under her direction and largely as a result of her effort, it's an incubator for new ideas and new understanding. Its lecture series brought in Anita Borg to talk about women and the future of technology, and Aliza Sherman, better known as Cybergrrl. Its site remains the best resource on women and technology on the Web. And Korenman's book, *Internet Resources and Women,* is a complete primer on using technology to teach courses in women's studies.

Open Korenman's personal Web page and there's a quote from Emily Dickinson. "I'm Nobody — who are you? Are you — Nobody — too?"

You don't hear glass ceilings crashing or e-commerce sites ka-chinging when you talk to her. The investors in the Center for Women and Information Tech won't get rich on soaring stock options. But Korenman, who lives her life online at human scale, could teach Bezos — not to mention the editors of *Time* — a thing or two about being Person of the Year.

A teacher and a journalist, Dianne Lynch is the author of Virtual Ethics. Wired Women *appears on alternate Wednesdays.*

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