

A Publication of National Industries for the Blind

OPPORTUNITY

Volume 8 | Issue 3 | Summer 2015

PAGE 8

Game Changer

The Americans with Disabilities Act's Impact After 25 Years

PAGE 4

A Strong Ally

U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer

PAGE 6

Expanding Capabilities

NIB associated agencies are trusted partners in the flourishing medical field

PAGE 14

Rising Stars

National Employees of the Year

Meet Sharon Elosser, computer operator III at Industries of the Blind in Greensboro, North Carolina.

NEXT PAGE

A WORK IN PROGRESS

Stand on a busy street corner these days and chances are you won't think twice about the curb cuts, tactile paving and audible crossing signals. In the 25 years since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law, these accessibility measures have become a part of everyday life.

The ADA has fueled a remarkable transformation in the lives of people with disabilities and attitudes towards them. Accommodations like braille numbers in elevators and wheelchair seating in movie theatres are the rule, not the exception, in society today and the vast majority of Americans agree these changes are for the better.

Unfortunately, misconceptions about the capabilities of people who are blind or have disabilities still exist in today's workplace. Despite tremendous advances in assistive technology that make nearly every job accessible, 70 percent of working-age Americans who are blind are not employed.

At NIB, we work every day to build awareness of the capabilities of people who are blind because in today's technology-driven workplaces, there are few limits on what people who are blind can do. Our associated nonprofit

agencies leverage the latest in assistive and adaptive technologies to provide meaningful employment, while professional development initiatives such as NIB's Business Leaders Program provide essential business training that prepares people who are blind for success in a variety of upwardly mobile careers.

In this issue of Opportunity, we take a look at how assistive technology has evolved, and how people who are blind working at NIB associated agencies use these technologies to perform a variety of manufacturing and service jobs.

Twenty-five years ago, the ADA provided a springboard for progress, but much is still to be accomplished. As technology continues to advance, NIB will continue working to translate gains in accessibility to the workplace, so people who are blind can enjoy all of the benefits that come with meaningful employment.



Kevin A. Lynch
President and
Chief Executive Officer



OPPORTUNITY

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02 LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

A Work in Progress

13 READY TO LAUNCH

NIB associated agencies introduce and update SKILCRAFT® and other AbilityOne® products.

14 BRIGHT FUTURES

Meet the winners of NIB's 2015 national employee of the year awards.

18 NEWS & NOTES

- Major General Hawthorne Proctor honored with 2015 Irwin Award
- NIB Awards Officer's Sword at Navy Supply Corps School Graduation
- NIB to Construct New Headquarters Facility
- Get Ready for National Disability Employment Awareness Month
- Save the Date! 2015 National Conference and Expo

08

GAME CHANGER

In the 25 years since the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law, technology has helped level the playing field. But there's still work to be done to secure equal employment opportunities for people who are blind.



04

A STRONG ALLY

For his Empire State constituents who are blind, U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer is a reliable advocate.



05

GROWING CAPABILITIES

From transcription services to medical supplies, NIB associated agencies are trusted partners in the medical field.



16

ADVOCATES TAKE THE HILL

Participants in NIB's Public Policy Forum enlisted legislators' support in creating opportunities for people who are blind.

A STRONG ALLY

For his Empire State constituents who are blind, U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer is a dependable supporter and advocate.

BY RICK WEBSTER

Born and raised in Brooklyn, Charles E. “Chuck” Schumer (D), New York’s senior U.S. Senator, still calls the borough home. After graduating from Harvard University and Harvard Law School in 1974, Schumer began a life of elected service, running for a seat in the New York State Assembly and becoming, at age 23, the youngest New York state legislator since Theodore Roosevelt. Just six years later he won the 9th Congressional District seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he represented the citizens of Brooklyn and Queens for 18 years.

Road Warrior

Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1998, Schumer continues his advocacy for New Yorkers on a range of issues, including preserving jobs for people who are blind. Despite serving on four Senate committees and being the third ranking Democrat in the Senate leadership, Schumer found time in 2014 to visit three NIB associated nonprofit agencies in New York: the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill (ABVI-Goodwill) in Rochester in June; the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) in Utica in September; and the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (AVRE) in Binghamton in December.

His visits to three agencies that employ people who are blind should come as no surprise to constituents – for 17 years Sen. Schumer has kept a pledge to annually visit each of the state’s 62 counties. On his visits to the agencies he toured the facilities, met employees

and pledged to fight for the jobs of New Yorkers who are blind as the federal government modernizes purchasing practices. “I am here today to urge the feds to take a good, hard look at the new distribution practices they are putting in place and make sure they are complying with the law and not putting jobs like these in jeopardy,” Schumer said during his visit to ABVI-Goodwill.



▲ Senator Chuck Schumer shakes hands with Morgan Sequeira, accompanied by her dog guide, Jimmy, at ABVI-Goodwill. Other employees at the event include (from left to right) Ron Harris, Hari Subba, Phil Ercolamento and Mike Wiles.

During his Rochester visit, Schumer released letters he sent to the heads of both GSA and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) questioning certain practices and their impact on the AbilityOne® Program. Schumer urged OMB to help ensure that all federal agencies comply with the Javits-Wagner-O’Day (JWOD) Act and support jobs for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

Senator Schumer continued to press the issue when he visited CABVI on September 3. While recognizing the importance of cutting costs and increasing government efficiency, the Senator cautioned against changes in government procurement practices that “could be putting the jobs of many blind or visually impaired Utica residents at risk.”

AbilityOne Champion

Schumer was recognized as an AbilityOne Congressional Champion at his December visit to AVRE. In presenting the award, NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch commended the senator for “not shying away from taking on the issues and challenges that threaten our program and jobs for people who are blind.”

Even as Senator Schumer moves up the Senate leadership ranks, New Yorkers who are blind can expect him to continue fighting for jobs and calling on federal agencies to support the AbilityOne Program. ■

Rick Webster is vice president, public policy at National Industries for the Blind.

NIB EXPANDS CAPABILITIES IN GROWING MEDICAL FIELD

From medical transcription services to make-to-order medical solutions, NIB associated nonprofit agencies are launching innovative new endeavors and burnishing their credentials as trusted partners in the flourishing medical field.

BY ROSEMARIE LALLY

In times of peace and war, the U.S. military's need for medical supplies and services continues to grow. Add to that a civilian population that's aging – according to the World Health Organization, the average life expectancy in the U.S. is now 79.8 years – and it's clear the market for medical supplies and services represents a growth opportunity. NIB associated agencies are expanding their presence in this field to create sustainable jobs for people who are blind.

The latest foray into the field is being undertaken by NIB, Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Troop Support, NIB associated agency LC Industries, and American Medical Depot (AMD), a medical and surgical supplies distributor.

The partnership is working to provide Make To Order (MTO) Medical Solutions – kits customized to customer specifications for expeditionary operations, disaster response and other emergency situations. The partners work collaboratively to identify customer needs, determine necessary components and provide the supplies on an expedited basis.

Customer objectives can vary from providing supplies for an immunization program, to setting up a field operating room or disaster relief effort, explains DuWayne Gilbertson, LC Industries' vice president for business development. MTO Medical Solutions can include



▲ Switchboard operator Doris Dawson is one of eight visually impaired employees of Lighthouse Louisiana who provide services at Barksdale Air Force Base in Shreveport.

anything from basics such as needles, gloves and personal protective equipment to surgical supplies and tents.

Streamlined Procurement Process

Both Gilbertson and Tom Black, NIB director of niche product development, note that the ability to deliver a customized product quickly and efficiently sets MTO Medical Solutions apart from other medical products. The program aims for a 60-120 day response time, depending on availability of components – a stark contrast to typical defense contracting scenarios, which can take 18 months or

longer to deliver a product. DLA Troop Support has obligated \$50 million to the MTO Medical Solutions program under an indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity (IDIQ) procurement that allows for the streamlined process.

Experienced medical clinicians on the AMD staff work with customers to determine the types of items to include in a kit based on the mission, explained Gilbertson; once the necessary elements are identified, employees of LC Industries assemble the kits. AMD's proprietary IT system provides

Continued on page 7

ALPHAPOINTE CELEBRATES PARTNERSHIP THAT CHARTED A NEW COURSE

Twenty years ago, a contract with the Department of Veterans Affairs started Alphapointe on a path to success in medical products manufacturing.

BY ROSEMARIE LALLY

In the early 1990s, plastic injection molding was a new enterprise for Alphapointe, an NIB associated nonprofit agency based in Kansas City, Missouri. The agency's work producing specimen bottles for the Department of Defense caught the attention of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) just as it was planning to create an integrated, automated prescription fulfillment operation, known as the Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP), recalls Alphapointe President Reinhard Mabry.

If it could meet the VA's rigorous quality standards, Alphapointe would have a unique opportunity to provide bottles for the new dispensing system. But to show it could meet the VA's criteria for product dimensions and quality, Alphapointe needed to invest tens of thousands of dollars to produce test molds.

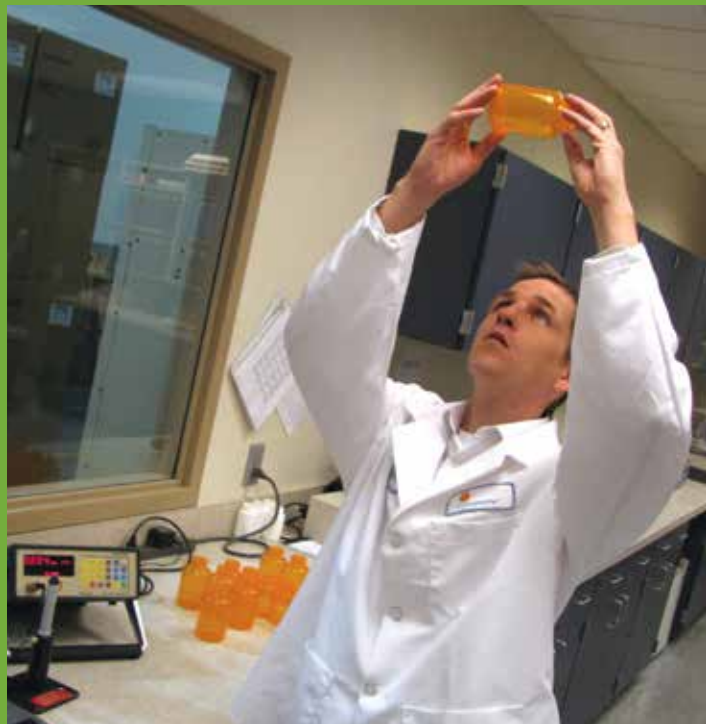
"This presented a bit of a financial risk for Alphapointe," said Mabry, "but the chance to provide more jobs and opportunities for upward mobility for people who are blind was worth it." When the test molds – which cost about \$40,000 each – were approved, permanent molds were created at a cost of \$250,000 to \$300,000 per mold.

The investment paid off and by late 1994, when the VA launched its first CMOP at Leavenworth, Kansas, Alphapointe was providing all of the prescription bottles used in repackaging bulk drugs purchased from manufacturers. Veterans Affairs has since expanded its program to include seven CMOP facilities across the country, filling 120 million prescriptions each year. Since the program's inception, Alphapointe has produced roughly 750 million prescription bottles.

In 1995, only one or two employees who are blind worked on a VA contract valued at \$400,000. In 2014, twenty people who are blind were employed over three shifts, five days a week, to provide products for VA contracts valued at nearly \$4 million.

To keep up with demand, Alphapointe has built a new facility, instituted training programs, increased its quality standards to meet or exceed VA specifications, and achieved ISO 9000 certification. Its plastic injection molding business is thriving, supplying additional federal clients and private-sector customers such as Motorola and Ford.

Mabry credits much of Alphapointe's success in injection molding to the VA's trust in awarding the original contract.



▲ Before he became a Call Center supervisor, Chris Montavon checked bottles in the quality control center at Alphapointe. Montavon, who is legally blind, is also an NIB Advocate for Leadership and Employment.

"The VA partnered with an agency for the blind in something that represented a risk and a possible win for both sides," Mabry said. "They took a chance and we appreciate it immensely. Their confidence in us was proven. We came through for them."

The contract has done more than just create jobs, Mabry explained: It has promoted upward mobility for people who are blind, providing opportunities to advance to quality control, IT and administrative positions. And it has provided employees who are blind a chance to give back. "We have employees who are blind who have worked in the department since its opening," Mabry said. "They take tremendous pride in their work, knowing that although they didn't have the opportunity to serve in the military, their work serves our nation's veterans."

Looking back over the years, Mabry never forgets the relationship that started it all. "We have a real sense of thanks and appreciation for the VA taking a risk, creating wonderful opportunities, and serving as our longstanding partner." □

Rosemarie Lally is a freelance writer and editor based in Washington, D.C.

NIB EXPANDS CAPABILITIES IN GROWING MEDICAL FIELD

Continued from page 5

comprehensive life-cycle management, tracking the shelf life of kit components and informing clients as expiration dates approach. This “concierge service” lets purchasers quickly reorder items nearing expiration, or return kits to be refilled with new components.

Developing the capability to fulfill contracts for medical product assembly and packaging required a substantial investment by LC Industries, Gilbertson said. The agency built a positive airflow room on its premises specifically to allow clean packaging of medical supplies, and developed a strict protocol for packaging and assembling the medical components in logical order, so users in the field can open a kit and quickly find a needed item, without risking contamination of the others.

Currently working on its first contract under the MTO Solutions program – supplying a Marine Corps unit in Japan with components for individual first aid kits – LC Industries is reviewing requirements with other prospective customers through DLA, said Gilbertson, who noted the Air Force is looking at two customized medical solution packages. “If the military services can turn this function over to DLA, the individual services will spend less time sourcing their needs,” he explained.

LC Industries also is looking into providing commercial solutions for private companies, but “our primary focus at the moment is working to build a pipeline,” Gilbertson said. “If you get speed-to-market of quality products and flexibility for the customer, the rest will fall into place.”

Black said NIB is evaluating other potential projects that could benefit from a template similar to the MTO Medical Solutions template. “The potential is huge,” he said. “As

customers become more broadly aware of our capabilities, we anticipate this project will create in excess of 20 jobs for people who are blind,” he explained. “As it grows, we hope to bring in additional NIB associated agencies to help fill our customers’ needs.”

Meeting Administrative Needs

MTO Medical Solutions are just one offering in the medical line of business. Training and employment programs in medical transcription and switchboard services are well established at the Lighthouse of Houston and Lighthouse Louisiana.

The Lighthouse of Houston offers an intensive telecommunications course that provides students who are blind with the office experience or training needed to become switchboard operators and receptionists. The agency has switchboard contracts at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities in Houston, Beaumont and Lufkin, Texas, and Long Beach, California, as well as at the Houston Chronicle.

The agency also offers a medical transcriptionist program that includes 18 months of instruction, followed by three- to six-months of on-the-job training. In addition, an online medical transcription training program has been available since 2006.

Houston’s medical transcription service, employing 33 employees who are blind, is a state of the art operation using the very latest adaptive technology and medical transcription platforms. Doctors anywhere in the world can access an 800 number and dictate medical reports by phone. The voice file is then accessed by a U.S. citizen located in the U.S. (a requirement for government clients), typed, passed through a quality assurance program and uploaded

directly to the patient file.

Special Project Manager Marisa Knowles said the Lighthouse of Houston began providing transcription services to the VA in the 1990s and currently provides services to VA hospitals in Texas, Louisiana, Oregon, Idaho and Indiana, as well as to Navy hospitals in California. Private clients include Baylor College of Medicine, MD Anderson Cancer Center and Texas Children’s Hospital. Knowles said Lighthouse of Houston employees currently type 5 million lines of transcription per year.

Employees at Lighthouse Louisiana have been providing switchboard operations to the VA Medical Center in Biloxi, Mississippi, for the past 15 years with similar success, according to Rick Krohn, vice president of operations and business development. Ten to 12 employees who are blind provide the services, using adaptive technologies from screen magnification to screen reader software. An additional eight visually impaired employees work at Barksdale Air Force Base in Shreveport, Louisiana, under a contract of 14 years standing.

Lighthouse Louisiana employees providing the services are paid above minimum wage and receive good benefits, said Krohn, who called the program “an absolutely wonderful opportunity for the most underemployed segment of the community to attain independence and achieve financial stability.”

As the medical products and services offerings of NIB and its associated agencies continue to expand, so do the opportunities for upwardly mobile jobs for people who are blind. And that, says Krohn, is “a net win” for all parties. ■

Rosemarie Lally is a freelance writer and editor based in Washington, D.C.



A GAME CHANGER FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

July 26, 2015, marks 25 years since the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law. Although technology has helped level the playing field, there's still work to be done to secure equal employment opportunities for people who are blind.

BY SHARON HARRIGAN

Kathy Gallagher, NIB's learning and development manager, remembers well what her life was like before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990. Gallagher, 58, has been blind since age five, but that has never stopped her from pursuing her dreams. She admits, though, that it was much more difficult before the ADA and the resulting rise of adaptive and assistive technologies for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Navigating her way through college pre-ADA wasn't easy. Each semester, Gallagher had to persuade professors to compile their reading lists early, so she would have time to find books in braille or send them away to be taped. She also had to find and pay for her own readers. Now such services are offered free to college students through ADA-mandated offices of student disability services.

After she completed her education, Gallagher relied on drivers, the phone and in-person meetings to do her job working with New Jersey self-help support groups for people who are blind. When traveling, she put rubber bands on hotel door knobs so she could find her room, because hotel room numbers weren't posted in braille.

The ADA was a game changer for people who are blind or visually impaired – it required that government and public places be accessible to people with disabilities, which often meant providing adaptive or assistive accommodations. Enacted on the cusp of the technology boom of the 1990s, the ADA was the needed catalyst that brought creative minds together to really figure out accessibility, says Tony Stephens, NIB's public policy and advocacy manager.

The adaptive and assistive technology available before the ADA was rudimentary when compared to what's available today, says Megan O'Toole, Virginia Industries for the Blind's vocational rehabilitation engineer. The ADA, says O'Toole, took adaptive and assistive technology to a new level "and made it ten times better."

Assistive technology like closed circuit televisions (CCTVs) for reading printed material, computer screen magnifiers, digital recorders, optical scanners, refreshable braille displays and software like JAWS (Job Access with Speech) that reads information on a computer screen, opened doors



▲ NIB employees Kathy Gallagher and Silvia Grove read a braille sign at the San Antonio Botanical Gardens during NIB's annual meeting.



▲ Sharon Elosser uses a mix of new technology in the form of a braille display, and old technology – an abacus – to track receiving information and product value, and research customer requests at Industries of the Blind in Greensboro, North Carolina.

and leveled the playing field, says Stephens, who is legally blind. Today, more than anytime before, people who are blind or visually impaired are completing undergraduate and graduate degrees and working in jobs previously inaccessible to them.

As assistive technology has evolved, NIB and its associated nonprofit agencies have leveraged those advances to expand career opportunities for people who are blind, both in manufacturing and in the service sector. In today's technology-driven workplaces, most positions can be made accessible to people who are blind at little cost to employers – according to Department of Labor estimates, two-thirds of all job accommodations cost less than \$500.

“Assistive technology has opened doors to better quality jobs for people who are blind – in customer service, warehousing, contract management services,” says Gallagher, noting that a person who is blind can do any job today that involves a computer. “We wouldn’t be where we are today if not for the ADA, not just in the workplace, but in our personal lives as well. We can pay bills, travel, and do chores – all because of assistive technology.”

Adaptive Technology Assists at Work

As Peggy Martinez, accessibility manager at The Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle, is quick to point out, all technology intended to help people who are blind is assistive – a fact that’s more than evident on the Lighthouse’s machine shop floor. Opened nearly 60 years ago, the machine shop today employs more than 70 people who are blind or deaf-blind. The shop, which has supplied products to The Boeing Company since 1951 and to other organizations like the

U.S. Department of Defense, and aerospace firms Triumph Composite Systems and BAE Systems, is ISO9001:2000 and AS9100 accredited. Those accreditations, says Martinez, would not have been possible without assistive technology.

The machine shop uses computer numeric controlled (CNC) machines to make some of the parts its customers need. The Lighthouse worked with Okuma, a maker of CNC machines, to create an interface that is accessible to employees with a wide range of visual and auditory disabilities. Together, they developed a CNC machine with a screen reader that uses JAWS for blind employees, and a braille display for those without useable hearing and vision. The adaptive technology, says Martinez, puts them on par with any other ISO9001:2000 and AS9100 accredited machine shop. “We can – and do – perform the same work as any other manufacturer of these parts, and at an extremely high quality” says Martinez, noting that the shop’s quality rating is consistently greater than 99 percent.

Pat Thomas, production manager at Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB), a division of the Virginia Department for the Blind, says VIB uses assistive technology to help people who are blind meet their career goals. VIB employs 150 people, more than 100 of whom are blind or visually impaired, at 23 locations throughout Virginia. Its manufacturing division produces mattresses, mop heads and handles, pillows, reflective safety vests, writing instruments, exam gloves and more. VIB also operates a retail division and recently opened a customer service center staffed and managed by people who are blind or visually impaired.

Continued on page 8

THE ADA

Continued from page 9



▲ Lise Pace, senior marketing manager, uses the Salesforce platform at Bosma Enterprises in Indianapolis, Indiana. The addition of a custom suite of applications known as VisionForce makes virtually every job at the agency accessible to people who are blind.



▲ NIB Public Policy and Advocacy Manager Tony Stephens uses JAWS with his Windows tablet to monitor developments on Capitol Hill.

As a result of the sheer number of products and services offered, and the wide array of visual impairments among its employee population, VIB uses a variety of adaptive and assistive technologies, including computers with JAWS, colored filters and ZoomText; large print documents and more. “We’ve been able to promote a lot of people who are blind because of technology,” says Thomas.

Like the Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle, VIB has also adapted some existing technology to make it accessible. The agency, which packages spices to be used by federal prisons and state entities, has modified two machines designed for sighted employees so that they can be operated by employees who are blind or visually impaired. A foot pedal was installed to help run one machine and the scale is equipped to beep when filled to the correct weight. One spice room employee uses a CCTV to read the machine’s digital display.

Fine-Tuning Off-the-Shelf Software

Though adaptive technology has helped people make great strides in the workplace, adaptation can sometimes create silos as people fashion patches and work-arounds to get their jobs done. It’s a phenomenon common to all workplaces, not just those employing people with disabilities, but one that wastes time and precious resources in today’s connected workplaces.

Two and-a-half years ago, Indianapolis-based Bosma Enterprises, Indiana’s only provider of programs and services for people who are blind, found itself with an abundance of silos. The 30 different computer systems in use made some jobs inaccessible to people who are blind or visually impaired, not only bottling up information, but also tying

people to specific divisions. To combine all of the systems, Bosma selected the popular Salesforce platform – which includes compatibility for screen reading and JAWS – because, according to Adam Rodenbeck, Bosma’s Lead CRM developer, it was “pretty accessible right out of the box.”

But not completely accessible, which lead to the addition of VisionForce, a suite of applications added to the platform that everyone at Bosma can use. “VisionForce made nearly all jobs at Bosma – drivers being the exception, of course – accessible to people who are blind,” says Rodenbeck. “Now people can move laterally because jobs are more accessible and the platform is familiar to everyone.” Bosma makes the VisionForce suite available to other organizations using Salesforce, and hopes it will lead to more private-sector hiring of people who are blind or visually impaired.

No Tweaking Required

Some systems are accessible right out of the box. Arizona Industries for the Blind’s (AIB) distribution center has been using Vocollect Talkman, a voice-activated portable computer system, since 1995. The system gives the distribution center’s 63 employees (80 percent of whom are blind or visually impaired) voice directions to designated locations throughout its 175,000 square foot warehouse. To provide the right direction, all of the center’s 43 million inventoried pieces are bar coded and entered into the Talkman system.

The distribution center processes 26,000 to 28,000 orders each month and makes daily shipments to Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as to locations in Europe and the U.S. Its 99.8 percent inventory accuracy rate would be impossible without the Talkman system and dedicated employees like

Christine Helvoight. Helvoight, who is blind, has worked in AIB's distribution center for a year and is a daily user and big fan of the technology. "It's awesome," says Helvoight of the Talkman system. "My supervisor will tell me where to pick each day and Talkman tells me where to go. It's really nice because if I scan the wrong area, it tells me where I am. I couldn't do my job without it."

Breaking Barriers, Increasing Awareness

Gallagher says the ADA's biggest impact on people who are blind is in increasing awareness. "Has it changed the employment rates among the blind and disabled? No," she says. "Seven out of 10 people who are blind or visually impaired are still not employed. But the ADA has improved the quality and scope of jobs available to people who are blind, and that's a big deal."

Assistive technology has also allowed people who are blind or have disabilities to enter their communities in ways unimagined before the ADA's passage, notes Stephens. "It also gave rise to the idea that people with disabilities can do anything," he says. "The ADA broke down the doors for access. It told the nation that people who are blind or visually impaired have the right to be educated, to hold a job and to enter a store."

Doug Goist, NIB accessible technology program manager, agrees. Goist was losing his vision when the ADA was passed and calls the law a landmark because it started the

conversation. "With assistive technology," says Goist, "being blind becomes less of an issue."

The ADA "Helps Us All"

For Daniel Martinez, AIB's community services liaison, the ADA did more than just "invite people to think differently" about people who are blind or have disabilities – along the way, people realized that assistive technology is good for everybody. VIB's Thomas is quick to point out that sandpaper paint on floors, audible indicators for starting or stopping a process, and wheelchair ramps were all developed in response to the ADA but are helpful to the general public – just ask any parent who's pushed a stroller up a sidewalk ramp.

O'Toole notes that not only is accessible technology helpful to everyone, it will become increasingly needed as the U.S. as a whole continues to age. As an example, she points to a keyboard that allows people with visual impairments to pick the color combinations that work best for them. Those keyboards, she says, were once intended only for a specific population – but O'Toole recently saw a very similar product in an "As Seen on TV" store. "I'm seeing more and more products like these being made more widely available because they're useful to others – particularly as we age," she said.

Moving Forward: Mainstreaming Assistive Technology

Although technology has vastly improved the jobs and lives of people who are blind or visually impaired, it sometimes

Continued on page 12



⚠ Before coming to Virginia Industries for the Blind, Keith Pegram worked in maintenance jobs. After assistive technology instruction, and professional training through NIB, he's now a production supervisor.



⚠ Christine Helvoight uses a voice-activated portable computer system to navigate the 175,000 square foot warehouse at Arizona Industries for the Blind.

NIB ANNOUNCES ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY TRAINING FOR PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE BLIND

The NIB board recently approved development of an in-depth training program on adaptive technology and standard office software aimed at preparing professionals who are blind with the skills needed to work independently in a sighted office setting. The NIB staff is working with a third party to develop the curriculum. Participants in the a four-week intensive computer training program will be in class up to eight hours a day, five days a week, learning how to use Microsoft Office applications such as Outlook, Excel, Word and PowerPoint; browse the Internet; configure assistive technology and more.

“We want to make sure professionals who are blind or visually impaired have the all training they need to successfully transition into a business setting,” says Billy Parker, NIB’s CMS training program director. “Most vocational rehabs do a great job of providing intro-level basics, but aren’t able to give in-depth, one-on-one training. This program will help fill that gap.” □

THE ADA

Continued from page 11

leaves them behind. “Technology keeps changing how we all live, but developers are often not thinking of people who are blind and disabled when they’re designing new products,” says Gallagher. “For example, at Wawa convenience stores, you used to be able to go up to the deli counter and place an order with a live person. Now, you type your order on a computer. This is not accessible for people who are blind. The same thing happens when I go into a doctor’s office and use a computer to sign in.”

The answer for industry, say Goist and Rodenbeck, is to follow Apple’s lead and build accessibility into products from the start, with a focus on usability. Louis E. Orslene, co-director of the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the U.S. Department of

Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy, and Teresa Goddard, lead consultant for JAN’s sensory team, agree, adding that there have been great strides in that area. “The iPhone showed everyone how something deliberately designed for accessibility could apply to everyone,” says Orslene, who notes building accessibility in at the design phase is always more cost effective than retrofitting.

“There will always be challenges, but thanks to the ADA there has been an exponential improvement in assistive technology,” says Peggy Martinez, who has low vision. “It has allowed us to go as far as we want to go.” And as Gallagher said, that’s a big deal. □

Sharon Horrigan is a freelance writer based in Asheville, North Carolina.



▲ Doug Goist, manager of NIB’s accessible technology program, uses the LookTel Money Reader on his iPhone. Users point the camera of an iOS device at a bill and the app speaks the denomination in real time.

READY TO LAUNCH

These new products produced by NIB associated agencies are now available to federal government customers through the AbilityOne® Program.

NIB and its associated nonprofit agencies continue to launch new products to meet federal customers' needs, including a variety of SKILCRAFT® office products and cleaning supplies produced by people who are blind.

1. MAKE TO ORDER MEDICAL SOLUTIONS

Make To Order (MTO) Medical Solutions provide a customized selection of mission-critical supplies, kitted and fielded to warfighters quickly under a streamlined procurement process. MTO Medical Solutions can support missions from immunization clinics to field surgical stations. Includes life cycle management to assess viability and readiness status, manage FDA recalls and monitor shelf life. Produced by LC Industries in partnership with NIB, DLA Troop Support and American Medical Depot.

2. CALENDARS AND PLANNERS

Get ready for the upcoming year with high quality calendars and planners produced by the Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired. All calendars use paper made of 100 percent post-consumer recycled materials and printed with soy inks.

2016 Monthly Wall Calendars, January – December

Twelve-month wall calendars with one month per page feature ruled squares for each day and include holidays, Julian dates and remaining days. Calendars have a wire-bound top with hanger and 12 month reference calendar at the bottom of each page. Available in three sizes: 8 ½ x 11 inches, 12 x 17 inches or 15 ½ x 22 inches.

2016 Monthly Planner Book, Wire Bound, Black Cover

This 8 ½ x 11 inch monthly planner book helps keep track of important dates. Each month is presented on a two-page, unruled spread with daily blocks for fast notes. The right-hand side of each spread includes the previous and following calendar month, a "reminders" area for

fast jotting, and a telephone/address area for contact information. Covers 14 months starting in December 2015.

2016 Weekly Planner Book, Wire Bound, Digital Black

This 5 x 8 inch weekly planner book presents one week per each two-page spread. Ruled for half hour appointments from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., each two-page spread includes calendars for the prior, current and following two months in the margins. The back of the book features 12-month calendars for the previous, present and following years with important dates and holidays highlighted, as well as an area for jotting quick notes or reminders.

2016 Weekly Planner Book, Wire Bound, Black Cover

This 6 7/8 x 8 3/4 inch weekly planner book presents one week per each two-page spread. Ruled for 15 minute appointments from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., each two-page spread includes calendars for the prior, current and following two months in the margins. The back of the book features 12-month calendars for the previous, present and following years with important dates and holidays highlighted, as well as an area for jotting quick notes or reminders.

3. SKILCRAFT® BIOBASED LIQUID HAND SOAP

Produced by Lighthouse for the Blind in St. Louis, this biobased liquid hand soap is made using 78 percent coconut oil. Designed for general hand cleaning, the formula quickly emulsifies and delivers a rich moisturizing lather of mild, pH balanced detergents. Use in liquid soap dispensers and central dispensing systems without dilution. Fresh linen fragrance. □



These and thousands of other products are available for purchase at AbilityOne.com, GSAAdvantage.com, your local Base Supply Center or through AbilityOne authorized distributors. For more information about how to purchase SKILCRAFT and other products produced by people who are blind, visit www.nib.org/products.

RISING STARS

BY MARY JANE SURRAGO

Meet the winners of NIB's 2015 national employee of the year awards. The Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year award recognizes the achievements of employees who excel in their positions at NIB associated agencies. The Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award honors individuals who demonstrate career advancement at an NIB associated agency or in the private sector.



A Randy George, contract closeout specialist at VisionCorps, Philadelphia, with Avery, his Seeing Eye Dog. Avery was a steadfast and constant companion until his passing in June.

2015 PETER J. SALMON AWARD WINNER

Randy George, contract closeout specialist at VisionCorps, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, built on previous work experiences and training to succeed in a new career track.

Randy George is a highly-skilled JAWS user who produces superior contract research results as a member of the Contract Management Services group of VisionCorps, which is headquartered in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. A top producer, George consistently delivers the ideal combination of high productivity and an exceptionally low error rate.


Prior to joining VisionCorps, George served as a civilian contractor at

Travis Air Force Base, providing world-class service in extremely stressful and time-sensitive environments, including logistical and communications support to White House staff in transit. Prior to coming to Travis Air Force Base, he developed a distinct level of polish and professionalism working in the hospitality industry with Hilton Hotels in California, and gained valuable experience in sales, customer service and management

with Trinity Home Medical, a national medical supply company.

Totally blind since birth, George is a recognized JAWS expert. He worked directly with the software developer, and is skilled at building compatibility between JAWS and other software programs. He recently led an initiative petitioning the Philadelphia Street Commission to make important safety changes to a busy intersection near VisionCorps, and as a result, an audible crosswalk system is now in place. George represents The Seeing Eye as an outreach representative and serves as a member of its volunteer speakers board. He has also volunteered his time to the Pennsylvania Protection and Advocacy organization, serving as a board member and as committee chairperson for contract monitoring.

"The outside professional opportunities I have gained as a result of my employment with VisionCorps as a public policy advocate, the extensive procurement and contracting experiences, and the personal friendships I have developed with co-workers at VisionCorps have been extremely beneficial to me," said George.

In addition to travel, hiking, philanthropy and advocacy, George is an avid equestrian, volunteering with a therapeutic riding program at least twice a week. He also stays active with goal ball, bowling and beep baseball leagues for people who are blind. 

2015 MILTON J. SAMUELSON CAREER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNER

Luis Narimatsu, public relations coordinator at Georgia Industries for the Blind in Bainbridge, believes that real achievement is not about awards, but rather how one uses accomplishments to make a positive impact on others.

Luis Narimatsu was born and raised in Panama, Central America. His father, a veteran, worked as a civilian for the Department of Defense (DOD) in the Panama Canal Zone, so Narimatsu and his siblings attended Canal Zone and DOD schools. When he began having severe headaches and vision problems while attending Panama Canal College, doctors diagnosed juvenile acute glaucoma. Despite medication, damage to the optic nerve was so severe that Narimatsu eventually lost all of his vision.

Narimatsu learned braille and independent living skills, and became proficient with access technology, landing a job with the 106th Signal Brigade, 56th Battalion, 94th Signal Company in the Canal Zone as a tactical switchboard 911 operator. Eventually becoming the trainer and lead operator, he was responsible for communications in 14 military defense sites housing more than 15,000 troops and 15,000 civilians and dependents, as well as U.S. embassy personnel. During his seven years with the 94th Signal Company, Narimatsu received commendations for humanitarian actions while on duty during operation Safe Haven, and was nominated for the DOD employee of the year award. When the Panama Canal was turned over to the Republic of Panama in 1999, Narimatsu relocated to the U.S. in pursuit of career opportunities. His long job search led him to Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) where he started as a sewing machine operator.

Because he consistently exceeded expectations on the production



▲ Luis Narimatsu, public relations coordinator, Georgia Industries for the Blind, with NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch.

floor, Narimatsu was selected to set up a Learning Center where employees could study computer skills. The driving force behind GIB's technology training, Narimatsu has taught more than 120 employees.

Narimatsu was part of the first graduating class of NIB's Business Management Training, and a member of the first class of NIB's Advocates for Leadership and Employment. He was instrumental in recruiting U.S. Representatives Sanford D. Bishop (D-GA2) and Austin Scott (R-GA8) to become AbilityOne Champions. In addition, Narimatsu was the first blind person to complete the Georgia Department of Labor's Executive Commitment to Excellence in Leadership program through the University of Georgia. He volunteers as vice chairperson for the Georgia Statewide Coalition on Blindness, which provides

resources and recommendations on issues such as legislation, employment, transportation and education.

Seven years ago, Narimatsu was promoted to employee relations specialist. Currently GIB's public relations coordinator, his major responsibilities are recruitment and public policy. "Recruiting is one of the most rewarding parts of my job," said Narimatsu. "I can relate to what it is to be unemployed, and what it is to be praying for an opportunity to demonstrate your capabilities. Here at GIB, we offer that opportunity!" ■

Mary Jane Surrage is former editor of Opportunity magazine and author of "Empowering People: The Story of National Industries for the Blind and its Associated Agencies," published in 2013 to mark the 75th anniversary of NIB and the AbilityOne® Program.

CREATING INDEPENDENCE, DELIVERING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Participants at the 2015 NIB/NAEPB Public Policy Forum took to Capitol Hill to enlist legislators' support in creating employment opportunities for people who are blind.

BY JENNIFER CLICK

After a long, cold winter, advocates from NIB and 34 associated nonprofit agencies enjoyed a perfect spring day as they converged on Capitol Hill April 29 to meet with their elected representatives. The annual day in D.C., part of the 2015 NIB/NAEPB Public Policy

Forum, was a huge success, with 150 meetings held with congressional offices to discuss priority issues impacting employment for people who are blind.

Preparing for the Meetings

The two-day Public Policy Forum

kicked off on Tuesday, April 28, in Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, where the 2015-2016 class of 13 Advocates for Leadership and Employment joined six members of the 2014-2015 class. Also in attendance were several members of the first class of Advocates. It was a busy two days for the new Advocates, who spent Tuesday learning the ropes of congressional advocacy and the messages important to convey in their Wednesday meetings on the Hill.

The forum officially opened with a luncheon and keynote address by Frank Sesno, former Washington bureau chief for CNN, who discussed effective ways to engage members of Congress and the media.

"You are all your own storytellers," Sesno said, explaining that the two items that make an impression on Capitol Hill and in the media are people and stories. Rather than making policy issues the focus of Capitol Hill meetings, Sesno advised advocates to treat their time with Congressional leaders as conversations and let them revolve around characters. "People relate to people," he said, telling participants they should not shy away from telling real, personal stories that acknowledge the obstacles they've faced in life, as well as their successes.

Closing the Loop at Home

Later in the afternoon, Karen Walls, president of Midwest Enterprises for the Blind in Kalamazoo, Michigan, led a panel discussion on growing relationships with Congress. The panel featured three members of NIB's inaugural class of Advocates for Leadership and Employment: Lise Pace, senior marketing manager at Bosma Enterprises in Indianapolis; Rachel Carver, communications and public relations facilitator at Outlook Nebraska in Omaha; and Luis Narimatsu, public relations coordinator at Georgia Industries for the Blind.

Bosma builds advocates "from the ground up" Pace said, explaining that all employees are encouraged to register



▲ 2015-2016 Advocates for Leadership and Employment: (Front Row, from left): Maureen Reid, Chicago Lighthouse; David Green, Lighthouse Louisiana; Bettina Dolinsek, Lighthouse of Fort Worth; Kyle Coon, Lighthouse of Central Florida; Randy George, VisionCorps. (Back Row, from left): Steve Britton, North Central Sight Services; Steve Heesen, Industries for the Blind, Milwaukee; Robert Studebaker, Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle; Gary Wagner, Olmsted Center for Sight; Robert "Bob" Porter, Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired; Herbert Humphrey, Mississippi Industries for the Blind; Manuel Zavala, West Texas Lighthouse.



▲ Representatives of Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired met with Rep. Rob Portman (R-OH2) in his Capitol Hill office. From left to right: John Mitchell, Steve Ogletree, Rep. Portman, Carolyn Mitchell-O'Bryant and Jennifer DuBois

to vote and stay informed on issues affecting people who are blind. The agency routinely invites locally based staff members from congressional offices to its events and works to educate them on Bosma's expertise in matters affecting people who are blind. "We want them to know that Bosma is also a resource for their constituents," said Pace, who added that she feels a measure of success whenever a congressional office refers a citizen for information or assistance.

Narimatsu agreed that effective advocacy starts at home and encouraged attendees to get to know local as well as federal elected officials. Noting that representatives at the state level often advance to national office, he explained that "when that happens, you'll already have a relationship in place."

Working with district office staff can also be easier than working with staff in a busy Capitol Hill office, said Narimatsu, who recounted his difficulty working with a Capitol Hill scheduler who was very protective of the member's time. When Narimatsu began contacting the district office to schedule meetings, the Washington staffer took notice and was more receptive to his calls.

Carver agreed that relationships with staff members can be almost as important as the relationship with the member. Describing advocacy as "relentless pressure, gently applied," she said she always introduces herself to newly elected officials or those she hasn't met, and takes a few minutes to "spread the mission" using personal stories to connect with members and their staff.

Echoing keynote speaker Sesno's advice, Pace said she too strives to connect with representatives and their staff on a personal level. "I tell them that my story could be their daughter's or another family member's story and to ask themselves 'Would I want them to live in a world where there are no opportunities?'"

Delivering the Message

Before traveling to Capitol Hill Wednesday morning, attendees heard an inspiring speech by Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA8), who reinforced the value of meeting with members of Congress in Washington, and stressed the important role played by legislative staff. On the Hill, participants made specific "asks" related to ongoing GSA challenges and support for the military commissary system, and shared concerns related to the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program.

After a productive two days, participants headed home to prepare for the next step in the process – reinforcing their messages during the August Grassroots Forum. The virtual event, held during the Congressional recess, keeps critical issues in front of members of Congress, who are invited to meet with representatives of NIB associated agencies, tour agency facilities and learn more about AbilityOne and the capabilities of people who are blind. By the end of last year's Grassroots Forum, 63 members of Congress had signed on to a letter expressing concerns around compliance with the AbilityOne Program. 🇺🇸

Jennifer Click is a communications consultant and editor of Opportunity magazine.

THANKS FOR POSTING!



Envision
@HelpEnvision

.@RepMikePompeo took time out to chat with us during the #NIBPolicyForum (& helped our CEO celebrate his bday)!
pic.twitter.com/WoO96t0v1Z



Mississippi Industries for the Blind

15 days ago

Mike Chew and Herb Humphrey in front of the U.S. Supreme Court building. Leaving the Senate, headed to the House. #NIBPolicyForum



2015 R. B. IRWIN AWARD GOES TO MAJOR GENERAL HAWTHORNE PROCTOR

The NIB Board of Directors has named Major General Hawthorne (Peet) Proctor, USA (retired), the 2015 R. B. Irwin Award winner. The highest honor given by NIB, the R.B. Irwin award recognizes a professional in the NIB family who has devoted his or her career to creating and improving employment for people who are blind, or a volunteer who has demonstrated exceptional and longstanding service and commitment to the mission of NIB.

Major General Proctor's impact on the AbilityOne® Program spans many years. After embarking on a military career in 1968, Proctor rose through the ranks as he continued to pursue education and military schooling. After holding command posts all over the world, he assumed command of the Defense Personnel Support Center (soon to become the Defense Supply Center Philadelphia) in 1996. From that point forward, Proctor became an advocate of NIB and the AbilityOne Program, visiting many NIB associated agencies, meeting employees and speaking at NIB conferences. Proctor has also served as Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics and Operations, U.S. Army Materiel Command; 46th Quartermaster General and Commander at the Quartermaster Center and School; and held the post



▲ Major General Hawthorne (Peet) Proctor, USA (Ret).

of J-3, Chief of Logistics Operations at the Defense Logistics Agency. In all of these positions, Proctor lent his support on projects to provide employment to people who are blind. After retiring from the military, Proctor joined the NIB Board of Directors.

In retirement, Proctor established a consulting firm providing services – particularly in the areas of logistics, contracting and information technology – to organizations doing business with the federal government. In addition to being a strong advocate for NIB before the U.S. AbilityOne Commission®, Proctor worked with his contacts at the Defense Logistics Agency to assist NIB with various projects to help create

employment opportunities for people who are blind. Even after retiring from the NIB board, he continues to provide assistance and open doors.

The award is named in memory of Dr. Robert B. Irwin, who was executive director of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) in the 1930s and worked with AFB's Chairman M. C. Migel and Peter Salmon, of the Industrial Home for the Blind in New York, toward passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act and the formation of NIB. [□](#)

NIB AWARDS OFFICER'S SWORD AT NAVY SUPPLY CORPS SCHOOL GRADUATION

Ensign Seth Wartak received the Officer's Sword for superb academic performance at the Navy Supply Corps School's Supply Officer Basic Qualification Course (BQC) graduation. NIB Assistant Vice President for Operations Support Charles Froemke presented the award to Wartak, the BQC 1st Battalion Honor Graduate. Wartak completed the course with a 98.7 percent overall grade point average. The sword, presented to the valedictorian at each BQC graduation, is a recurring gift to the Navy Supply Corps officer community and a symbol of NIB's long and successful partnership. [□](#)



▲ NIB Assistant Vice President for Operations Support Charles Froemke presents the Officer's Sword to Ensign Seth Wartak at the Navy Supply Corps School's Supply Officer Basic Qualification Course graduation.

NIB TO CONSTRUCT NEW HEADQUARTERS FACILITY

NIB has entered into a contract to purchase a parcel of land at The Exchange at Potomac Yard in Alexandria, Virginia, where it will construct a new corporate headquarters. Expected to open in late 2017, the building will serve as a space for NIB to more fully carry out its mission of creating meaningful employment opportunities for people who are blind.

Working closely with its Board of Directors, NIB management concluded that construction of a new LEED-certified headquarters building is a sound investment offering substantial economic advantages over continuing to lease its older, inefficient office space.

“This decision marks a turning point for our organization and demonstrates confidence in our continued growth,” said NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch. “We will be better positioned to enhance our workforce capabilities, provide our associated agencies with a home base in the Washington, D.C.,

NIB headquarters building planned for Exchange at Potomac Yard

Mar 10, 2015, 2:39pm EDT Updated Mar 10, 2015, 2:51pm EDT

Michael Neibauer
Washington Business Journal

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The co-developers of the Exchange at Potomac Yard have landed their first office tenant for the 1.9 million-square-foot Alexandria project.

The National Industries for the Blind, a nonprofit dedicated to stemming the 70 percent unemployment rate among working-age blind Americans, has entered into a contract to acquire land at the Exchange, where it will construct a 70,000-square-foot headquarters building – with the option to expand later to 100,000 square feet. The NIB is currently based at 1310 Braddock Place in Alexandria, near the Braddock Road Metro station.




COURTESY OF THE EXCHANGE AT POTOMAC YARD

The Exchange at Potomac Yard is slated to include nearly 2 million square feet of... [more](#)


area and train employees with the best resources available.”

Incorporating universal design principles, the new 70,000 square foot headquarters will include an expanded training facility with a computer lab,

a showroom to feature products manufactured by NIB associated nonprofit agencies, and a conference center for networking and special events. In the future, NIB will have an option to expand its headquarters to 100,000 square feet. 


GET READY FOR NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) and NIB and its associated agencies across the country are planning activities to raise awareness about disability employment issues. The U.S. Department of Labor’s 2015 theme, “My Disability Is One Part of Who I Am,” aims to reinforce the message that like all people, people with disabilities are the sum of many parts. “Disability is an important perspective we bring to the table, but, of course, it’s not the only one,” said Jennifer Sheehy, acting assistant secretary of labor for disability employment policy.

NIB associated nonprofit agencies, AbilityOne Base Supply Centers, and authorized distributors and wholesalers are receiving toolkits from NIB to help them recognize NDEAM and communicate the importance of creating meaningful employment for people who are blind. Join NIB in celebrating NDEAM and contribute to the conversation on social media using the hashtag #NDEAM. 

SAVE THE DATE! NIB/NAEPB NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND EXPO

Mark your calendars for the 2015 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo! This year’s conference is scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 13 through Thursday, Oct. 15 at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City in Arlington, Virginia.

This year’s theme “Focused. Proven. Ready.” reflects the way NIB associated nonprofit agencies focus on mission success and leverage proven experience and expertise to provide timely and efficient solutions to customers. 

FOCUSED. PROVEN. READY. 



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A close-up photograph of a woman's face and hand. She is smiling and making a hand gesture with her right hand, where the index and middle fingers are extended upwards and slightly apart, while the other fingers are curled. She is wearing a dark blue blazer over a light blue button-down shirt.

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