

A Publication of National Industries for the Blind

OPPORTUNITY

Honoring Those Who Serve

Plus

- A Veteran With a Vision
- Serving the Most Deserving
- Public Policy Grassroots Forum

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We Salute You

Every day, thousands of men and women devote themselves to protecting our freedoms, providing relief and maintaining peace around the world. Military service is a calling. Those who serve in the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines know the benefits can be tremendous – education, training and honor. But those who wear the uniform also realize it requires self-discipline, intense physical stamina and long periods of time away from loved ones.

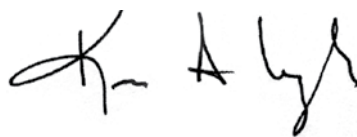
Each year, Americans honor all those who have served on Veterans Day, November 11. The day is marked by parades and community services and is intended to honor all military personnel, whenever and wherever they served.

What is exciting to me is the number of veterans who are still serving their country, even though they have hung up their uniforms. We walk among them every day. They are serving in capacities that show their pride in America. Most of these veterans don't wear labels identifying themselves, nor

do they wear their medals or ribbons, but you can identify them by their actions and the patriotism deep in their hearts.

We are fortunate to have a number of veterans working in NIB associated agencies, still doing their part to keep our military strong by providing mission-critical products and services. In this issue of *Opportunity*, we feature a few of these patriots, as well as some of the career opportunities and other support programs offered to veterans by NIB associated agencies.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to America's veterans who put themselves in harm's way to preserve our freedoms and keep us safe. We at NIB salute you and pledge our unwavering support for your service to our great nation.



Kevin A. Lynch
President and Chief
Executive Officer



OPPORTUNITY

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Denovia Anderson, sewing machine operator, New York City Industries for the Blind in Brooklyn.



ON THE COVER:

Albert Logan (former Lance Corporal, U.S. Marines) palletizer, Horizon Industries, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Tyler.

U.S. Army veteran Al Avina jumps into his new role as executive director of the Blinded Veterans Association.

As the youngest of six children in a poor family that emigrated from Mexico to California, Al Avina did not have many educational or vocational options. Upon his graduation from high school in 1990, he joined the U.S. Army. He excelled and moved up to personnel administrative manager at Fort Lewis, Washington. There he created and managed a project that transitioned outsourced human resources functions to an internal Personnel Administrative Center for senior-level managers and supervisors. He trained and transferred responsibilities to the center to provide compensation and benefits support, executed day-to-day operations and ensured managerial responsibilities were appropriately shifted to executive ranks.

Sudden Vision Loss

During a routine eye examination in 1994, Avina was diagnosed with rod cone dystrophy. Visual acuity usually deteriorates gradually with this condition, but in Avina's case, the loss occurred suddenly while he was at work. Not able to see anymore, Avina left the Army in 1996, after serving seven years.

He turned to the American Lake Blind Rehabilitation Center at the Veterans Administration (VA) Puget Sound Health Care Hospital in Tacoma, Washington, for assistance and enrolled in college. Avina graduated four years later with a Bachelor of Science degree in business from Saint Martin's University in Lacey, Washington.

Having difficulty finding employment, Avina, a decorated veteran, learned of



Al Avina, executive director, Blinded Veterans Association.

“I set the bar high for myself. NIB recognized it and gave me opportunities for more challenging work and development of leadership skills.”

Al Avina

NIB's Business Leaders Program. He applied for the competitive Fellowship for Leadership Development and was selected based on his achievements. During the 18-month program, Avina worked in the day-to-day operations of NIB's military resale department. From there, he relocated to Indianapolis to serve as a cross-departmental project manager at Bosma Enterprises. During the last rotation of the Fellowship, Avina was stationed in the government markets division of 3M, in Washington, D.C., where he developed a new contact relationship management system to better identify partnering opportunities with NIB associated agencies.

Raising the Bar

Along with Avina's strong work ethic comes an intellect eager to embrace new ideas and innovative solutions. He credits the military for pushing him out of his comfort zone, which helped him as an NIB fellow. “I set the bar high for myself. NIB recognized it and gave me opportunities for more challenging work and development of leadership skills.”

Since joining the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) as executive director in April, Avina is showing the same dynamic approach and vision. “My predecessor did an outstanding job advocating on Capitol Hill for benefits for blinded veterans,” said Avina, “I am also focusing on modernizing our operations and using technology to enable the BVA to become more prominent and socially relevant in the United States and beyond.” ❖

NIB Plans 75th Anniversary Celebration

Next year, NIB will celebrate its Diamond Jubilee – 75 years of opening doors to employment opportunities for people who are blind! Future issues of *Opportunity* will feature highlights from NIB's history and special events planned to celebrate this milestone.

NIB's history dates back to 1938 when, in June, the Wagner-O'Day Act was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to provide employment for people who are blind by manufacturing products to sell to the federal government. That August, NIB was incorporated as a 501(c)3, private, nonprofit corporation. ❖

Industry Group Honors NIB Manager

Kathy Gallagher, NIB learning and development manager, was selected by the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) to receive the 2012 McAulay Award. Gallagher accepted the award at the AER International Conference, held July 18-22 in Bellevue, Washington.

"This is a great honor for Kathy and we are extremely proud of her accomplishments," said Kevin Lynch, NIB president and CEO. "During Kathy's career at NIB, she has coached countless individuals who are blind, like herself, to develop their careers with no boundaries."



Kathy Gallagher, NIB learning and development manager.

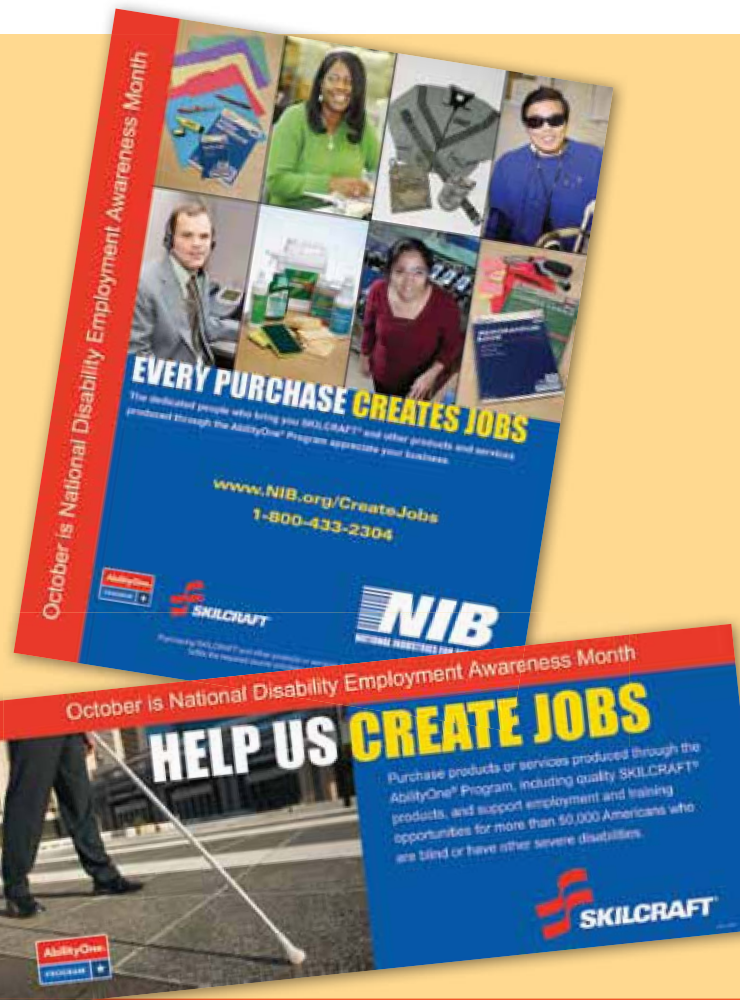
Established in 1959, the John H. McAulay Award honors professionals who have contributed outstanding efforts and achievements leading to the placement of people with visual impairments in productive employment. McAulay was a pioneer in vocational rehabilitation of people with severe visual disabilities. ❖

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

To raise awareness during National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in October, NIB developed "Help Us Create Jobs" promotional materials for its associated agencies and their Base Supply Centers across the country, as well as for military commissaries and exchanges, and product distributors.

Established by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, the 2012 theme for NDEAM is "A Strong Workforce Is an Inclusive Workforce: What Can YOU Do?" This not only reminds employers to hire individuals who are blind or have other severe disabilities, but also to keep jobs in the United States.

To promote NDEAM, NIB is participating in AbilityOne® Program customer events at Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Land and Maritime on October 11, DLA Aviation on October 18 and DLA Troop Support on October 31. The events enable NIB associated agencies to showcase their products sold to U.S. military customers. ❖



Honoring Those Who Serve

NIB and its associated agencies offer a variety of career and training opportunities and other support services to America's veterans.



Veterans who work at Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina with their former military ranks indicated in parentheses. Seated left to right: Rick Gaefe (Army Sergeant) with guide dog Baldwin and Lawrence Marible (Army Sergeant). Standing left to right: Troy Whorton (Army Private), Roosevelt Hayes (Army Sergeant), Calvin Linster (Army Reserves Specialist Fourth Class), Larry Diggs (Air Force Specialist Fourth Class), Steve Flynt (Air Force Sergeant) and David Phillips (Army Specialist Fourth Class).



Veterans who work at Horizon Industries at the East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Tyler, with their former military ranks indicated in parentheses. Front Row (left to right): Milow Christian (Army Specialist), Patricia Owens (Army Private First Class) and Paul Brooks (Army Sergeant). Back Row (left to right): Albert Logan (Marine Lance Corporal) and George Lewis (Air Force Supply Airman).

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), there are approximately 160,000 veterans who are legally blind. The number rises to more than one million veterans when you include those who have been diagnosed with low vision. To assist them, the VA has 10 in-patient blind rehabilitation centers across the country and 55 out-patient programs serving nearly 50,000 veterans with vision loss.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have created more injuries resulting in blindness than any conflict since the Civil War. For military personnel, this change can be especially daunting as they deal not only with the transition to civilian life but also with

physical and emotional healing and concerns about the future. With this in mind, NIB created the Wounded Warrior Program – to reach out to wounded veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts and inform them about training, job placement and career opportunities within NIB and its associated agencies. Led by Ned Rupp, veterans affairs specialist – wounded warrior, NIB staff meet with wounded warriors at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. They exhibit at job fairs, such as those at Fort Belvoir, Fort Meade and Naval Sea Systems Command, and meet one-on-one with the veterans. Each year, NIB participates in the national conference of the Blinded Veterans Association to meet

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with veterans and help them explore NIB and its associated agencies as potential employers that offer a positive workplace environment, opportunities for advancement and a rewarding mission.

Rupp has an intimate understanding of a veteran's adjustment after military life, having served two tours in Germany and three in Vietnam. He was a Battalion Commander in Vietnam, associate professor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and is a graduate of the U.S. Naval War College and National Defense University. After retiring from the Army, Rupp began a second career at NIB, and in 2009 was designated as NIB's Veterans Affairs Specialist.

Vital Services

While NIB associated agencies provide employment services to people who are blind, some have support programs specifically geared toward veterans. In 2009, NewView Oklahoma started VITAL (Veterans' Independence Through Adaptive Living), which reaches out by telephone monthly to more than

60 blind or visually impaired veterans living in Oklahoma City. The veterans range in age from young adults in their 20s to World War II veterans.

"Our men and women in uniform have done so much for us and our country," said Lauren Branch, president and CEO of NewView Oklahoma. "We are honored with the opportunity to help blind and visually impaired veterans live independent and fulfilling lives."

The VITAL group meets monthly at NewView Oklahoma. Meetings usually involve lunch and a guest speaker. There are also several outings each year, such as ball games and visits to military museums.

On one such outing, blind Marine Corps veteran Michael Stephens threw the first pitch at the AT&T Bricktown Ballpark, kicking off a minor league baseball series between the Oklahoma RedHawks and the Iowa Cubs. VITAL participants also toured the 45th Infantry Division Museum in Oklahoma City. Museum staff set up

tables in a well-lit room and pulled items from the museum's collection. Veterans were invited to touch the items, while museum staff answered questions.

The veterans also journeyed to Fort Sill for a hands-on tour of the Field Artillery Museum. They not only heard about the weapons and equipment used in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War and modern times, but they also got to explore tactually the rifles, muskets, bayonets and ammo pouches.

In addition to the support services, NewView Oklahoma also provides employment. Larry Troxell served from 1968 to 1974 in the Air Force. As captain of a Bell UH-1 Iroquois helicopter, commonly known as a "Huey," he flew rescue and recovery missions during the Vietnam War. After six years in the service, Troxell worked as a training manager for a company that designed water facilities around the world. In 1996, retinitis pigmentosa took away most of Troxell's vision. Although he sought rehabilitation



Larry Troxell (former Captain, U.S. Air Force), fire hose coupler, NewView Oklahoma in Oklahoma City.



Veterans in NewView Oklahoma's VITAL support group, along with volunteers, visited Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

services from the Southwestern Blind Rehabilitation Center of the Southern VA Health Care System, his attempts to secure employment were fruitless until he learned about employment opportunities at NewView Oklahoma.

Since 2008, Troxell has been a fire hose coupler at NewView Oklahoma, which sells hoses to the U.S. Forestry Service. In his spare time, Troxell enjoys the company of other veterans who participate in NewView's VITAL program. Troxell is also a member of NewView's dragon boating team, which competes in weekly regattas. "My job at NewView has gotten me out of the house and back into the workforce, and the VITAL program is great," said Troxell. "I'm happy that someone thinks about us and realizes that we performed a job when we were in the service that enabled others to continue to enjoy their freedoms."

A Bridge to Work

Recognizing the number of veterans living in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind (CLB) created the Bridge to Work program to ensure that veterans who are blind or visually impaired and seeking employment have the training and resources needed to succeed. Veterans learn how the skills they acquired during their military service can be applied in a civilian workplace. The program also offers training on assistive technology and computers and daily living techniques. While some veterans find career opportunities in the community, others decide to work at CLB's Digital Data Scan Service, which provides high-quality and competitively-priced document management and conversion services to federal, state and local government agencies and



Calvin Linster (former Specialist Fourth Class, Army Reserves), optical technician, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind, North Carolina.



Rick Gaefe (former Sergeant, U.S. Army), Air Force physical fitness uniform sewing machine operator/computer instructor, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina.

commercial businesses. Currently, three veterans are actively working on digital data scanning contracts. "Our Bridge to Work program, like our overall employment services, aims to close the gap between military service and civilian employment for persons with vision loss," said Eddie Jones, CLB's director of veterans services and training.

A Veteran Serving Veterans

While many veterans in NIB associated agencies are making mission-critical products and uniforms for military personnel, others, like Calvin Linster, are enjoying careers that provide

important services to veterans. A Desert Storm veteran, Linster was stationed in Germany, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf during his time in the Army Reserves. As a Specialist Fourth Class, Linster served in the infantry and worked in his battalion's headquarters. After his military service, he was an air conditioning and refrigeration technician until he was diagnosed with glaucoma. Through a relative, Linster learned about Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (WSIFB) in North Carolina and joined the optical services team as a technician. Using various machines, Linster cuts and polishes lenses for prescription eye glasses that are shipped to Eyes Right optical dispensaries located in 27 VA hospitals around the United States. "Words cannot express how wonderful it is to work at WSIFB. I love my job and I joined WSIFB's bowling team," said Linster.

Still Serving Their Country

Many veterans continue to serve their country even though they no longer wear the uniform. "Military service instills in young Americans a sense of responsibility, perseverance and work ethic," said Rupp. "These qualities are appealing to employers."

Opportunity magazine is proud to share some short profiles of veterans working in NIB associated agencies, who continue to serve their country – one product or service at a time.

Rick Gaefe, USA Sewing Machine Operator/ Computer Instructor Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind

When Sergeant Rick Gaefe was discharged from the Army in 1975,

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Bill Leos (former Fireman, U.S. Navy), shipper/packer, Arizona Industries for the Blind Distribution Center in Phoenix.



John Powers (former Airman Second Class, U.S. Air Force), sewing machine operator, chin straps, San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind in Texas.



Patricia Owens (former Private First Class, U.S. Army), client services administrator, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Tyler.

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he landed a job as a machinist. While coming home from work, he came upon a serious automobile accident and pulled the victims to safety, but he felt helpless due to lack of first aid skills. Several days later, Gaefe joined the volunteer fire department and trained to become a firefighter and an emergency medical technician. For 10 years, he served his community, but retired when he could no longer drive due to ischemic nerve atrophy. Today, Gaefe

sews parts for the Army physical fitness uniform and teaches computer skills at Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (WSIFB). He is a member of the safety team and leader of WSIFB's guide dog and veterans support groups. "When I went blind, I was not going to sit home and collect disability," said Gaefe. "I have a lot more to give, and WSIFB has given me every opportunity to do so."

**Bill Leos, USN
Shipper/Packer
Arizona Industries for the
Blind Distribution Center**

When Bill Leos turned 18, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He served two tours in the Far East and Indian Ocean as a fireman in the engine room of the USS O'Brien, a DD-975 destroyer. After his military service, Leos worked in construction until retinitis pigmentosa took most of his vision. He went to college for a few years and then came to Arizona Industries for the Blind (AIB) in 2007. Leos, who was recently promoted to shipper/packer, along with his colleagues in AIB's distribution division, ships hundreds of thousands of military insignias, flags, lighting

supplies, springs and other metal parts to many of the places that Leos once visited when he served in the Navy.

**Patricia Owens, USA
Client Services Administrator
East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind**

Private First Class Patricia Owens began her service in the Women's Army Corps as a personnel administration specialist in 1961. Her first assignment was with the Officer's Branch where she assisted in editing performance reviews. She then served at the Army Reception Station processing recruits and was often called on to do temporary duty assignments with the Signal Corps and 3rd Army Manpower. After Owens' discharge from the Army, she was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa. She was a stay-at-home mother for many years until she earned a masters degree in counseling in 1996. Now retired, Owens was a client services administrator at the East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Tyler. She interviewed applicants, researched assistive technology for individual needs, instructed clients in their use and facilitated support groups.

John Powers, USAF
Sewing Machine Operator
San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind

As an Airman Second Class, John Powers worked in the field of electronic surveillance when he served in the U.S. Air Force from 1957 to 1961, stationed in Turkey and Germany. Some 30 years later, Powers found he could no longer perform his job due to macular degeneration. In 2003, the Texas Commission for the Blind referred Powers to the San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind (SALB) for training in assistive technology. He wound up applying for a job at SALB, and at 73 years old, Powers is still serving his country as a sewing machine operator, where he makes chin straps for helmets worn by U.S. Marines.

Albert Logan, USM
Palletizer
Horizon Industries
East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind

Lance Corporal Albert Logan was a diesel mechanic servicing 2-½ and 5-ton trucks while in the Marine Corps. He was stationed at Camp Pendleton, California, and in Okinawa, Japan, from 1970 to 1972. Logan transitioned to civilian life by working on assembly line jobs, and later, he became a truck driver. In 1987, a truck tire exploded, costing Logan his vision. He stayed at home for the next two decades until he applied for a job as a palletizer at Horizon Industries at East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Tyler. "Serving my country as a Marine changed my life in a lot of different ways," said Logan. "Every young American should experience at least two years of military service. It provides direction and purpose, in addition to many benefits for active and retired personnel."



Albert Logan (former Lance Corporal, U.S. Marines), palletizer, Horizon Industries, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Tyler.



Bernard Shands (former Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army), mail bag sorter, New York City Industries for the Blind in Brooklyn.



Richard Lee (former Private First Class, U.S. Army), JSLIST bag sewing machine operator, Alabama Industries for the Blind in Talladega.

Richard Lee, USA
Sewing Machine Operator
Alabama Industries for the Blind

Richard Lee's service in the U.S. Army was cut abruptly short in 1965 with a gunshot wound to the head. He recuperated at the Edward Hines Jr. Veterans Administration Hospital and learned Braille, cane mobility and other skills of daily living. For the next 30 years, Lee worked at the Mobile Association for the Blind. Now the proud father, grandfather and great-grandfather is a sewing machine operator at Alabama Industries for the Blind in Talladega. Lee makes camouflage Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology (JSLIST) bags, which are used by the military to carry nuclear, biological and chemical protection equipment.

Bernard Shands, USA
Mail Bag Sorter
New York City Industries for the Blind

Bernard Shands grew up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and enlisted in the Army in 1979. As a staff sergeant, he was training a soldier how to fire a gun when the weapon malfunctioned. Dozens of doctors were unsuccessful in attempts to restore Shands' vision, and despite the injuries, Shands remained in the military for another two years. "When I first left the military, I thought I just needed glasses," said Shands, but as his eyesight worsened, he sought help from the VA. There he learned orientation and mobility and computer skills and discovered career opportunities at New York City Industries for the Blind (NYCIB). Since 2010, Shands has been working on a service contract for the U.S. Postal Service as a mail bag sorter at NYCIB's satellite operation near John F. Kennedy International Airport. ❖

Since 1955, NIB's Military Resale program has provided quality household items to military personnel and their families, while supporting employment for people who are blind.

One of the military's top nonpay benefits is the ability to shop in commissaries, which sell groceries and household goods. The first commissaries opened in 1825 when Army officers could make purchases at cost for their personal use. The program was expanded over the years to benefit active-duty military personnel of all ranks, as well as reservists, members of the National Guard and retired members of all uniformed services of the United States. Spouses and dependent children of service personnel also enjoy commissary privileges. Generally, shopping in commissaries results in an average savings of more than 30 percent compared to civilian supermarkets.

There are 248 commissaries worldwide operated by the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA), with the average commissary stocking about 11,000 line items. Among those items are more than 650 household products made by approximately 400 people who are blind in 17 agencies associated with NIB. Manufactured under the trade name SKILCRAFT®, NIB associated agencies have been supplying commissaries and exchanges with SKILCRAFT products for almost 60 years.

Distribution is handled through S&K Sales Co., an experienced broker providing brand-name consumer products to the worldwide military resale market. The broker assists in calling on DeCA, introducing new items into stores, managing the shelf stockers, overseeing merchandising, setting up and maintaining promotional displays and dealing with distributors to ensure they carry SKILCRAFT products. S&K Sales Co. also acts as a liaison between NIB and store personnel, educating the military on the benefits of the AbilityOne® Program.



Military family stocks up on SKILCRAFT products at a commissary.



Variety of SKILCRAFT kitchen and cleaning products produced by NIB associated agencies.



Daniel Shock labels kitchen utensils at the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Ohio.



SKILCRAFT bucket and caddy cleaning kit.

In recent years, NIB has been working with its associated agencies to develop environmentally friendly products, new product categories and upgrading the current product selection, so that SKILCRAFT products continue to meet customer demand and pricing achieves the savings customers seek. In addition, product packaging and merchandising have been an ongoing activity to appeal to customers.

Earlier this year, NIB recognized the long-standing partnership with DeCA when NIB COO Scottie Knott presented DeCA Director and CEO Joseph H. Jeu with a Government in Excellence award in recognition of DeCA's superb efforts to support the AbilityOne Program mission to create employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.



NIB COO Scottie Knott with DeCA Director and CEO Joseph Jeu.

"The partnership between DeCA and NIB has been mutually beneficial to both of our organizations as it has continued to support a growing number of jobs for people who are blind, while providing military patrons with quality household products," said Jeu.

"We are extremely appreciative of the support that NIB and its associated agencies receive from DeCA headquarters," said Anne-Marie Wallace, NIB military resale manager.

"And employees in our associated agencies are proud to 'serve the most deserving' by providing quality SKILCRAFT products to military personnel and their families." ❖

Music Man

Meet Ron Pablico – one of the many dedicated employees who make SKILCRAFT® products for the Military Resale program.



Ron Pablico, assembler and packager, New York City Industries for the Blind, Brooklyn, New York.

Cataracts and glaucoma took Ron Pablico's vision when he was a toddler. With limited educational opportunities and practically no work experience, Pablico came to New York City Industries for the Blind (NYCIB) in Brooklyn in 2003. Described by his supervisors as a loyal and dedicated employee, his attendance record is exemplary despite his long commute via mass transit from upper Manhattan to Brooklyn every day.

Besides his job, Pablico also loves music! Everyone at NYCIB considers it his modus operandi as he listens to it religiously while he assembles and packages SKILCRAFT products. ❖

Building Relationships at Home: 2012 NIB/NAEPB Grassroots Forum

NIB's associated agencies host federal, state and local elected representatives and staff in communities across the nation in August.

Because federal and congressional advocacy doesn't just happen in Washington, D.C., NIB's Public Policy team, working with our associated nonprofit agencies, launched the first NIB/NAEPB Grassroots Forum on August 13 with the theme: Building Relationships at Home.

Agencies invited members of Congress, staff, and state and local leaders to visit while legislators were on recess in their home districts. Collectively, nearly 40 visits took place, half of them by members of Congress. Agencies also used social media to get the word out and create a "virtual" Grassroots Forum at individual agencies across the country. The goal was to raise awareness on Capitol Hill and in local communities about NIB associated agencies and their mission to create and sustain employment for people who are blind. Based on the dialogue created by Twitter "tweets" and Facebook posts, the event was a great success.

Throughout the August recess, agencies hosted visits at their home offices and satellite operations. During the visits, they established and maintained relationships; thanked supporters who shared the mission of creating, sustaining and improving employment opportunities for people who are blind; and recognized new congressional AbilityOne Champions.



The groundbreaking ceremony for San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind's new 60,000-square-foot, multi-purpose building was attended by more than 600 people, including Rep. Francisco Canseco (R-TX23) and Councilwoman Leticia Ozuna.

Communication Tools Build Momentum

To help with outreach efforts, NIB's Public Policy team provided a "communications tool kit" for agencies, offering instructions on how to initiate legislator visits, templates for invitation letters and media advisories, guidelines for communicating about the visit to local media, and fact sheets about NIB and the AbilityOne Program.

Incorporating 21st century advocacy tactics, agencies posted photos and updates on the Grassroots Forum Facebook page to share ideas and build excitement. Eleven Advocates for Leadership and Employment created personal videos, sharing how their jobs have made a difference in their lives. Their stories were featured daily throughout the forum.

Meetings and Events Raise Awareness

The event created awareness on the positive impact of the AbilityOne Program. Two new AbilityOne Champions were recognized for their commitment to the program and their support of employment opportunities for people who are blind or severely disabled. Employees at Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind in Texas honored Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX30), and North Central Sight Services, Williamsport, Pennsylvania, recognized Rep. Tom Marino (R-PA10).

The first week of August, Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA5) hosted a Disabilities Roundtable at The Lighthouse for the Blind – Seattle's Spokane facility, the Inland Northwest Lighthouse, attended by other disability organizations in the area representing employment programs.

The following week, Lighthouse Central Florida in Orlando hosted "2012 Vision in Leadership Week: Living, Learning, and Earning in Central Florida," including tours for local, state and national elected officials.

BOSMA Enterprises in Indianapolis, Indiana, held a panel on issues facing the community, inviting 150 local, state and national officials, staff and community leaders.



Pictured left to right: Senator Mark Pryor (D-AR); Randy Massanelli, state director for Senator Pryor; and Bill Johnson, CEO, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind (ALB), with ALB employee Jermaine Parker in the equipment belt department.



Pictured left to right: Doug Jones, senior director, sales and marketing, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind; Julie Shaffer, NIB program advocacy manager; Blake Lindsay, manager, communications, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind; Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX30), receiving an AbilityOne Champion plaque; Nancy Perkins, CEO, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind.

Advocates Play a Key Role

The Grassroots Forum got off to a flying start, with help from the Advocates for Leadership and Employment, a team of 14 NIB associated agency employees who are blind and interested in public policy issues. These volunteer Advocates were selected through a competitive process and began their two-year term in January 2012. They reached out to

local leaders and media representatives, elevating awareness for a wide range of issues faced daily by persons who are blind. Some of the Advocates shared their stories with their elected leaders and several of these stories follow.

Stephen Comency joined the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment Inc. (A.V.R.E.) in

Binghamton, New York, in 2007 as a part-time manufacturing department employee and was later promoted to a full-time Accounting Associate position. As a tour ambassador at A.V.R.E., he enjoys promoting the abilities of people with vision loss. CEO Bob Hanye says Comency “has excellent verbal and interpersonal skills as evidenced by the great rapport he maintains with our customers.” In December 2011, he received an associate degree from Broome Community College, and he plans to pursue a bachelor’s degree in marketing management.

Toni Fraser was born visually impaired and began to lose her remaining vision during her late twenties. After a near-death experience, her life changed dramatically. “I did a lot of bargaining with God that if he let me live, my life would change,” Fraser said. Today, Fraser’s experience as an employee at Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind in Little Rock has been life-changing, and she is thankful for the opportunity to witness the potential of every person who is blind.

Lise Pace is the community programs manager at Bosma Enterprises, Indianapolis, Indiana. She started as a volunteer, and later was hired full-time. At Bosma, Pace said, “I’ve been exposed to blind and visually impaired people living their lives and being successful.” She also conducts public policy outreach. “I work with my fellow employees to further public policy issues that make the world a better place for people who are blind or visually impaired.”

Anastasia Powell went blind in 1988. Before joining Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (WSIFB), North Carolina, she experienced difficulty finding gainful

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“Once I stepped into the vision of WSIFB, my life changed. I’m able to give back to my community, pay taxes, send my kids to college, and buy a home.”

Anastasia Powell,
Winston-Salem Industries for the
Blind in North Carolina

employment. “So many people in society would not give me a chance. Darkness gave me a different view of life,” said Powell. “Once I stepped into the vision of WSIFB, my life changed. I’m able to give back to my community, pay taxes, send my kids to college, and buy a home. Every time I clock into work, I make a difference. I went from being a stay-at-home mom, to having the training to actively participate in the workforce.”

Misty Stenberg has been legally blind since birth, but she keeps a positive focus on her lack of sight. “I’ve always tried to look beyond my visual impairment, and focus on what I can do and not on what I can’t do,” Stenberg said. Graduating in 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in business and computer networking, she spent a year trying to find work with no real success. In 2007, she landed a job at Midwest Enterprises, Kalamazoo, Michigan,



Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (WSIFB) employees Anastasia Powell, Chris Flynt and Tim LaCroix with Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC5) on a tour of Tracy’s Little Red Schoolhouse, an independent learning center established by WSIFB earlier this year.

where she has provided administrative services and IT support. She was recently promoted to Public Policy Liaison after becoming an Advocate.

Courtney Williams began working part-time at Lions Volunteer Blind Industries (LVBI) in Morristown, Tennessee, to assist with call center technology training and system evaluation in July 2010, and became a full-time employee in April 2011. He enjoys helping others work toward their employment goals while tackling accessibility issues. Williams believes that “raising public awareness of the capabilities of disabled persons is essential for success and longevity in the job market.” Through his involvement as a competitive athlete with the U.S. Association of Blind Athletes, he is passionate about helping others develop viable skills that focus on abilities rather than disabilities.

Other members of the inaugural class of Advocates for Leadership and Employment are: Rachel Carver,

Outlook Nebraska, Omaha; Jimmy Dean, Alabama Industries for the Blind, Talladega; Nan Magness, Louisiana Association for the Blind, Shreveport; Chris Montavon, Alphapointe, Kansas City, Missouri; Blake Lindsay, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind, Texas; Jude Lucien, Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired, Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Luis Narimatsu, Georgia Industries for the Blind, Bainbridge; and Carlos Paraskevas, Arizona Industries for the Blind, Phoenix. ❖



Pictured left to right: Kevin Kelley, chief operating officer, Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB); Luis Narimatsu, public relations coordinator, GIB; Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-GA); Jim Hughes, executive director, GIB, during a visit to GIB’s Griffin, Georgia, location.

NIB Sponsors Blinded Veterans Association Convention

For the last six years, NIB and several associated agencies have sponsored the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) Operation Peer Support. This program brings newly blinded veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom to the BVA National Convention, offering both information and camaraderie to assist them in their adjustment to blindness.

At this year's conference held August 20-23 in Galveston, Texas, NIB sponsored a luncheon for all convention attendees and staffed an exhibit where Operation Peer Support participants could learn about employment options and NIB's Wounded Warrior Program. Other exhibitors included The Lighthouse of Houston, The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired and The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc. in Seattle. ❖



Former Royal Marines (wearing NIB hats), Kenneth Facal and Billy Drinkwater, who are part of the Operation Peer Support exchange program with the United Kingdom, pictured with NIB staff Ned Rupp, veterans affairs specialist, and Brian Hurley, public affairs program director, at the Blinded Veterans Association conference.

Statler Center Achieves Job Placement Success

The National Statler Center for Careers in Hospitality Service, a program of one of NIB's associated agencies, Olmsted Center for Sight, is focused on jobs! The Statler Center, in Buffalo, New York, trains individuals who are blind, visually impaired and physically disabled for employment in the hospitality and contact center industries. Statler offers a 10-week training program several times throughout the year attended by students from across the United States and abroad.

Recently, more than a dozen people who are blind, all graduates of Statler's training program, have landed new jobs in a broad mix of companies, where their training has provided transferable skills to diverse industries. One graduate is a customer service agent in a Seattle, Washington, contact center. Another is working in a Buffalo manufacturing facility as an inventory clerk and was recently promoted to full-time permanent status. ❖

NewView Oklahoma Employee Competes in Paralympics

When she's not at work as a communications specialist at the consolidated switchboard at Travis Air Force Base (AFB) in California, Christella Garcia is practicing judo. Garcia is an employee of NewView Oklahoma, based in Oklahoma City, which supports the contact center services contract with Travis AFB.

Garcia took up judo five years ago and has placed in judo championships all over the world. But she had much higher aspirations for herself – to compete in the London 2012 Paralympic Games. In April 2012, Garcia's dream

was realized when she was named to one of the six spots on the United States judo team for the 2012 Paralympic Games, held in London, August 29-September 9.

Garcia trains five days a week with her trainers at the Sacramento Judo Club, and spends two additional days each week working on her strength and grappling. "I think the thing that makes the club so awesome is that I am expected to do everything that all the other people are doing," Garcia explains. "I am held to the same standards as the sighted people in the club." ❖

Lighthouse Central Florida Grows Business, Creates Jobs

Lighthouse Works! (LW), a division of Lighthouse Central Florida (LCF) in Orlando, provides employment and training opportunities for individuals who are blind by manufacturing products and delivering business services. LCF/LW recently graduated as one of NIB's "emerging agencies," developed a business plan with assistance from NIB and received IRS 501(c)3 certification. Today, LCF/LW is growing its customer base and product lines, and creating employment for people who are blind or visually impaired.

In March 2011, LCF/LW launched a new contact center, which employs 13 part-time agents who are blind or visually impaired, working on commercial campaigns that include call monitoring, call scoring and mystery shopping.

LCF/LW also works with the State Use Program, RESPECT of Florida. In June 2012, LCF/LW added 17 toner cartridges produced by people who are blind to RESPECT's list of products sold to government agencies throughout the state.

In July 2012, LCF/LW successfully shipped its first AbilityOne product — alcohol pads — one of 11 medical items designated for use in the Army's Combat Lifesaver Kit that LCF/LW will supply to the Defense Logistics Agency depots through the AbilityOne Program. Four people who are blind were hired to package and ship the alcohol pads. ❖

New BSC Opens at Joint Base Andrews

Blind Industries and Services of Maryland (BISM) hosted the Grand Opening ceremony for its new AbilityOne Base Supply Center (BSC) at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland on August 7. The new facility is one of 145 BSCs operated by NIB's associated agencies.

Joint Base Andrews is home to Air Force District of Washington's 11th Wing, which supports contingency operations in the nation's capital, provides security for the world's highest visibility flight line, and is known around the world as the home of Air Force One.

Special guests at the event included Colonel William Knight, 11th Wing, Joint Base Andrews Commander; Maryland Lieutenant Governor Anthony Brown; and NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch.

BISM also operates BSCs at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware; Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling and Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington, D.C.; Fort Knox, Kentucky; and Aberdeen Proving Grounds and Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. ❖



Pictured left to right: Ken Barnett, director of BSC operations, BISM; Kevin Lynch, president and CEO, NIB; BISM BSC associate Kagan Nuss; Fred Puente, president, BISM; Anthony Brown, Maryland lieutenant governor; and Colonel Bill Knight, Joint Base Andrews Commander.

New 2012-2013 AbilityOne Catalog

The new 2012-2013 AbilityOne Catalog features more than 3,500 items produced by individuals who are blind or otherwise severely disabled from NIB and NISH associated agencies. New icons throughout the catalog highlight products with environmental attributes such as U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) BioPreferred, USDA Biobased and BPA Free (processed without Bisphenol A), as well as re-designed products and products that are mandatory for federal buyers.

The catalog is available online at www.abilityonecatalog.com. To order print copies, contact customer service at 1-800-433-2304 or customer_service@nib.org. ❖



Reflections From an Employee of the Year

One of the nominees for NIB's 2012 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award, Barbara Irvin, industry associate in the Document Imaging Department at North Central Sight Services (NCSS) in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, wrote to NIB to share her thoughts about what this recognition meant to her.

Irvin, whose goal is to become a playwright and screenwriter, wrote a heartfelt essay, entitled "The Greatest Honor." In beautiful prose, Irvin admitted she had coveted this award for seven years, and every year her motivation to accomplish this goal increased.

Irvin said, "Since being named Employee of the Year, my confidence level has

soared. I grasp every opportunity that comes my way. I do not allow anyone or anything to stand in the way of what I intend to achieve."

During her eight years at NCSS, Irvin has worked in several departments, adapting easily to each new environment. She admits she is "driven" to reach out and strive to achieve her goals. She attended Hadley School for the Blind, studying English Composition and Business, which fostered her talent for writing.

In her essay, she noted, ". . . I just wanted to take a moment to thank your organization for sponsoring this award and giving me the opportunity to be employed." ❖



Barbara Irvin, industry associate, North Central Sight Services, Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

DLA Hires CMS-Trained Closeout Specialists

The Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) recently hired three contract closeout specialists who have completed AbilityOne Program Contract Management Support (CMS) training. The new employees, all of whom are blind, came from NIB's associated nonprofit agencies.

Bernard Werwie worked for Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired at DLA in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania. Christina Harris was employed by Virginia Industries for the Blind at the Defense Contract Management

Agency, Fort Lee, Virginia. Werwie and Harris entered the Corporate Intern Program as contract specialists at DLA Aviation in Richmond.

Mindy Cook, hired out of college by Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Ohio, is now employed at DLA Land and Maritime in Columbus.

Launched in 2009, the CMS Training Program has provided opportunities for on-the-job training and upward mobility, leading to the employment of nearly 70 participants. Many have

landed closeout specialist positions at NIB associated agencies, and others have been hired by NIB, private-sector companies such as Boeing and Northrop Grumman, and federal government agencies, including the U.S. Army, Defense Commissary Agency and the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth.

DLA is seeking more talented individuals to hire as contract specialists and NIB is working to help DLA meet this requirement. ❖

DoD Memorandum Encourages Growth of AbilityOne Business

U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) leadership issued a joint memorandum July 12, advocating use of the AbilityOne Program. The memo from Richard Ginman, director of Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, and Shay Assad, director of Defense Pricing, noted that the AbilityOne Program has experienced a 35 percent

increase in sales to DoD over the past five years, creating 7,000 jobs for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

Ginman and Assad urged DoD procurement officials to develop a strategy to increase AbilityOne Program business over the next five years,

including opening new markets similar to the Contract Management Support (CMS) initiative. The memo stated that DoD's CMS indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity contract had resulted in 51 task orders, creating jobs for 93 direct labor closeout specialists, including 27 wounded veterans, employed at 14 nonprofit agencies. ❖



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