



Supporting AbilityOne is Beyond Business It's Personal

By Philip E. Sakowitz, Jr., Director and Chief Executive Officer, Defense Commissary Agency

For the past 18 years, the Defense Commissary Agency has prided itself on delivering a world class benefit to our men and women in uniform. That commitment to

excellence has many faces—including U.S. government civilians, local national employees, service members, contractors, stakeholders and industry partners.

What many may not be aware of is that we deliver this benefit with the assistance of a small army of people who are blind or severely disabled. This partnership exists thanks to our relationship with the National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH—the two central nonprofit agencies designated to assist the government's AbilityOne Program.

Through AbilityOne, formerly known as the Javits-Wagner-O'Day or JWOD program, the federal government matches contracts for goods and services with program participants that have at least 75 percent of their labor performed by people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. AbilityOne provides jobs for more than 43,000 people nationwide—by far the largest source of employment for people who are blind or severely disabled.

DeCA currently has more than 200 contracts in place to provide shelf stocking, custodial and warehousing services, with contractors associated with the AbilityOne Program. As a result of these contracts, nearly 2,000 full-time severely disabled employees are directly supporting the commissary benefit. These contracts enhance our ability to provide our customers with clean and well-stocked stores, while at the same time, provide persons with disabilities with real jobs and increased independence. In fiscal 2009, these contracts were valued at about \$112 million

Through our contracts with the NIB, we achieved about \$20.56 million in sales during fiscal 2009—a 6.9 percent increase from fiscal 2008—for more than 700 products in the SKILCRAFT® program such as mops, brooms, toilet and household brushes, kitchen tools and towels, sponges, cleaning wipes and cloths, candles, household gadgets, and flatware.

Another example of our partnership with NIB is evidenced by our contract with a NIB work center, Envision

of Wichita, KS, which provides plastic T-shirt bags for use

by our patrons when bagging their groceries. This same contract also includes several sizes of trash bags, which are purchased and used for intrastore operations. DeCA purchases about \$10 million in plastic bags and employs about 55,000 man-hours of visually challenged labor annually from Envision. We also have contracted with Envision for producing promotional kits to enhance our store displays. The quality on the initial set of kits was so outstanding we decided to develop a long-term agreement based on purchasing for an estimated ten marketing campaigns each year.

Our participation with AbilityOne is a small part of the federal government's long history of supporting people with disabilities. In 1938, the Wagner-O'Day Act was passed under President Franklin D. Roosevelt to provide employment opportunities for people who are blind by allowing them to manufacture mops and brooms to sell to the federal government. In 197x, under the leadership of Sen. Jacob Javits, Congress amended this act (Davits-Wagner-O'Day Act) to include people with severe disabilities and allow the program to also provide services.

The government managed its support of nonprofit companies through the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, a federal agency that operates under the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act. The committee established NIB and NISH as the two central nonprofit agencies to assist with program implementation and execution. Today, more than 60 nonprofit organizations are associated with either NIB or NISH to produce products and services under the AbilityOne Program.

Throughout its history, DeCA has been a strong supporter of the AbilityOne Program, but this is more than business—it's personal. It's a relationship that centers on empowering people, typically highly motivated people who truly take pride in pleasing their customers and doing a good job. And, we are better for it. F



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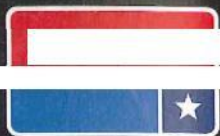
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