

Empowering People

The Story of National Industries for the Blind
and its Associated Agencies

75 Years • 1938-2013



MARY JANE SURRAGO

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Dedicated to the men and women
employed at NIB associated agencies
who have inspired the NIB team,
generation after generation,
to champion opportunities for
people who are blind to achieve their
full career potential.

“You are...a special kind of American. Blind men and women of talent, dedication and patriotism. Disabled? Not hardly! I congratulate NIB for being in the forefront of the struggle to channel this talent into the mainstream of American life.”

General Colin L. Powell
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Address at the 1991 NIB Conference

When General Colin Powell expressed his appreciation to all the nominees for national Employee of the Year at a conference in 1991, he was not only congratulating National Industries for the Blind (NIB), but also reminding us that NIB was built upon the ideals that every American should have opportunities for education, training and employment. But what are those opportunities?

People who are blind come from all walks of life, and for each of them, opportunities may mean different things. Some may want a career in the service industry, while others may want to be educators. Still others may aspire to professional and executive careers. NIB and its nationwide network of 91 associated nonprofit agencies provide a broad range of educational, rehabilitation, social and other services to support those aspirations and serve as the largest employer of people

who are blind in the United States. Together, they are focused on enhancing the opportunities for economic and personal independence of people who are blind, primarily through creating, sustaining and improving employment. This mission has driven the NIB family for the past 75 years and is evidenced in the growth and diversification of careers for people who are blind in challenging, high-energy, quality work environments.

Today, NIB mentors and supports its associated agencies through business development, program management, marketing and sales, as well as learning and development programs. These services have an extraordinary impact on empowering people who are blind to advance in their careers, to enhance their opportunities for economic independence and to more fully participate in the American Dream.

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 NIB President and CEO

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Mission, Vision, Values

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Seventy-five years ago, when America was pulling itself out of The Great Depression, a federal program emerged that has long been considered a prime example of the government operating at its best. It was in 1938 that Congress passed the Wagner-O'Day Act, signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 25 of that year. The law gave an opportunity to nonprofit agencies employing people who were blind to provide the federal government with products, as long as those organizations were able to deliver them on time, to strict specifications and at a fair market price. On August 10 of that year, a group of leaders in the blindness community founded National Industries for the Blind (NIB) to be the central nonprofit agency and liaison between government procuring agencies and organizations employing people who are blind.

Due to the successes of NIB and our associated agencies, these opportunities were expanded to organizations serving persons with other severe disabilities, when Congress

amended the legislation in 1971 as the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act. Today, known as the AbilityOne® Program, the rules of participation in the program include quality and delivery of products and services, fair market prices, limited impact on a current government contractor's business, and adherence to all federal and state workplace regulations.

As NIB celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2013, it is important to renew our commitment to our mission of enhancing opportunities for economic and personal independence of persons who are blind by creating, sustaining and improving employment. Doing so includes the process of celebrating our roots and history, nurtured by generations before us.

NIB is proud to publish *Empowering People*, which traces the history of NIB and its associated agencies from our beginnings to modern times. Our story reflects not only the diversity of the people we serve, but also the diversity of their career aspirations, and how NIB and our associated agencies have embraced their desires and drawn on their untapped capabilities.

Earlier histories were authored in 1966 by Robert LeFevre, the first executive director of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission®, and brought up-to-date in *Creating Jobs, Changing Lives* in 1988 by Irving Dickman, an experienced author in the healthcare field. But so much more has occurred in the last 25 years with advances in technology and NIB's learning and development programs, which created more di-

verse employment opportunities. These initiatives have had a profound impact on career opportunities for people who are blind, helping the high achievers in the NIB family advance into supervisory, management and executive positions.

NIB was founded on the ideals that every American should have equal access to opportunities for economic and personal development, and our success over 75 years is proof of the enduring power of these beliefs. There is no doubt that we have come a long way from our very first steps back in 1938, but we are still a long way from achieving full employment for every American who is blind and wants to work. As we celebrate our diamond jubilee, we look forward to continuing to work to advance the interests of people who are blind.

Kevin A. Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer

August 10, 2013

Chapter 1

Their Legacy

Seventy-five years is a long time in any life. In the life of NIB, the past 75 years have seen many changes in what people who are blind have accomplished. Today's employees in NIB associated agencies are professionals in their own right. They are capable, bright and accomplished, and often have a clearer picture of their career paths than others around them.

But it wasn't always this way. There was a time when there were very few opportunities, if any, for a person who was blind to find meaningful and steady employment.

In many respects, the history of the blindness movement in the United States followed the country's social, political and economic climate. The Industrial Revolution that began in Great Britain and spread throughout the United States and the rest of the world in the early 19th century had a profound effect on Americans. Innovations in textiles, steam power, machinery and transportation led to the growth of industries. Ordinary citizens found increased opportunities for employment, leading to massive changes in the social, economic and cultural conditions of the times. The average income of

Americans and the population of cities began to exhibit unprecedented and sustained growth. But during this time, little attention was given to the needs of the blind population for education, training and employment.

An early solution came in the mid-19th century when the first industrial program was established to serve the growing needs of people who were blind. Because there was limited transportation available, employees were housed nearby in boarding homes. Soon after, similar facilities sprang up in major cities around the country. By 1908, there were 16 homes and industries in existence. Their total sales were \$311,000, hardly enough to provide steady work and living wages to their 583 employees. To sustain these programs, managers had to find markets for the products, which were mostly hand-made baskets, rugs and brooms. However, a strong competitor — the federal prisons — made it difficult for industries for the blind to maintain a share of the broom business.

These industries soon competed among themselves for a portion of the business, which impacted the working conditions and wages of employees. And because of inconsistent sales, financial institutions viewed these organizations as risky investments, making modernization, industrial production or expansion almost impossible.

It was clear that drastic action was needed if there was to be any hope of transforming these under-capitalized, small producers of handcrafted items into sound business ventures. That action came in the late 1930s from three men, two of whom were blind.



Peter J. Salmon, executive director of The Industrial Home for the Blind (now Helen Keller Services for the Blind).

Born in Hudson, Massachusetts, in 1895, Peter J. Salmon was not aware that he was “different” from other boys and did not realize he could not see as well until he was placed at the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind at the age of nine. Graduating in 1916, Salmon developed a burning zeal to improve opportunities for people who were blind, particularly those who were deaf-blind. He joined The Industrial Home for the Blind in 1917 and moved up to the position of executive director. His first national efforts to improve conditions came in 1928, when he testified before Congress and urged members to pass legislation to restrict the sale of prison-made goods at low prices in the open market. During this time, Salmon developed friendships with the chief of

Federal Prison Industries, leaders of the National Association of Broom Manufacturers and the executive director of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB). These friendships later proved invaluable in securing a federal market for industries serving people who are blind.



Dr. Robert B. Irwin, executive director of the American Foundation for the Blind.

Salmon's passion was matched by Robert B. Irwin's spirit and intelligence. At age five, inflammatory rheumatism left him totally blind. He graduated from Washington State School for the Blind and won a scholarship to Harvard Graduate School. Irwin began his career in education and eventually joined AFB. His work chairing the Subcommittee of the Surgeon General on War Blinded and the World Conference on Work for the Blind in New York brought him international prominence.



Moses C. Migel, first president of the American Foundation for the Blind, first chairman of the NIB Board and first private-citizen representative on the Committee on Purchases of Blind-Made Products, which operates today as the U.S. AbilityOne Commission®.

It was Salmon's vision of creating a steady market for products that inspired AFB's President Moses C. Migel to join the cause. In 1937, Salmon wrote to Migel, "I don't think that AFB could possibly do anything that would result in more jobs [for people who are blind] in a shorter period of time than getting federal and state governments to purchase the brooms and mops they make."

A philanthropist, Migel was a man of broad business experience and national prominence. A pioneer who advocated for the needs of servicemen who were blinded during World War I, Migel became the first chairman of the AFB Board and lobbied for free railroad transportation for all guide dogs, as

well as federal appropriations for Braille literature and Talking Books. He also sponsored a conference in London where uniform English Braille was adopted, and financed the operation of a summer camp for young girls who were blind.

Inspired by Salmon's dream, Migel prevailed upon his good friend, Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York, to introduce a bill in the Senate that would establish the federal government as a steady market for industries employing people who are blind. New York's Congresswoman Caroline Love Goodwin O'Day, a close friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, championed the cause in the House.



Senator Robert F. Wagner with Helen Keller who, when learning of the passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act, wrote to M. C. Migel, "What especially delights me is that through the passage of Bill S-2819 and the formation of National Industries for the Blind, people with little or no sight are being brought into the life of the community as useful and increasingly self-reliant human beings."



*Representative Caroline Love Goodwin O'Day (rear seat)
with President Franklin D. Roosevelt (front seat).*

All of these visionaries — Salmon, Irwin, Migel, Wagner and O'Day — knew that Salmon's vision was not a request for a government subsidy, but simply an opportunity to demonstrate the capabilities of people who are blind. Salmon's dream became reality when President Roosevelt signed the Wagner-O'Day Act on June 25, 1938.

Everyone has a legacy — something they can leave behind for which they will always be remembered. For these visionaries, their legacy dramatically shaped opportunities for economic and personal independence for thousands of Americans who were blind or had other severe disabilities in the following decades.

Chapter 2

The Early Years

Two days prior to the passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act, leaders from 20 organizations met at the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) in New York City. They came from as far west as Colorado to discuss the implementation of the new law and the provisions of the bill. At that meeting, the representatives formed an advisory group and elected Peter Salmon as its first chairman. More significantly, they made several important decisions — agreeing that a system would have to be established for the allocation of large government orders to the agencies, a certification process would have to be developed to ensure that the agencies were actual employers of people who are blind, and these agencies would pay a central nonprofit organization a small fee on all government orders to support the costs of the program. As a result, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) was incorporated in the state of New York on August 10, 1938, to serve as the central nonprofit agency to distribute the orders and administer the program.

Chester C. Kleber, who was employed by AFB as director

of its Talking Book program, took charge of NIB as general manager. He was a natural for the job, bringing talent and experience to the task of bringing reality to all of these ideas.



Chester C. Kleber, NIB's first general manager.

Presidential Appointments

The Wagner-O'Day Act directed the President of the United States to appoint a Committee on Purchases of Blind-Made Products, comprised of representatives from the departments of War, Agriculture, Treasury, Commerce, Interior and Navy, along with a private citizen conversant with the employment of people who are blind. The Act also empowered the Committee to fix a fair market price for each product and establish rules and regulations as deemed necessary for the effective implementation of the Act.

The President quickly appointed leaders from these federal departments and asked Helen Keller to serve as the first civilian member. She declined due to her other extensive work commitments, so at the urging of President Roosevelt, Migel accepted the appointment. Just one month after passage of the Act, the Committee convened its first meeting on July 26, 1938, and elected Rear Admiral Christian Joy Peoples, director of the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department, as chairman. Peoples appointed Robert LeFevre, his assistant at the Treasury Department, as the first secretary of the Committee.



Robert LeFevre, first secretary, Committee on Purchases of Blind-Made Products (known today as the U.S. AbilityOne Commission®).

The Committee on Purchases called its second meeting on December 21, 1938, to adopt the regulations prepared by LeFevre, Migel and Committee members representing the Navy and War departments. They included requirements that “at least 75 percent of the direct labor of production of such commodity shall have been performed by the blind” and defined the required nonprofit status of participating agencies. The Committee also took another important action at that meeting by approving the items and prices for purchase by the federal government. LeFevre issued the first “Schedule of Blind-Made Products” to federal ordering offices on January 1, 1939. It contained two products — corn brooms and cotton mops.

The list of items grew quickly. On September 14, 1939, Migel wrote to his good friends Senator Wagner and Congresswoman O’Day, “I presume that legislators who have bills passed in Congress would enjoy hearing the result, particularly if they prove beneficial and successful....I take pleasure, therefore, in referring to the Wagner-O’Day bill, S-2819, which you sponsored on behalf of the blind workers of the country. Thus far in a period of eight months, the following blind-made products have been purchased by government agencies: 348,768 wet mops, 52,306 corn brooms, 34,391 whisk brooms, 703,464 pillowcases, 589 deck swabs, 126 sanitary swabs, 2,997 cocoa mats — giving employment to 150 blind men and women.”

Proving Their Capabilities

By the end of 1939, 36 nonprofit agencies furnished \$221,000 worth of products to the federal government. The years that followed were valuable learning ones. The agencies gained some basic quality control and mass production experience. They proved their capabilities in meeting the government's delivery schedules and strict quality standards. By the end of 1940, \$3.1 million in sales were realized under the Act. More important, employment became steady, rather than the intermittent two or three-day work week experienced in earlier years.

With the entry of the United States into World War II, adequate war production became a national necessity. Kleber led the associated agencies through the enormous task of the World War II defense build-up, which played a major role in supplying the Armed Forces with critical items. And while Kleber was eager to build more business and employment, he was also cautious about assigning projects to associated agencies that had no proven capability of manufacturing the product in accordance with federal specifications, stating, "If you do ship articles that fail to meet the specifications, they will be rejected and returned to you....we cannot endanger the whole plan for the sake of a few that are inefficient." His leadership was instrumental in resolving procurement difficulties and in proving the capabilities of associated agencies during the war. More than 40 million pillowcases, 21 million mailing bags, 13 million brooms, 21 million mops and 6 million deck

swabs were delivered between 1941 and 1945. Some associated agencies were recognized by the military for their performance with the Army-Navy Production Award for exceptional performance on the “production front,” an honor that firmly established NIB associated agencies as reliable suppliers.



The first of three stars for the Army-Navy E pennant was awarded on June 6, 1944 to The Industrial Home for the Blind (now Helen Keller Services for the Blind) in Brooklyn, New York, for excellence in support of the war effort. Commander William J. Strachan, USN, presented the star to a group of employees.

NIB Services Grew

Just five years after its formation, NIB moved far beyond the mere allocation of government orders into providing product development and pricing assistance, offering central purchasing of pillowcase material, coordinating interagency sales, monitoring compliance with the Committee’s regulations and marketing the law to federal agencies. In a December 8, 1943 memo to Irwin, Kleber pointed out that no individual agency can afford to spend this amount of money on experimen-

tal work and, “It is only through the cooperative efforts of the agencies functioning through National Industries for the Blind that this work can be done.”

Post War Planning

By the end of 1943, a Post War Planning Committee, comprised of 16 agency leaders, met with NIB representatives in Chicago to plan for peacetime co-existence. The proceedings of that meeting indicated the belief that “by July 1944, Germany would be out of the war and Japan would follow the end of 1945. The government would begin to terminate some of its war contracts, and the purchases of all federal departments will have a decided drop.” This committee unanimously agreed that NIB should initiate a retail sales program to expand into commercial markets.

At that time, the agencies also looked toward states and municipalities as potential markets and agreed to take immediate steps to secure state-use laws, similar to the federal Wagner-O’Day Act. But one of the most important outcomes of this meeting was an agreement to charge NIB with the responsibility of selecting agencies to manufacture new products for the government. Prior to this, all agencies were qualified for new government business, which resulted in too many agencies making pillowcases for the war effort. Cooperation in this respect would enhance their competitiveness in commercial markets on the basis of greater volume and afford the employees higher productivity and steadier wages.

Under the leadership of Peter Salmon, this advisory group met often and acquired unity of purpose. Their close working relationship with the Committee was affirmed in a telegram on March 19, 1942, to LeFevre from Salmon upon his return from an advisory group meeting. It read in part, "I have been asked to express to you...the very sincere appreciation for your untiring efforts in connection with the operation of the Wagner-O'Day Act. The program has meant more than can ever be put into words....Please accept our hearty personal esteem and unbounded gratitude for all you have done. This is the wish of the entire conference."

This advisory group of NIB associated agencies is known today as the National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind and continues to work effectively with NIB on a common mission of creating meaningful career opportunities for people who are blind.

Following the prosperous war years, government orders predictably plunged from an average of \$8.5 million per year to \$586,000 in 1946. In spite of this, the agencies positioned themselves to sustain employment by developing sales in other markets.

Chapter 3

More Products, More Jobs

From mops and brooms, the federal procurement list was expanding rapidly as NIB associated agencies increased employment by taking on the production of more items — from small sewn items to large bedding products, such as box springs and mattresses.

By 1949, federal purchasing was increasing, too, and the government established the Bureau of Federal Supply (today known as the General Services Administration), which took over all central purchasing for the government from the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department. NIB opened an office in Washington, D.C., to maintain close ties with this important customer.

In the next decade, NIB's role expanded as the liaison to the federal government for its associated agencies, and it became a clearinghouse of information, passing the expertise of one associated agency to another — all united under a common mission.

Military Resale Market

In the 1950s, government business fluctuated up and down from a low of \$3.4 million to more than \$14 million per year. With these erratic government buying patterns, NIB initiated steps to broaden markets through sales in military commissaries. Many agencies already produced household items that were sold to the general public, so reaching the military family shopper seemed like the next logical step. After years of developing distribution and marketing strategies, the first products reached display shelves in 1955. Wax applicators, dish and polishing cloths, door mats, clothespin bags and many other household products were displayed in commissaries. These consumer products began to be manufactured under the NIB registered trade name SKILCRAFT®, a symbol of high quality to the consumer. Customer response was immediate, and sales served as a stimulus to introduce more products. By 1957, NIB reported that commissary sales provided more than 270,000 hours of employment per year.



Early and modern versions of the SKILCRAFT® logo.

Today, there are more than 650 household products sold in military commissaries and exchanges and made by approxi-

mately 400 people who are blind. A variety of kitchen gadgets, sponges, scrubbers, rubber gloves, candles, dish towels, pot holders and cleaning products make up the line. Distribution is handled through an experienced broker who works closely with NIB in calling on the Defense Commissary Agency, which operates the 248 commissaries located worldwide, to introduce new products, oversee merchandising and set up displays. In this competitive market, NIB and its associated agencies have continually introduced new items and upgraded current products, packaging and merchandising to appeal to customers. Over the years, the SKILCRAFT logo has been redesigned several times, and its strong brand recognition resulted in it eventually being adopted for use on most commodity products provided today by NIB associated agencies to the federal government and the military.

Sanitation Kits

When Kleber died in 1960, Bob Goodpasture, an engineer with industrial marketing experience, was recruited from industry to head NIB operations. One of the first large projects facing him was performance on a major federal contract of \$7.7 million for sanitation kits used in fallout shelters during the Cuban missile crisis. During 1963, seven associated agencies assembled more than a million sanitation kits for the federal bomb shelter program. Goodpasture proudly reported that “The success of the contract provided far-reaching effects on the thinking of government and industry with regard to the capacities and abilities of NIB...”

Skilcraft
FALL-OUT SHELTER
SANITATION KIT
Diameter — 16 1/2" Height — 21 1/2"
Gross Weight — 18 lbs.

CONTENTS*

Toilet Tissue	10 rolls
Commode Seat	1
Can Opener (hand)	1
Sanitary Pads	3 doz.
Sanitary Pads (heavy)	2 doz.
Hand Cleaner	1 can
Gloves (polyethylene)	1 per
Water Dipping Spoon	1
Wire Bag Closure	2
Cups & Lids, plastic	80 each
Commode Chemical	1 quart
Bag Liner (polyethylene)	1
Instruction Sheets & Cards	

* According to Office of Civilian Defense Specifications for the use of 50 persons for an estimated 2-week period, on an austere basis.

PRODUCTION POINTS

Phoenix, Ariz.	Binghamton, N. Y.
Baltimore, Md.	Brooklyn, N. Y.
Kansas City, Mo.	Greensboro, N. C.
	Cleveland, Ohio

PRICE
\$9.17 per kit
F.O.B. point of origin
Special discount in lots of 100 or more
Prices subject to change without notice.

Sanitation kits produced for the federal government during the Cuban missile crisis in the 1960s.

National Consumer Sales Program

For several years, the program had leveled off on a plateau, and associated agencies were looking for new avenues to expand employment. They were primarily interested in a national consumer sales program. Goodpasture brought NIB from a position of extreme conservatism to a new era of taking risks to increase employment. Under his leadership, NIB responded by developing an all-encompassing marketing program to expand the SKILCRAFT household product line. Besides the redesign of the logo, coordinated packaging and extensive market studies, NIB pursued a commercial approach to mar-

keting products through the rack-jobbing field. By 1969, 1,500 racks were installed in supermarkets in five major market areas, creating an annual sales volume of \$1.8 million.



NIB's fleet of SKILCRAFT® trucks at one of its warehouses distributed products to retail stores in the late 1960s.

The Power of a Little Pen

It was Heinz Abersfeller, the GSA Commissioner, who presented NIB with its next major challenge. In 1967, GSA found itself with 13 million defective retractable ball point pens and decided to look for a more reliable supplier. Abersfeller offered NIB the opportunity for its associated agencies to supply GSA with 70 million ball point pens a year, beginning in 1969.

With this extraordinary chance to increase employment, NIB staff visited a number of commercial plants around the country that were engaged in the production of ball point pens and components. Certain facts became clear. Ball point pens could be successfully and competitively manufactured in associated agencies utilizing at least 75 percent blind labor. To produce 70 million pens and refills annually required a division

of the work among four associated agencies. Performance specifications were high, inspection strict and tight quality control was essential. Since it was not feasible for each associated agency to set up its own laboratory facility, NIB decided to provide complete testing facilities.

For the first time in its 30-year history, NIB was designated as the prime contractor for these items, rather than allocating them among the agencies. A contract was negotiated with each of the four agencies to serve as a subcontractor to NIB in filling the government's requirements.

For all steps in the manufacturing of ball point pens, NIB selected commercially available equipment that was most readily adaptable to operators who were blind. To maximize employment, NIB used some degree of automation in the equipment selection in order to supply the product at a competitive price. NIB staff designed equipment layouts and full-scale templates. Installation and training followed on side-clipping machines, hot-stamp printers and assembly machines, as well as pen-testing and packaging equipment. Pens soon started rolling off the production lines in Greensboro, North Carolina; Kansas City, Missouri; Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Phoenix, Arizona. Later the operations in Phoenix were transferred to the Lighthouse for the Blind in St. Louis, Missouri.



U.S. government ball point pen.

Meanwhile, NIB set up and equipped a product testing laboratory in St. Louis, designed to perform all of the 28 separate tests required by the ball point pen specification — resistance to light and fading, temperature and humidity conditions, flame resistance and the ability to write continuously for a mile.

Within a year, the ball point pen project provided employment for 166 employees, 133 of whom were blind. By May 1970, the agencies met the GSA Commissioner's challenge by delivering 70 million ball point pens and refills to the government. Its original design of a brass ink tube, plastic barrel, along with its tungsten carbide and cobalt ball has changed little over the decades, and although sales in recent years have given way to rubberized comfort grip, gel and felt-tip pens, the ball point pen has remained a best seller with the government.

But the most significant aspect of the project was the outstanding quality of the pen produced by employees in NIB associated agencies. The ball point pen story shifted GSA's perceptions about the capabilities of NIB associated agencies and paved the way for dozens of new writing instruments to be introduced in the following decades, including a vast array of gel ink and roller ball pens, grease pencils, markers, highlighters, mechanical and wood-cased pencils, as well as a line of executive quality writing instruments. And when the government was seeking more planet-friendly products, NIB associated agencies introduced SKILCRAFT BioWrite® writing instruments, which continue to be produced today. Made of corn starch-based, renewable, sustainable resin, the barrels

are refillable for environmentally friendly use and are biodegradable in landfill conditions of heat, water, soil and microbes.

Demonstration and Training Facility

A few years prior to taking on the ball point pen project, NIB acquired the Modglin Company, a leading housewares manufacturer in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Incorporated in 1966 in the state of Mississippi as Modglin-Maid, Inc. (and later renamed as Royal Maid Association for the Blind), the nonprofit company enabled NIB to convert the two plants into additional manufacturing facilities and employ people with severe visual disabilities. As a demonstration project, it promised to open opportunities for training people who were blind in two new fields — plastics fabrication and metal stampings. As Royal Maid produced metal or plastic components for consumer products, it supplied other NIB associated agencies with these components, thus ensuring that the entire end product will be totally “blind-made.” Early in the process, Royal Maid was making and supplying components to 18 other NIB associated agencies. But it took three years for the organization to reach the required 75 percent labor performed by blind employees to qualify for federal contracts under the Wagner-O’Day Program and a few more years after that to add its first item to the federal procurement list.

The results were impressive. The initiative proved that NIB could establish a model demonstration and training center that would be beneficial to other associated agencies. It also

demonstrated rehabilitation principles in an industrial setting where innovative vocational evaluation techniques were developed to manufacture components suitable for assembly in other associated agencies.

Royal Maid shared its expertise in the areas of metal stamping, plating, plastic extrusion and injection molding with other associated agencies. Its work proved that the plastics industry held many employment possibilities for people who are blind.

The facility also served as the lead agency in NIB's Develop and Relocate Program, which helped small emerging associated agencies that did not have the capability to research, develop and engineer a project on its own to get started. The concept was to take a brand-new item and place it at Royal Maid where NIB and Royal Maid staff would determine the work station layout, formulate all job descriptions, develop jigs and fixtures, video tape complete operations and, once tested and proven, transfer the project to the smaller agency where the staff would be trained to produce the item successfully. The small agency benefitted from receiving a complete production "package" with proven production procedures.

Royal Maid became a thriving operation under the leadership of its President John Granger — so much so that NIB divested itself entirely of Royal Maid's operations in 1985. By the time of Granger's retirement a decade later, Royal Maid was providing employment to more than 400 men and women who were blind or had severe disabilities in nine locations

throughout the state of Mississippi.



NIB's demonstration facility, Royal Maid Association for the Blind in Hazlehurst, Mississippi.

Dramatic Results

During the 1960s, NIB initiated a number of new programs and special projects. The ball point pen and sanitation kit projects were successful, but the rack jobbing program proved to be a financial drain and ultimately discontinued. More importantly, the vital statistics of that period were impressive with the number of associated agencies growing from 56 to 77, work years for people who are blind doubling from 2,071 to 4,274, and government and commercial sales doubling to \$49 million by the end of the decade.

Research and Development Center

A few years prior to the start of the ball point pen project, NIB established a facility in St. Louis with the intent of making it the headquarters for all marketing, merchandising and sales for the SKILCRAFT rack and Military Resale programs. But the success of the pen project and difficulties of the rack program caused a major transformation of this facility into a technical center. Rather than continuing to develop the consumer market, the focus shifted to developing products that would create a high volume of sales to the federal government. NIB associated agencies added mail carriers' straps, squeegee scrapers, catheters, disinfectant detergents, surgical shaving kits, duffel bags, first-aid field cases, soldier helmet chin straps and other products to the federal procurement list.

In 1981, NIB undertook another huge project — bringing the paper conversion business within the capabilities of its associated agencies. To do this, NIB engineers designed and built a special machine, called a ferris wheel, which was tested at the Technical Center, then disassembled and reassembled at the producing agency. Within a week after installation, one agency produced 198,000 paper towels per day.

The Technical Center continued to provide value with the addition of more products to the federal procurement list. It acquired prototype tooling to manufacture plastic knives, forks and spoons; worked out design and production problems; and turned the project over to an associated agency. The agencies began to take greater advantage of NIB's engineers

and, as a result, the Technical Center added lab testing for selected materials, components and finished items; provided technical guidance on quality control; analyzed information of new products; recommended assignment of new products to specific agencies; conducted technical training seminars on quality control and product development; and provided assistance in equipment selection, installation, maintenance and operation.

By the early 1980s, the center's quality assurance staff was performing 10,000 tests per year in support of associated agencies producing items for the government. As its responsibilities increased, the center's physical facilities increased. In 1976, the center moved to a 9,000-square-foot building.

In the mid-1980s, NIB's President George Mertz convinced the Board that the key to employment growth would be expansion into new product lines. An expanded Technical Center, additional technical engineers, prototype manufacturing processes and additional training would support this goal. By 1986, NIB constructed a new 26,000-square-foot building as part of its long-range plan to develop more sophisticated product lines, particularly with computerized pattern makers, cutting machines and sewing equipment. The plans also included exploring many non-traditional areas, such as chemicals, electronics, rubber and plastics for government procurement.

The results of these efforts paid off in the following decades when NIB associated agencies added binders, file fold-

ers, portfolios, bookends, clocks, clipboards, printer cartridges, shredders and a vast line of paper pads, tablets, loose-leaf paper and self-stick note pads to the procurement list. As the need for on-site testing increased, the center downsized its quality assurance lab, assisted associated agencies in establishing their own quality assurance laboratories and provided training for personnel.

Planet Friendly Products

Initiatives to engineer the next generation of products that are more friendly to the planet have also played a large role in more sustainable sanitary and janitorial products, including absorbents, chemical cleaners and degreasers, food service disposables, personal care cleaners and trash can liners. By incorporating biobased technologies, SKILCRAFT biobased flatware used for military dining packets are made with 50 percent wheat-based raw materials to replace plastic content, which makes the flatware biodegradable and disposable. Many janitorial and sanitary products, such as carpet and upholstery cleaners, floor cleaners and hand soap, have been redesigned to earn federal certification for environmental responsibility.



Modern and environmentally friendly products produced in NIB associated agencies.

Today, NIB associated agencies provide more than \$175 million in office products to the federal government through the AbilityOne® Program with writing instrument sales accounting for \$33 million of that amount. From the early years of assembling ball point pens to a full line of environmentally responsible office products, NIB and its associated agencies continue to bring together style, innovation and expertise to offer a diverse line of SKILCRAFT products to customers.

Chapter 4

Diversifying the Business

While business with the federal government under the Wagner-O'Day Program was growing fast, it was not without challenges. Orders surged during World War II and the Korean War, only to plummet at the end of these conflicts. One major obstacle to securing new products was financing equipment for their production.

In the 1950s and '60s, some associated agencies started to seek work from large and small commercial companies and performed subcontract jobs, such as assembling parts or packaging for computer, air conditioning, refrigeration and other equipment manufacturers. Their proven records of quality and production for the federal government laid the foundation for marketing the capabilities of NIB associated agencies outside the federal marketplace.

Subcontracting with Big Business

One NIB associated agency, The Minneapolis Society for the Blind (MSB), secured a subcontract for employees to thread screws for thermostat controls and to cut and deburr copper

coils for refrigeration and air-conditioning equipment for Minneapolis Honeywell. The employees performed so well that they received the Minneapolis Honeywell STEP (Strive for Error-Free Performance) award for outstanding quality control in subcontract work.

In other subcontract operations, employees stripped and twisted wires for Control Data Corporation, a major computer company in the 1960s, performed electrical assembly for IBM and assembled film drying equipment for Pako Corporation. They also sewed in-flight pillowcases for North Central Airlines, various cloths for Pillsbury and Cusom Inc. and yacht seats for a boating equipment firm. MSB eventually became the main packing center for IBM, and about 100 manufacturers of parts for IBM machines sent their material directly to MSB for packaging.

At the Cincinnati Association for the Blind, employees packed premiums — a million pens — offered with Procter & Gamble's products. A production line at Blind Industries and Services of Maryland assembled and packaged millions of gift items sent out by American Sugar Refining. The Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle was already doing an annual volume of over \$2 million in sub-assembly contracts for Boeing Aircraft and served some 50 other companies, including Kaiser, General Electric, and Pacific Car and Foundry.

Leading distillers, such as Schenley, Seagram's and National Distillers, utilized NIB associated agencies in Baltimore, Louisville, Pittsburgh and Cincinnati to assemble more than

17 million decanters. Contracts increased for fitting glass bottle tops with plastic collars and corks.

Many NIB associated agencies installed plastic “blistering” or automatic heat-sealing machines, filling contracts with Eaton Manufacturing and Mid-West Laminating Company to package radiator caps and thermostats in the blisters. Arizona Industries for the Blind secured a subcontract to assemble pontoon bridge panels for Allison Steel Company.

Meanwhile, NIB obtained contracts with Sherwin-Williams, Pan American Airways and other national firms to secure more work for associated agencies.

Teaming Up with Small Business

The search for more business to employ more people was not limited to large corporations. NIB associated agencies partnered with small companies, too, which proved to be mutually beneficial to all parties involved — in both the federal and commercial markets.

When NIB took on the manufacture of black retractable ball point pens for the federal government in 1969, it found a small manufacturer of pen parts in New Jersey to help with the design. Rotary Pen continues to be a valued partner, supplying components for this product.

Today, many similar mutually beneficial relationships exist. Rocky Mountain Ram, a woman-owned, small disadvantaged business in Colorado, teams up with North Central Sight Services in Pennsylvania to make a comprehensive line of

computer flash drives. ABM Federal, a service-disabled veteran-owned company, which specializes in information technology hardware and consumable supplies, has become a distributor of products made in NIB associated agencies. SDV Command Source, a service-disabled, veteran-owned, small business, partners with Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina to provide optical eyewear manufacturing and services for the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as cut-and-sew dress uniform T-shirts for the U.S. Coast Guard. Cotton Medical Group works with Bosma Enterprises in Indiana to provide federal customers with LED lighting, hearing aids, and health and safety products. Alliance Rubber Company, a woman-owned small business and producer of high-quality rubber bands, expanded its distribution network to more than 225 military base stores and 300 office supply dealers by teaming up with the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in New York.

A 2008 national survey of NIB associated agencies showed consistent collaboration with small businesses, leading to increased efficiencies for all parties. The results demonstrated that the relationship between NIB and the small business community is highly complementary rather than competitive. One key finding was that NIB associated agencies purchased almost 42 percent of all raw materials and components from small businesses, nearly double the 23 percent small business procurement goal established by Congress for the federal government as a whole. The survey also indicated that

67 percent of work subcontracted by NIB associated agencies was to small businesses, and approximately 64 percent of NIB associated agencies have served as partners with small businesses in new product or service development.

Co-Branded Products

One of the more recent win-win partnerships with big businesses started more than 20 years ago when NIB brought 3M Corporation together with the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill Industries of Greater Rochester (ABVI) to make self-stick notes for the federal government. ABVI had to demonstrate capabilities to a world-class organization with a very strong brand identity and also convince the General Services Administration that ABVI employees were capable of making the product, using 3M™ materials, up to the same quality standards. NIB worked closely with ABVI on the project. Special adaptations to the manufacturing equipment were designed for precise cutting operations, which employees then packed, boxed and shipped. That particular partnership between 3M and ABVI flourished. Today, ABVI manufactures 36 different types of SKILCRAFT® self-stick pads for 3M. But as importantly, it led to more alliances between 3M and other NIB associated agencies.



Setting her sights high, Joanna Richardson of ABVI-Goodwill Industries of Greater Rochester was the first person who is totally blind to operate the milling cutter, making self-stick notes. Today, 25 years later, Richardson is supervisor of ABVI's call center.

The Louisiana Association for the Blind produces co-branded SKILCRAFT/3M Peel-and-Stick safety-walk strips for passageways on U.S. Navy ships. The Beacon Lighthouse in Texas makes various floor pads, griddle screens and other cleaning products using 3M materials. New York City Industries for the Blind uses 3M microfiber materials to make cleaning products for the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Cincinnati Association for the Blind has been using 3M materials to make masking and filament tapes since 1996. Several other associated agencies have formed partnerships with

3M to make desktop cellophane, double-sided and electrical tapes, privacy filters, and sponges and microfiber cloths – all using 3M materials, marketed under both the SKILCRAFT and 3M trade names.

Co-branding is also popular with NIB associated agencies that produce cleaning products. The Lighthouse of Houston has been in the chemical filling business since 1973 and eventually partnered with SC Johnson to launch products under SC Johnson's brand name and generic product names. This partnership opened the door for other NIB associated agencies to develop formal co-branding relationships with commercial companies. The Travis Association for the Blind in Texas and Gojo cobrand their skin care products using the SKILCRAFT brand with Gojo®, PURELL® and MICRELL® brand names.

The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired teamed up with Kensington Computer Products Group to offer a line of ergonomic office products to the federal market. Kensington, the technology division of ACCO Brands Corporation, provides its ergonomic products in component form to the Lighthouse where the products are assembled and packaged by people who are blind.

NIB connected The Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle with ACCO to make dry erase and cork wallboards. The partnership was a win-win, because it brought jobs back to the United States, which meant ACCO would be compliant with the Trade Agreement Act. And with this work, the Lighthouse was able to open a satellite facility in Spokane, Washington, which

provides employment to more than 40 employees who are blind, deaf-blind or blind with other disabilities.

Today, mutually beneficial partnerships also exist between NIB associated agencies and Avery®, Accentra®, Spartan®, Kimberly-Clark Professional®, Rochester Midland®, Lysol®, Jiffy Mailer® and other prominent brands.

These win-win relationships with businesses in similar and complementary industries have provided enormous benefits by enabling the commercial businesses and NIB associated agencies to combine resources, gain more marketplace exposure, share promotion costs, strengthen both brands, build customer loyalty and develop new capabilities. In many ways, the customer can purchase a better quality, competitively priced, American-made product. Over the decades, it has proven to be just another way that NIB associated agencies create and sustain employment opportunities for people who are blind.

Chapter 5

The Amendments

The 1960s were a period of dramatic growth in employment of people who are blind in NIB associated agencies. It was clear that the Wagner-O'Day Act was fulfilling its original purpose, especially when comparing the first few products on the federal procurement list – brooms and mops – to the hundreds of products that were being made in the late 1960s by NIB associated agencies. These successes drew more and more attention from leaders of agencies serving people with other severe disabilities, who called on NIB for assistance in creating a federal market for their organizations.

With NIB's cooperation and with support from Senator Jacob Javits of New York, Congress amended the Wagner-O'Day Act in 1971. The significant provisions of the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act stated that agencies serving people who are blind will have first preference, after Federal Prison Industries, over agencies serving people with other severe disabilities in the sales of commodities to the federal government. It provided that services to the federal government be included in the program and gave NIB associated agencies a five-year

priority in that area. After that, agencies serving people who are blind and agencies serving people with severe disabilities would have equal priority for services. And, it provided that military commissaries and exchanges be included among agencies subject to the law.



Senator Jacob K. Javits of New York.

The amendments radically changed the Committee, which was renamed the Committee for Purchase of Products and Services of the Blind and Other Severely Handicapped. Its membership expanded from seven to 14, and a congressional appropriation of \$220,000 provided operating funds to support a staff of eight that first year. Charles W. Fletcher became the Committee's first paid executive director. He wrote new regulations, established procedures for agencies to participate in

the JWOD Act, and worked with NIB and six central nonprofit agencies serving people with other severe disabilities to administer the program.

As time went on, it became evident that the agencies serving people with other severe disabilities would be better served by a single central nonprofit agency, similar to NIB. National Industries for the Severely Handicapped (NISH), known today as SourceAmerica, was established in 1975 for this purpose.

Today, the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled operates as the U.S. AbilityOne Commission®. It is composed of 15 presidential appointees – 11 represent federal agencies, and four are private citizens knowledgeable about employment challenges faced by people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. Day-to-day operations are carried out by a full-time staff, led by a career Senior Executive Service federal employee. And the former JWOD Program, known today as the AbilityOne® Program, brings focus on the abilities of the people served who are provided with opportunities to work.

At the time of the 1971 amendments, leaders of agencies serving people with other severe disabilities asked NIB to expand its role by serving as the central nonprofit agency (CNA) for agencies serving persons with other severe disabilities. This would be in addition to its responsibilities as the CNA for agencies serving people who were blind. The NIB Board grappled with the decision of expanding its mission to serve those with other disabilities. Ultimately the Board opted to support

expand the program to serve people with other severe disabilities, but felt that NIB should remain focused on the training and employment needs of people who are blind. NIB leaders realized that separate and specialized services were the best way to ensure that people with visual impairments had the best access to education, training, rehabilitation and employment services, which would lead to greater economic and personal independence. It is a strong belief in the NIB family that holds true decades later as the organization developed innovative learning and development programs to expand career options for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Chapter 6

Emerging from Crisis

While a lot was taking place on Capitol Hill in 1970 and 1971 with amendments to the Wagner-O'Day Act, NIB was showing signs of severe financial strain from risks taken during the preceding decade. The acquisition of Royal Maid Association for the Blind that was financed with a sizable bank loan, a large exhibit at the New York City World's Fair, the establishment of a Technical Center and the launch of a large-scale consumer sales program brought on heavy expenses. By 1968, NIB increased its central nonprofit agency fee on the sale of government products from three percent to four percent to cover costs. These factors, coupled with a drastic drop in government business from \$22.8 million in 1970 to an expectation of only \$14 million in 1971, forced NIB to take a hard look at its operations and make drastic changes in its leadership as well as its programs.

New Leadership, New Priorities

Noel Price, who several years earlier ran a successful agency in Jackson, Mississippi, was appointed as NIB's vice pres-

ident and general manager. The Board engaged McKinsey & Company, internationally known management consultants, which offered its services at no cost to NIB, to conduct an in-depth study of the organization. The McKinsey team quickly identified key challenges, as well as opportunities, and presented its findings and recommendations to the NIB Board of Directors.

As a result, NIB redirected its emphasis, working to develop its great potential with the government and military resale markets. To accomplish this, it added resources to these areas. Inevitably, other programs were terminated.

Ownership of the commercial rack program was acquired by one of NIB's associated agencies, and the program eventually closed. NIB's military resale warehouse was taken over by another associated agency. The Research and Development Laboratory in St. Louis, which focused on the marketing and development of commercial products, was temporarily closed. Technical personnel were reassigned to develop products for the government market. Greater emphasis was placed on the military resale program, and services to the military stores improved by implementation of a worldwide brokerage program. NIB cut 43 staff positions with these changes, 20 of whom were employees eliminated by closure of the commercial rack program.

Financial Assistance

These belt-tightening steps were supplemented with emer-

gency financial help from an old friend — the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB). Largely through the efforts of AFB's Chairman Jansen Noyes, Jr., NIB received a \$160,000 grant from AFB to reduce the long-term indebtedness resulting from NIB's purchase of Royal Maid. Later, NIB insisted on fully repaying AFB for this financial assistance. In addition, loans of \$230,000 from 31 associated agencies helped NIB retire a \$200,000 bank loan and meet other urgent financial obligations.

Renewed and Revitalized

The policies and changes instituted in 1971 produced substantial results within a year. Government sales were rebuilt in 1972 to \$20.7 million from a low of \$14.8 million the prior year. This dramatic increase was accomplished by the addition of a record number of new products added to the federal procurement list. The worldwide military brokerage program initiated by NIB became progressively more effective and played an important role in increasing sales to military resale stores by nine percent.

With financial stability regained, NIB started to repay loans made by associated agencies ahead of schedule, having retired all loans by the end of 1973. After a very difficult few years, NIB emerged as a sound, revitalized organization.

Chapter 7

Supporting America's Best

Since its beginnings, NIB has been a driving force in coordinating orders for mission-critical products and services among its associated agencies. World War II firmly established the reputation for NIB associated agencies in providing quality products for the military with sales reaching \$8 million by the war's end. The Korean conflict brought sales to \$14.5 million as NIB associated agencies expanded their capabilities. Meeting the military's requirements during the Vietnam War resulted in \$28.8 million in sales in 1967. But more recent conflicts presented greater challenges.

From Desert Shield to Desert Storm to Desert Peace

When allied troops were sent to Saudi Arabia in August 1990, 10 NIB associated agencies started production of flatware and camouflage textile items critically needed by American troops. By the time the air and ground campaigns were launched, 90 percent of NIB associated agencies were producing products for Operation Desert Storm. Total allocations and orders from August 1990 through February 1991 were \$67 million. Pro-

duction soared with more products shipped to the federal government in a shorter period of time than ever before. As news reports came in from Saudi Arabia, the level of support from NIB associated agencies for the war effort was very evident. President George H. W. Bush was seen eating with troops in Saudi Arabia, using SKILCRAFT® plastic flatware. Troops in the field were seen using canteens, field pack covers, desert neckerchiefs, equipment belts and other commodities — all made by employees in NIB associated agencies.

The response of NIB associated agencies to the challenges created by the conflict was nothing short of tremendous. Many agencies faced the daunting task of having to produce extremely large quantities of items in very short delivery periods. Despite these problems, NIB associated agencies did an outstanding job of supplying the large volume of mission-critical products and delivered them on time.

The quantity of some items required by the government was staggering — one-half million field pack covers and more than one million desert neckerchiefs. Flatware touched all men and women in the Armed Forces, and several NIB associated agencies produced and packaged hundreds of millions of plastic knives, forks and spoons. A special Desert Storm plastic flatware set was shipped by Royal Maid Association for the Blind at the rate of 32 truckloads per month. These agencies operated for many months, seven days a week, 24 hours a day. NIB purchased 30 new flatware packaging machines to help associated agencies keep up with the demand.

The danger of chemical warfare was imminent throughout Desert Storm, forcing troops and their back-up staff to take precautions. Canteen caps, which allowed users to consume liquids through a tube without removing their gas masks, were provided by The Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle. At the Lighthouse, operators who were blind inserted intricate cap components into a grommet to be inserted into the cap in one operation. Three machines with special jigs allowed for a push-button operation and automatic feed of the canteen straps into the bottle and cap. The Seattle Lighthouse provided 50 percent of the military's requirements for canteens during the war.

There were other items produced for Desert Shield and Desert Storm, such as helmet bands, cable assemblies, wheel chocks used for aircraft, mattress pads and covers, traffic safety clothing, detergents, glass cleaners and paper towels.

Many agencies took extraordinary steps including overtime and extra shifts to meet the urgent demands of the military for Desert Storm commodities. There was considerable media coverage of employees supporting the war effort. Television network coverage included ABC World News Tonight, NBC Nightly News and CNN News. Print coverage included feature and front-page stories in major metropolitan newspapers and military publications.

The media coverage caught the attention of many federal, state and local officials who visited agencies producing for the

war effort. Perhaps the most ambitious visitor was Texas Senator Phil Gramm, who visited nearly all of the nine agencies for the blind in his state that were producing for the war. He watched bed sheets and wiping towels being made at East Texas Lighthouse in Tyler. In Dallas, he visited with employees who were making camouflage lanyards. He saw sea markers in production at the Lighthouses in Corpus Christi, Austin and San Angelo. Senator Gramm also visited the San Antonio Association for the Blind, where chin straps for the Kevlar helmet were being produced, and then toured the Southwest Association for the Blind in Lubbock to view production of equipment belt suspenders. At the Beacon Lighthouse in Wichita Falls, he watched employees make aircraft cleaning kits.

But perhaps it was General Colin L. Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who said it best when he spoke at an NIB conference in October 1991.

“I’ve been sent here today by all the men and women who so proudly wear the uniform...to thank you....for all that you have done for us, for your country and for the cause of freedom.

“Desert Shield and Desert Storm highlighted your products. But you’ve been turning them out for us for years. Our troops along the DMZ in Korea and in Europe, our sailors and marines and coastguardsmen far out at sea, and our aircrews flying overhead — everywhere they serve, they depend on you.

“You are...a special kind of American. Blind men and wom-

en of talent, dedication and patriotism. Disabled? Not hardly!

“I congratulate NIB for being in the forefront of the struggle to channel this talent into the mainstream of American life.”

Just as fast as the buildup for the war began, it was over. By May 1991, the surge for products came to an abrupt halt. Although the presence of some allied troops in the Persian Gulf was needed, the quick end to hostilities affected a number of Desert Storm orders. Portions of some orders were cancelled. In other cases, orders that were expected were not issued by the government. Overall, Operation Desert Storm also left some procurement activities with large inventories of certain commodities. This, combined with planned reductions in federal spending, had a negative impact on the size and timing of orders in the following years.

Mission-Critical Medical Products

With decades of experience producing products for the battlefield, in the early 1980s, NIB associated agencies started making items for the bedside. Arizona Industries for the Blind began making Army litters in 1982. The specifications, which have changed over the years, now require that litters support up to 1,600 pounds, yet be extremely portable and collapsible for shipping and storage. The litter is used by the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and American Allies worldwide and is designed to fit into the Army's portable field operating table, also manufactured at Arizona Industries.



James Caldwell, senior CNC (computer numerically controlled) machine operator and machine shop team leader at Arizona Industries for the Blind in Phoenix.

Today, many other NIB associated agencies supply medical products to military hospitals operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Examination table paper, blood pressure cuffs, stethoscopes, pajamas, hospital pillows, specimen containers, prescription bottles, hand sanitizers, suture removal kits, examination and surgical gloves, and tourniquets are among the variety of products, many of which are made and packaged in sterile environments.



Although he has hung up his uniform, former Private First Class Richard Lee, U.S. Army, continues to serve his country making JLIST (Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology) bags at Alabama Industries for the Blind in Talladega.

War on Terrorism

Americans have known wars. But since the Civil War, they have been waged on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor created an unprecedented spirit of patriotism in the United States. Sixty years later, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 renewed that spirit across the country. Employees in NIB associated agencies shared in the grief of the terrorist attacks on civilians in New York; Washington, D.C.; and Pennsylvania. They also felt a common concern for American troops sent to war in the Middle East and accelerated production of critical products to

meet the surge requirements of the Armed Forces. With 60 years of experience under their belt as producers of go-to-war items, NIB associated agencies geared up to provide traditional items such as equipment belts and neckerchiefs, as well as newer, more complex sewn products such as poncho liners, helmet covers and flight deck jerseys.

Over the next few years, employment of people who are blind in NIB associated agencies increased as orders for mission-critical and other products reached record sales levels. Newer products, such as high-visibility parachutes, hydration systems, combat uniforms, extreme cold weather protective garments, and combat and physical training uniforms for various branches of the services, are produced today across the country in NIB associated agencies.



Airmen at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan thank Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind employees for producing the OCP (Operation Enduring Freedom Camouflage Pattern) combat shirt for U.S. warfighters.

On The Home Front

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq created more injuries resulting in blindness than any conflict since the Civil War. As a result, 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.

There are a number of veterans who have worked over the decades in NIB associated agencies. Although they came home and hung up their uniforms, some went blind later in life and found a renewed sense of purpose working in NIB asso-

ciated agencies, still doing their part to support the military by making mission-critical products. And while employment is the common service provided by NIB associated agencies, some agencies started to develop support programs specifically geared toward veterans to help them live independent and fulfilling lives.



Veterans in NewView Oklahoma's VITAL (Veterans' Independence Through Adaptive Living) support group, along with volunteers, visited Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Chapter 8

A Whole New World

Coinciding with NIB's 50th anniversary celebration in 1988, the General Services Administration (GSA), a major customer of NIB associated agencies, implemented industrial funding to reduce costs and financially support its large distribution functions of products to federal and military agencies. It had an immediate impact on employment and sales at NIB associated agencies. Although JWOD was a mandatory source program, there was a growing concern that additional changes in government procurement were creating an environment where SKILCRAFT® products could be bypassed for "essentially-the-same" products produced by other organizations, thus impacting sales and employment in NIB associated agencies.

As one associated agency executive aptly conveyed the feelings of his colleagues, "I used to go to the mailbox to pick up my product orders; now I have to be concerned about marketing, packaging and advertising my products to sustain jobs for our employees!" To respond to these common concerns among agency executives, NIB directed resources for the development of a government marketing program to increase

sales, open new markets and minimize the effect of the new industrial funding system implemented by GSA. For the first time in its history, NIB developed a four-color catalog in 1989 to promote products and services available from NIB associated agencies. It installed a toll-free number with a trained customer service representative to answer customers' questions and promote communication between NIB and GSA customers. NIB staff increased participation in government trade shows, placed articles in government publications, developed a procurement video and compiled a sales database to identify product movement and research government buying patterns.

Multiple Award Schedule

In 1993, Vice President Gore's National Performance Review (NPR) set out to create a government that "works better, costs less and gets results Americans care about." The NPR led an effort that evolved into a broad-based endeavor to move bureaucracy away from complacency and entitlement toward initiative and empowerment. Within a few years, GSA released a Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) for office products. The contract included the 48 contiguous states and required 24-hour, desktop delivery and identified delivery, payment terms, shipping methods and minimum order quantities. While the solicitation supported the JWOD Program in that no commercially similar items would be allowed, it stated that delivery and shipment would be 30 days after receipt of order,

payment would be net 20 days, shipments made F.O.B. Origin and pricing updated quarterly.

NIB developed a central order processing system and selected a contractor. Product descriptions and artwork were refined for use in the distributors' catalogues and staff reviewed distribution catalogs for similar items. GSA awarded the contract to distributors, including Boise Cascade, Office Depot and Staples, which marked up SKILCRAFT products very competitively with GSA. NIB received its first MAS orders, and the associated agencies responded by successfully shipping products. Early on, the MAS became an important distribution channel for SKILCRAFT products with JWOD sales growing from \$421,000 with eight percent of the market in 1997, to \$9.7 million, comprising 15 percent of the market by 2000.

Prior to these changes in the government's procurement practices, NIB associated agencies would receive a contract from the federal government for various products at intermittent intervals and had 60 days to manufacture them. The products were shipped to a GSA depot, and GSA paid associated agencies, even if the products sat in a warehouse for long periods of time. With the MAS, associated agencies adapted to ship product to MAS distributors in 30 days. These distributors marketed products to the federal government agencies, which required next-day, desktop delivery of office products to customers. It required associated agencies to streamline production planning and inventory management systems.

More Procurement Changes

In the past, NIB associated agencies also shipped products such as surgical masks and medical supplies, for hospitals within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system directly to VA depots. With these depots closing, personnel at VA hospitals could only buy products through certain prime vendors. It required NIB to convince the prime vendors to carry SKILCRAFT products and to encourage the purchasing agents at the VA hospitals to ask for SKILCRAFT products when they contact their prime vendors. And with 172 VA hospitals around the country, NIB enlisted the support of its associated agencies to call on government customers in the area.

The Military Resale program also underwent changes during this time with tough price competition on traditional products such as mops, brooms and kitchen gadgets. NIB made changes to consolidate complex administrative, billing and distribution procedures to provide a better edge for SKILCRAFT products in a competitive, commercial-like market.

All of these changes, moving from centralized to decentralized procurement and launching entrepreneurial initiatives, resulted in a less controllable federal procurement system. The traditional government product specifications underwent a dramatic evolution to adopt commercial descriptions. Government employees were empowered as buyers rather than procurement personnel. The disappearance of centralized procurement practices with a specialized workforce of procurement personnel was a concern because procurement

personnel had extensive training in government procurement practices and knew the mandatory requirements of the JWOD program. To complicate matters more, purchase orders were eliminated in favor of issuing hundreds of thousands of credit cards to government employees. NIB increased its marketing staff to lead a concerted effort to participate in government credit card training as a means of educating and reaching out to these newly “empowered” employees.

Many buyer-seller partnerships evolved, as opposed to the arms-length relationships of yesteryear, and negotiations became very price-focused, rather than considering the manufacturing cost of a product. Changes in distribution practices involved direct-vendor delivery and vendor-managed inventory, rather than centralized inventory management and government stocking systems. Government warehousing was being outsourced to third parties, and base supply stores were being managed by the private sector.

The Department of Defense followed with similar changes in procurement practices, requiring among other changes, that purchases less than a \$2,500 micro-purchase level were to be made with the government credit card, with very few exceptions.

Along the way, there was also tremendous cooperation from GSA to support the AbilityOne® Program. GSA Global Supply, one of the largest channels for the sale of SKIL-CRAFT and other AbilityOne products, released a “JWOD Essentials” catalog in 2003 to further promote these prod-

ucts to its customers. The GSA MAS program became one of the fastest-growing distribution channels for SKILCRAFT products. By 2003, there were more than 200 small business and other commercial vendors authorized to sell SKILCRAFT products to federal customers who leveraged the GSA schedule for their procurement needs. Today, the GSA Schedule is the AbilityOne Program's largest distribution channel partner, selling more than \$140 million annually in products manufactured by NIB associated agencies.

NIB worked closely with its associated agencies to build marketing, logistics and distribution capabilities, as well as an information technology infrastructure for electronic commerce. Innovation in these areas to deal with the new world of government procurement led to even more diverse career opportunities for people who are blind.

Chapter 9

Adapting to Change

While procurement changes were evolving in the federal government and military, NIB transitioned into a more customer-facing organization. For more than 50 years, NIB's headquarters were located in the New York metropolitan area. In 1994, the NIB Board of Directors decided to relocate NIB's headquarters to Alexandria, Virginia, in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., for closer proximity to federal elected representatives and customers. By the following year, NIB sold its main facility in Wayne, New Jersey, and NIB's new president Judy Moore consolidated the operations of the Wayne and Alexandria offices. With the relocation, she also saw an opportunity to evaluate staff resources and recruit new staff with different skill sets to support associated agencies.

Moore fostered an enormous culture change, which resulted in a more customer-facing organization with more marketing staff and an aggressive marketing program. NIB staff regularly participated in government seminars to educate and remind customers about the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program.

A New Look

At the same time, NIB worked closely with its associated agencies to modernize product packaging. Many associated agencies had already transitioned from plain brown boxes with national stock numbers indicated on the side to four-color, attractively designed packaging. But a consistent, unified look for SKILCRAFT® products was lacking.



Redesigned SKILCRAFT® logo.

Realizing that a key component to the success of any product line is its visual identity, NIB retained a designer to modernize the SKILCRAFT logo and develop that consistent look for the SKILCRAFT family of products as a means of creating brand-name recognition with government customers. With more than 2,000 products for the federal market in diverse product lines, including writing instruments, office supplies, paper products, cleaning supplies, household items, chemicals, and military apparel and supplies manufactured in NIB associated agencies, NIB faced the challenge of unifying the SKILCRAFT look. By 1996, design work was completed on

150 writing instrument boxes. And although quality and manufacturing procedures at each NIB associated agency differed, presenting some challenges in developing the uniform look, for the first time, packaging for writing instruments boasted a consistent brand identity.

At the same time, new packaging was introduced for the entire Military Resale line, which involved approximately 190 different packages. Within the next few years, NIB expanded design support to associated agencies to create a fresh look for the entire line of SKILCRAFT products. This effort continues even today to ensure that SKILCRAFT product packaging stays current and appealing to customers.

In addition, NIB took the lead in unifying promotional pieces such as product catalogs, posters, merchandising cards and sell sheets.



Modern product packaging for SKILCRAFT® products.

Brand Awareness

With a unified look on hundreds of SKILCRAFT products in the federal marketplace, in 2000 NIB undertook a market research study of the SKILCRAFT brand. A research company surveyed 200 government customers who had credit cards approved for government purchasing. The objectives of the study were to measure respondents' familiarity with SKILCRAFT and JWOD, to establish the importance of various attributes in purchase decisions and to determine how many years respondents had been making purchase decisions.

Survey respondents were broadly distributed among branches of the government at varying levels of annual purchasing. The results were positive and enlightening. SKILCRAFT brand awareness was high with 83 percent of respondents familiar or very familiar with SKILCRAFT, as opposed to JWOD at 24 percent.

In addition, SKILCRAFT attributes were positive and appropriate with 78 percent of the sample identifying SKILCRAFT as being a brand for pens, pencils, office supplies and paper. And quality, value and convenience of ordering rated the highest when respondents were asked to rate importance of attributes in the purchase decision-making process. Of all these brand attributes, "quality" was the highest ranking attribute associated with SKILCRAFT, with "value" coming in second.

Program Branding

As NIB continued to strengthen the SKILCRAFT brand for associated agencies, it also worked with the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled and NISH to adopt a program-wide brand. In 2007, the result was a change in the name of the JWOD Program, now called the AbilityOne® Program. The three organizations saw it as an opportunity, working in partnership with associated agencies, to grow AbilityOne into a recognizable brand to achieve employment goals. The Committee (now operating as the U.S. AbilityOne Commission®), NISH (now SourceAmerica) and NIB developed common language – *The AbilityOne Program creates employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities to fulfill their potential while delivering a wide array of solutions to the federal government.*

Thereafter, the AbilityOne brand would be leveraged to influence purchasing behaviors, to capture JWOD brand equity and to enhance and grow AbilityOne brand awareness. Public policy, marketing, communications, operations and packaging opportunities were effectively used to leverage the new program name.



AbilityOne® Program logo.

Continuous Improvement Processes

Meanwhile, more and more businesses were requiring their suppliers to demonstrate higher standards, and quality control programs proliferated as businesses globalized. This led to the realization that international quality assurance standards were needed, and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) responded by publishing the ISO 9000 series standards. Over time, competitive pressures led to businesses adopting ISO 9000, and soon thereafter, government entities such as the Department of Defense, started to encourage their vendors to become ISO 9000 certified.

Industries for the Blind (IB) in Milwaukee was the first NIB associated agency, as well as the first nonprofit organization in the United States, to achieve ISO certification in 1998. IB spread the word among NIB associated agencies about the benefits of this process, citing customer satisfaction, customer

loyalty, improved productivity and better products from continuous improvement processes. ISO certification also fostered an understanding within the company that quality is every employee's responsibility.

NIB received its certification in 2004 and undergoes an extensive recertification process every three years. To foster adoption of ISO certification by NIB associated agencies, NIB provides financial assistance through its Contractor Compliance Grant. Today, 67 percent of NIB associated agencies participating in the AbilityOne Program have achieved ISO 9000 registration. Many of them have claimed it has transformed their organization from a reactive mode into a proactive organization — one with which people want to do business.

Chapter 10

New Distribution Channels

With increasing threats to the distribution link between NIB associated agencies and federal customers, NIB decided to gain control of portions of the supply chain. One way was to move forward with a Single Award Schedule for AbilityOne® products where NIB would be the award holder, utilizing electronic commerce through the Defense Logistics Agency's E-Mall, participating in the General Services Administration's Multiple Award Schedule for hardware and partnering with Federal Prison Industries' website for AbilityOne janitorial products. Two of the most effective ways have proven to be base supply centers and e-commerce ordering.

The timing could not have been better. In July 1999, GSA announced it would be closing its stock program. The next year GSA decided to close all four forward supply points in Springfield, Virginia; Chicago, Illinois; Denver, Colorado; and Auburn, Washington; along with two Federal Supply Service warehouses located in Palmetto, Georgia, and Fort Worth, Texas, by April 2001. The distribution centers at Burlington, New Jersey, and Stockton, California, absorbed the distribu-

tion functions. NIB met with eight associated agencies that generated the most sales to GSA and developed a detailed customer account strategy to call on the 670 customers who made up approximately \$70 million of SKILCRAFT® product sales with GSA.

Making Ordering Easy

By that time, NIB was well positioned with its newest distribution channel for SKILCRAFT and other JWOD products, which went online on October 1, 1999. JWOD.com (now AbilityOne.com), NIB's new electronic commerce site, provided federal customers with the convenience of desktop ordering access, one-stop shopping and enhanced service delivery, featuring next-day delivery on many products. With more than 2,100 JWOD products on the website, combined with communications to government and military customers, sales of these items jumped from \$985 a day when the site was launched to \$4,090 a day four months later. And, after a few years, sales averaged \$1 million a month. More importantly, it expanded the number of ways through which federal customers could order SKILCRAFT products and brought online commerce to the AbilityOne Program.

The new website also created new career options. Shortly after the launch of its e-commerce website, NIB partnered with ABVI-Goodwill in Rochester, New York, which was already starting up a call center operated by people who are blind. NIB awarded a call center contract, which supported the

entire JWOD Program, to ABVI, where employees provided product information, captured customer feedback, conducted outbound service calls, provided follow-up customer service for SKILCRAFT products and fulfilled product literature and sample requests for several years. These services were then contracted to RLCB in Raleigh, North Carolina, where they are still provided.

When e-commerce operations were consolidated and brought in-house at NIB in 2006, a separate Customer Care department was established at NIB to provide e-commerce services that include order management, order entry assistance, website information, quotes and front-end service to the federal buyers. Today, NIB's Customer Care team consists of five employees, all of whom are legally blind. As a regular part of their business operations, the team manages a constant stream of orders that are processed and sent to consolidation points to be shipped overseas. Particular care is given to each order to ensure that American troops receive needed supplies. In addition to supporting troop deployments, NIB partners with the General Services Administration and other federal agencies to support state and local disaster preparation and recovery efforts.

NIB's Customer Care team is continually looking for ways to enhance the customer experience with AbilityOne.com, and the results have been remarkable. Sales through this distribution channel totaled \$41 million in fiscal year 2012.

Operating Base Supply Centers

While dealing with changes in GSA's distribution system, NIB also took steps to participate in one of the military's main supply channels. The Department of Defense was closing base supply centers to cut costs. By 1996, the military already closed 30 of approximately 225 centers due to the need to reduce the military budget. That same year, LC Industries opened the first base supply center operated by an NIB associated agency at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. It was an important step, because it paved the way for other NIB associated agencies to open similar operations. Within a year, NIB prioritized 40 locations for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines due to requests by base commanders that NIB associated agencies operate these centers on their bases. LC Industries shared its experiences and expertise with other associated agencies and more sprang up around the country.

It turned out to be a win-win for all involved. Also known as Self-Service Supply Stores and Servmarts, Base Supply Centers (BSCs) provide walk-in shopping, phone-in and fax orders, on-line shopping and delivery. The one-stop shopping experience, offered by BSCs operated by NIB associated agencies, enabled military commanders to keep personnel on the base to handle supply needs. Each center provided two or three retail-type jobs for people who are blind. But most importantly, it created another distribution channel for SKIL-CRAFT products to keep people working in NIB associated agencies.

Today, NIB associated agencies operate more than 145 base supply centers on Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine bases in the United States. In recent years, NIB associated agencies have opened centers within federal office complexes at the Departments of Commerce, Energy, Census, Treasury, Agriculture and Transportation and the Securities and Exchange Commission. There are also stores at Coast Guard installations, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. These centers move more than \$76 million worth of AbilityOne products through this important distribution channel.



Base supply center operated by Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, D.C.

Chapter 11

Reinvesting Resources

Just as many businesses look for ways to reinvest resources to grow business, NIB felt that one of the best uses of its resources was to reinvest in its associated agencies. NIB made its first attempt at that concept in 1975 through a new project incentive program. The Board approved NIB waiving its commission fee for the first six months that a new project was added to the federal procurement list. The intent was to assist associated agencies with start-up and training costs for new manufacturing and service projects, thus encouraging the development of more projects, which in turn would create more jobs for people who are blind. The program was so widely received it has endured the test of time, being offered to associated agencies for almost 40 years.

Within a few years, NIB was providing additional financial assistance to help associated agencies grow employment opportunities. NIB created quality assurance grants to help associated agencies increase manufacturing efficiency, improve delivery schedules and ensure the quality of products. To improve manufacturing efficiency through better plant lay-

out and production methods, industrial engineering staffing grants became popular. Grants to help associated agencies develop strategic plans, achieve ISO 9000 certification, hire sales personnel, and convert and modify jobs also became popular.

NIB set up loan programs to assist associated agencies with working capital needs or to purchase raw materials or equipment used in the provision of products or services. Loans were also used to expand or renovate manufacturing facilities — all with the goal of creating more employment for people who are blind.

Extraordinary Measures

When the Board of Lighthouse International in New York City decided to close its industrial operations in Long Island City in 1995, NIB President and CEO Judy Moore recommended that the NIB Board partner with Industries for the Blind of New York State to guarantee a \$1 million bank loan to preserve 100 employment opportunities in the New York metropolitan area. The loan was used to create a new not-for-profit organization — New York City Industries for the Blind (NYCIB) — which took over the federal and state contracts to save the jobs of those displaced by the closure of Lighthouse International's industrial operation. By the beginning of 1997, NYCIB had 45 blind employees on the payroll and paid off the first third of an equipment loan from NIB. And by the end of the year, all loan guarantees were eliminated due to the financial

performance of the new organization, which has been on a continuous growth path.

Today, NYCIB employs more than 120 people who are blind in a variety of manufacturing, service and professional positions. The diverse vocational training opportunities, the excellent location in Brooklyn with accessibility to New York's mass transit system and competitive compensation packages makes it an attractive career option, which is evident in the waiting list of job applicants.

Opening New Facilities

NIB helped create other new organizations, taking on much less risk. A seed money grant provided start-up funds for a community group in Kalamazoo, Michigan, to establish a new agency and bring job opportunities to that community. The Visionary Media Company in New York City, winner of NIB's entrepreneurial grant, created different career options by providing opportunities to blind musicians, singers, composers and other professionals in the entertainment world across the country.

But it was the satellite establishment grant program, approved by the NIB Board of Directors in 1981, that had the greatest impact on increasing employment. The program was actively promoted by former Board Chairman Abram Claude, Jr., who believed that it was more practical to set up satellite operations rather than trying to start brand-new agencies with new boards of directors, new management and new commu-

nity support groups. The grant was successful in helping associated agencies create new facilities in geographic areas remote from the headquarters of an associated agency where people desired employment, but lived too far from the agency. Over the years, new operations sprang up in rural areas of Mississippi, Florida, Oklahoma, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington, as well as Puerto Rico.



Inland Northwest Lighthouse in Spokane, Washington, opened in 2008 with an NIB satellite grant to The Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle, Washington.

Satellite grants have assisted well-managed associated agencies take over financially struggling ones to save jobs for residents in that community. People in Kentucky and North Carolina benefitted from that assistance. Special Mentoring Grants provide incentives to well-established, capable asso-

ciated agencies to act as mentors to emerging agencies and facilitate the creation of more jobs.

Strategic Markets

Over the last few years, the NIB Board of Directors funded grants to create employment opportunities in associated agencies that were providing rehabilitation services rather than employment. After evaluating the blind populations in these cities, transportation possibilities and potential federal and commercial customers nearby, NIB partnered with Lighthouse Central Florida (LCF) in Orlando to make this happen. With assistance from NIB, LCF developed a business plan, and grew its customer base and product lines, resulting in a new contact center with a commercial customer and an AbilityOne® product for the Defense Logistics Agency.

Similar assistance was provided to the Lighthouse for the Visually Impaired and Blind in Port Richey, Florida, which received its first product order from the Florida Department of Transportation through Florida's RESPECT Program.

NIB continues to support employment growth with agencies serving people who are blind in Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles and New York, to help these organizations develop business. Success in these cities will ultimately serve new populations of people who are blind, further extending the geographic reach of NIB associated agencies.

Rewarding Growth

One of NIB's newer incentives — the Employment Retention and Growth Rewards Program — distributes a pool of funds to all those associated agencies that sustain and grow employment in a fiscal year, as well as provide upwardly mobile opportunities for people who are blind. The objective is to provide direct financial assistance to support the development of additional projects that would spur the creation of even more career opportunities. And NIB's Significant Employment Incentive Program rewards associated agencies for adding large projects to the federal procurement list that create at least 50 full-time positions for people who are blind.

Improving Wages

Recognizing the importance of offering good wages for employees who are blind, NIB created a Compensation and Productivity Improvement grant in 2010 to support the Board's position — strengthened further in 2013 — to “endorse, promote and encourage the payment of at least the federal minimum wage for all employees who are blind.” The goal of the grant is to improve employee productivity, to increase employee compensation, and to adapt operations so that they can be accomplished by people who are blind.

The grant also supports the work of NIB's rehabilitation engineers who are key players in determining what adaptations are needed for a person to succeed on the job and to be as productive and efficient as possible. Rehabilitation engineers

collaborate with associated agency staff to develop, recommend and implement simple, practical and often inexpensive tools and solutions to improve output and productivity. They also provide recommendations on job conversions from sighted employees to blind employees, conduct training and strengthen contract competitiveness. Employees benefit from increased production output and higher wages, in addition to enhanced job comfort. The agency gains from increased profitability through better material flow, process optimization, staff training, improved ergonomics and safety, and measurements to gauge success.



NIB rehabilitation engineer works with associated agency employees to modify work stations and increase employee output and productivity.

In some cases, employee output increased as much as 50 percent through workplace modifications and method changes recommended by NIB's rehabilitation engineers and implemented by staff at associated agencies. Follow-up visits encourage continuous improvement, collaborative work with associated agencies, and the development of training modules to highlight best practices, accommodations, economic positioning and staff supports.

Funding for NIB's various grant programs, as well as NIB's operating budget, comes from the central nonprofit agency fee on sales of products and services through federal, state and commercial markets. From 1938 to 1965, that fee was two percent. Over time, the NIB Board with support from its member agencies increased the fee to support services needed by associated agencies. Recently, one associated agency executive wrote a note thanking NIB for funding from financial assistance programs, indicating that NIB services and financial assistance programs are the best return on investment in fees paid to NIB for sales through the AbilityOne Program.

Chapter 12

Engaging Employees

When the Wagner-O'Day Program got off the ground during the first few decades, the program leaders focused primarily on proving capabilities to federal and military customers, as well as partnering with commercial firms to create even more employment opportunities. During that time, little was done to formally examine the preferences of people with severe visual disabilities and whether or not the employees were really satisfied with their positions. Realizing that talented people set an organization apart, there emerged a desire by the 1980s to gauge employee satisfaction within NIB associated agencies.

In 1982, NIB conducted a pilot survey of employees of associated agencies. Although the sample was small with just 100 employees in 10 associated agencies interviewed by NIB staff members, the results were positive. It set the stage the following year for a larger-scale survey of 1,000 people in 53 associated agencies to learn more about employees' attitudes, desires and concerns. Conducted by NIB staff, the results showed a high level of job satisfaction, although many employees were unfamiliar with the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act

or NIB. And one of the major drawbacks of the survey was a perceived lack of objectivity and independence, because the survey was entirely administered by NIB. NIB responded in two ways — by reaching out directly to nominees for NIB’s national Employee of the Year awards and by using outside experts to design, administer and compile later surveys.

Employee of the Year Program

In 1968, the NIB Board of Directors approved the establishment of the Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award. The program recognized one outstanding employee each year, but did not reach beyond that to recognize the nominees for the award. In 1981, the NIB Board decided to invite all of the nominees for the Salmon award to the annual training conference. As word of this opportunity spread, the numbers grew from a handful in 1981 to more than 80 nominees today. It has turned out to be an excellent communication tool for NIB to share information with agency employees about NIB services offered to associated agencies and the importance of the AbilityOne® Program to their vocational livelihood.

Using Outside Experts

In 1987, the NIB staff engaged 1,008 blind direct labor employees for another survey. To respond to external perceptions of earlier surveys, NIB retained Polaris Research Associates Inc., an independent research firm in New York City, to perform a detailed analysis. Mississippi State University’s

(MSU) Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision, in consultation with the American Foundation for the Blind, performed the next survey in 1994. MSU staff conducted personal interviews with 500 employees in 25 NIB associated agencies and compiled all the data. Both the 1987 and 1994 surveys reflected a high level of job satisfaction as well as a desire for more career growth opportunities.

In light of new and emerging global findings on employee engagement and satisfaction, NIB hired International Survey Research LLC (ISR), which was acquired by Towers Perrin, Inc. (now Towers Watson), to conduct the next three surveys in 2002, 2005 and 2010. ISR specializes in designing and implementing employee management and customer surveys to offer solutions in organizational effectiveness, human capital management and advanced analysis. As part of Towers Watson, ISR surveys employees of hundreds of companies across the globe. NIB was able to benchmark its results against this broader set of “norms.” In each of NIB’s most recent surveys, more than 1,000 employees were surveyed to identify, measure and prioritize organizational issues that affect the level of employee satisfaction and engagement for employees who are blind working on AbilityOne® contracts. Key findings from the 2010 survey showed that the overall level of job satisfaction for employees in NIB associated agencies is statistically higher than U.S. National, Manufacturing and Hourly Norms. And compared to the 2005 survey results, the 2010 survey results showed marked improvements in all comparable

categories, with the highest scoring categories being working conditions, training and development, and performance management. The areas of clear strengths were pride in the work the organization is performing, overall job satisfaction, a high level of morale in their work units and support of agency values. But there were also opportunities for improvement in the areas of training for career advancement, workplace safety and communications with employees. In each case, NIB shared aggregate survey results with participating agencies to determine what actions might be taken to ensure that NIB associated agencies continue to enhance employment experiences for people who are blind.

Using the Results

Ever since the first survey conducted in the early 1980s, NIB worked with associated agencies to meet the changing needs and desires of people who are blind. The surveys have enabled NIB to engage the hearts and minds of employees at all levels and helped to discover areas for improvement. In addition, the surveys encouraged employees to discuss aspects of their jobs that they may not be willing to share with members of their management team.

Responses to the survey results by agency management showed employees that their thoughts and opinions mattered, thereby improving communication with employees and offering direct feedback to the organizational environment.

Moving forward, NIB plans to use the survey results to continue fostering advances in employment practices in NIB associated agencies.

Chapter 13

More Career Choices

When the Wagner-O'Day Act was passed 75 years ago, the primary means of creating job opportunities for people who were blind or visually impaired was in the manufacturing sector. These jobs were limited to making a handful of products, some of which still provide meaningful employment for people who are blind.



Early switchboard operations.

Just as manufacturing jobs were limited decades ago, switchboard operations were generally the only employment possibilities for people who were blind who wanted to enter the service field. That changed in the early 1970s when the Lighthouse for the Blind in Houston began training medical transcriptionists. The only technology needed was a tape recorder and a typewriter, because transcriptionists listened to dictated recordings made by physicians and transcribed them into medical reports. The Lighthouse provided qualified applicants with the medical terminology training and helped students increase their typing speed. At that time, most students who graduated from this training program were placed in medical offices or hospitals.



Jennifer Parrish, master medical transcriptionist, at the Lighthouse for the Blind of Houston in Texas.

With 20 years of success in training and placing medical transcriptionists, the Lighthouse of Houston worked with NIB to add this service to the federal procurement list. Shortly afterward, the Lighthouse landed its first medical transcription contract with the Department of Veterans Affairs and has steadily grown this service.

Within the last decade, technology eliminated another barrier to employment. Today, the Lighthouse of Houston offers online medical transcription training to distance learners who connect via the Internet to a virtual conference room. An instructor teaches students a challenging and intensive college-level syllabus in a variety of medical specialties. Once trained, employees work from home in various time zones across the country and are available to provide customers with rapid turnaround time for emergency room reports in less than two hours. Employees enjoy having a professional career with flexible hours while eliminating transportation obstacles.

Technology Levels the Playing Field

There is no doubt that computer technology, as well as assistive technology, has leveled the playing field for people who are blind. Individuals with moderate to severe visual impairments can use software that reads aloud digitally displayed messages, such as emails and other lines of text on a computer. JAWS, a popular screen-reader software, provides employees access to various other software applications and

the Internet through a speech synthesizer. Closed-circuit televisions magnify print from a printed page onto a large screen. The Internet has opened up many opportunities for people to work at home.

World-Class Contact Centers

ABVI-Goodwill in Rochester, New York, was one of the first NIB associated agencies to open a call center. Employees respond to tens of thousands of inquiries per month by phone, email, webforms and faxes from customers of federal and state government programs. As part of NIB's strategy to increase and diversify career opportunities, NIB awarded ABVI-Goodwill its first Center of Excellence Award in 2006 with a grant for \$20,000. The grant was created to encourage associated agencies with successes in specific businesses to share expertise with other associated agencies. ABVI-Goodwill did so by conducting a call center training conference for representatives from other associated agencies. Agencies in Utica, New York; Indianapolis, Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; and Raleigh, North Carolina, followed by creating call centers a few years later. Document management services, mail room operations, data entry and other office administration and clerical service-based careers have opened through the use of technology.

Optical Services

With the assistance of a \$150,000 grant from NIB, Win-

ston-Salem Industries for the Blind (WSIFB) built a classroom to teach employees basic optical theory and principles to start an optical services business.

Today, WSIFB operates optical dispensaries for veterans at 21 VA hospitals around the United States. These facilities are staffed with licensed opticians, optometrists or ophthalmologists provided by WSIFB. When orders are received, prescriptions and frame selections are entered into the computer system, which prepares the manufacturing specifications. Trained employees follow the job, creating the lenses and assembling into frames, through completion and shipment to the customer.



Optical Services Division at Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina.

Careers for College Graduates

One of the newer career offerings is the result of an innovative partnership between the Defense Acquisition University (DAU) and the AbilityOne® Program. Several courses are offered to college graduates who are legally blind, providing the core training required to become a contract management professional. With the DAU courses, students develop an understanding of the Department of Defense acquisition environment, learn the use of Federal Acquisition Regulations, study acquisition planning from receipt of purchase order through solicitation and contract awards, and learn how to identify and utilize metrics to evaluate contractor performance, explore performance remedies, perform contract modifications and close out completed contracts.

The idea for people who are blind to enter this field came about when NIB recognized the critical shortage of qualified government contracting personnel, even as government demand increased for contracted goods and services. NIB took a strategic lead role in developing Contract Management Support services to leverage the shortage in contract specialists by focusing on providing post-contract award administrative services that are not inherently governmental functions. NIB developed and signed the first strategic contract for contract closeout services covering all Department of Defense requirements. Then, NIB developed and implemented standardized training and work procedures to help meet this need while simultaneously providing high-growth, upwardly mobile career

opportunities to people who are blind. Once working under the strategic contract, people who are blind provide research and analysis to ensure that all requirements for closing contracts are complete, presenting “ready-to-close” contracts to government contracting officers.

Section 508 Assurance services is another of the more recently developed services identified and developed by NIB. It addresses software, systems and website accessibility and usability conformance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Act requires that all federal agencies’ electronic and information technology systems, including websites, be accessible to people with disabilities. The service provides compliance and usability testing, validation and remediation services for websites, portals and applications; electronic documents; and legacy applications. It is another high-level, knowledge-based career now available for college graduates who are blind.

Supply Chain Services

For 75 years, NIB associated agencies have been manufacturing products for the Department of Defense, but it wasn’t until about 20 years ago that these agencies started to distribute products. One of the early operations was developed at the Travis Association for the Blind (TAB), which is the third-party logistics provider for clothing and textiles for the Air Force and Marine Corps. TAB’s average on-hand inventory is valued at more than \$160 million and is housed in 366,000 square feet

of warehouse space in three locations. About 80 employees who are blind ship more than 358,000 orders a year with a 99.89 percent accuracy record, earning DLA's Business Alliance Award for Outstanding AbilityOne Program Vendor in 2009.



Dwayne Cunningham, warehouse specialist, Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, Texas.

LC Industries in Durham, North Carolina, is also a leader among NIB associated agencies in distribution services. It operates two distribution centers in Durham and Las Vegas, Nevada. Supporting a wide array of military and commercial customers, LC Industries has nearly 250,000 square feet of distribution space, which enables the organization to respond rapidly to the military's surge requirements.

Two other large distribution operations are managed by Arizona Industries for the Blind (AIB) and Industries of the Blind in Greensboro, North Carolina, for the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA). The operations involve the receipt, storage, packaging, barcoding, tagging, material handling, repackaging and distribution of lighting products for DLA Aviation in Richmond, Virginia, along with springs for DLA Troop Support that are shipped to support America's warfighters worldwide. AIB has an additional contract for military insignias, carrying more than 30 million pieces of inventory, including American and Navy flags, insignias worn by enlisted personnel, as well as awards. AIB's performance earned the agency a DLA Outstanding AbilityOne Vendor Award in 2010.

The key to successful supply chain services involves three technology systems. HighJump™ Warehouse Advantage inventory management system is used to create picking assignments, as well as order and flow, based on customer priority. This software interacts with Vocollect through verbal communications to pick the order. With Vocollect, warehouse pickers wear devices on their belt and hold scanners. Pickers scan labels on shipping boxes, which indicate the proper aisle, shelf and item in the warehouse, as well as the quantity of that specific item. All software is accessible, because 80 percent of AIB's 64 employees in the distribution unit are blind.

NIB also found ways to partner with commercial companies that do business with the military. NIB connected Lion Vallen Industries (LVI) with Georgia Industries for the Blind,

which provides 10 percent of the personnel to run LVI's warehouse operations in Pendergrass, Georgia. This facility is the primary location for U.S. Army uniforms and associated clothing items under a contract with DLA Troop Support.

Other customers such as the General Services Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs and the Environmental Protection Agency have also come to depend on the extensive service offerings provided by NIB associated agencies, which provide cost-effective solutions, dependable service and exceptional performance.

Today, NIB and its associated agencies offer a wide range of knowledge-based service careers for people who are blind. NIB's service development strategy focuses on delivering primary services in contact centers, contract management support, along with administrative and technology and supply chain management lines of business. The strategy involves a multi-tiered national engagement strategy with federal customers on global-mission requirements. It focuses on equipping people who are blind with business management skills training and assistive technology, and working with associated agencies to improve business development capabilities in the services arena. While still relatively new territory for many associated agencies, the strategy is paying off with more diverse, higher-level career opportunities for people who are blind in both the government and commercial sectors.

Chapter 14

Investing in People

It was Noel Price who understood the challenges facing associated agency management, having run Mississippi Industries for the Blind before coming to NIB in the mid-1960s. He cited the need to continually improve production operations to remain competitive. At the same time, it should strive to employ as many people as possible as well as offer comprehensive outplacement services. In an attempt to continually improve management skills of associated agency leadership, NIB designed and offered a pilot Management Orientation Program in 1975 at Royal Maid Association for the Blind in Mississippi. Conducted by the staff of NIB and Royal Maid, it became an annual event that occurred over the next two decades.

Other training programs that followed included product development, production management, textile engineering, contract administration, quality assurance, costing and pricing, public relations, finance and accounting, compliance and board orientation. In most cases, they were conducted by NIB and agency personnel.

Shortly after Kevin Lynch became NIB's president in 2008,

NIB took a more formal approach to providing learning and development opportunities to personnel from associated agencies as well as its own staff. Having come to NIB after management positions at ABVI-Goodwill in Rochester, New York, and Georgia Industries for the Blind, Lynch also had intimate knowledge of the challenges facing associated agencies.

After conducting a needs assessment survey with associated agencies, NIB designed a learning and development strategy around five guiding principles. NIB identified organization capacity gaps and assessed training that was needed to fill these gaps. It was determined that the focus of the training should be on AbilityOne® Program business and employment, it should be sponsored by NIB and associated agency leadership, and it should be accessible for people who are blind. There should be measurable results in improving skills and knowledge and increasing employment, and it should result in sustainable actions to support NIB's mission and vision. In addition, the team developed different types of learning experiences, because learning happens in a variety of ways.

Today, a seven-member team, four of whom are blind, oversee all of NIB's learning and development initiatives. They ensure that training reflects NIB's goals, including leadership development and enhancement of professional and technical skills. In addition, NIB's Business Leaders Program, Contract Management Support Training Program and Quality Work

Environment initiatives have been integrated into learning and development strategies.

Learning and Development Opportunities

The 1975 management orientation program was revamped, along with some of the other older courses, which are offered on a regional basis at NIB associated agencies. While technical training is at the core of NIB's learning and development initiatives, the learning and development team supplements those courses with interpersonal skills training to enable employees to become more valuable to customers.

On a regular basis, NIB offers interactive webinars on a variety of topics such as understanding AbilityOne pricing changes, how to identify service opportunities and how to effectively manage federal contracts. The webinars are presented by NIB staff, agency and federal personnel who are subject matter experts in the webinar topics.

Engaging and Inspiring Employees

Learning today has moved beyond the classroom to alternative modes of sharing information. NIB works closely with associated agencies to implement AbilityOne Quality Work Environment (QWE) initiatives, launched by the U.S. AbilityOne Commission®.

Recognizing that QWE is a continuous improvement process, NIB has taken a leadership role working with associated agency personnel to improve employment practices.

QWE initiatives help associated agencies adopt practices

that provide opportunities for employees who are blind to attain the highest possible earnings, advance into positions that maximize ability, and if desired, land a position in the private sector. As part of the process, agencies complete self-assessments and create action plans. Agency personnel have reported positive results that include improved orientation, recognition and benefit programs for employees; flexible work hours; improved communications; greater employee engagement and career planning. Some of the job-shadowing participants have developed interests in other positions within the agency, and training has been provided to foster those aspirations. Some agencies are also inviting employees to participate in job enrichment activities such as mentoring their peers, serving as agency tour guides and writing for the company newsletter.

More and more associated agencies are embracing QWE concepts due to the positive changes it makes within the organization and improvements in accessibility throughout the facility.

Advocates for Leadership and Employment

For those employees in NIB associated agencies who are interested in learning more about the public policy process and telling NIB's story to elected officials, NIB created the Advocates for Leadership and Employment program in 2011. NIB selected advocates based on a competitive process as well as nomination by associated agency leadership. Through

training via webinar, followed up by classroom instruction, the advocates left the program well equipped with on-the-ground training for meetings with their members of Congress. NIB designed the program to provide training over a two-year period on topics such as effective communications, advocacy strategies and grassroots initiatives.

From NIB's early management training programs to ongoing QWE initiatives, NIB's learning and development opportunities inspire employees at NIB and its associated agencies to excel in the performance of their jobs. These award-winning initiatives foster innovation and growth, and employees are more motivated to achieve their career goals and reach their full potential.



The inaugural class of Advocates for Leadership and Employment.

Chapter 15

Developing Leaders

For the first 50 years of NIB's existence, there were not many persons who were blind in supervisory, management and executive positions at NIB associated agencies. One of the major reasons was that college students who were blind were generally not encouraged to pursue business degrees. Well-meaning counselors too often guided students toward careers in education, rehabilitation, social service and other related fields, regardless of the students' particular skills and interests.

One of NIB's earliest efforts to attract college graduates with degrees in business majors came about in 1988 with the introduction of a scholarship program. By engaging universities and state colleges, NIB's began to recruit freshmen and sophomores who were blind with high scholastic records, offering them summer internships to gain experience while in school and providing scholarship funds to complete their education. The program, funded by NIB and administered by a national consumer organization, continued for more than two decades, with one or two of the candidates eventually recon-

necting with NIB and landing positions in associated agencies.

In 2012, NIB discontinued that particular scholarship program in favor of offering two scholarships for college juniors or seniors majoring in assistive technology, a field that is very relevant to employment and advancement in the workplace.

Around the same time that NIB started to offer scholarships, it also created another internship program, which was designed as a cooperative effort between NIB and its associated agencies. NIB provided financial support by paying the salary and housing of interns, while the associated agency provided supervision and training. Candidates were required to have business degrees, at least a B grade point average and the willingness to relocate around the country for different experiences. The program was small in scale with only two to three internships offered at a time. As candidates completed their internships, others were offered opportunities.

The plan was to provide interns with on-the-job work experience that would clearly document their ability to perform within their areas of expertise. NIB geared the program toward candidates who obtained degrees in areas coinciding with positions within NIB associated agencies, such as engineering, marketing, communications, public relations, finance, accounting, business administration, production or manufacturing management.

The internship program continued for several years, providing employment experiences for several candidates, but

did not make a substantial impact on developing a larger number of future leaders.

In 2003, NIB took a bold step to remedy this situation. NIB's CEO Jim Gibbons, himself totally blind since high school, earned an undergraduate degree in industrial engineering and graduated from Harvard Business School with a Master in Business Administration degree. He knew firsthand how few bright young college students who are blind were coming off college campuses with business degrees. His dream was a learning and development initiative on a much larger scale than NIB's original internship program that had started several decades earlier. So NIB launched the Business Leaders Program in 2003 to provide business-oriented training, work experience and other learning opportunities to people who are blind as well as help them build rewarding, successful professional careers in business. The multi-track program became the first professional development program for people who are blind in the United States, offering opportunities to transform capable individuals into successful business leaders by providing educational and employment opportunities.

Fellowship for Leadership Development

The first track to be launched was the Fellowship for Leadership Development. After a competitive application process, fellows were given the opportunity for a two-year fellowship that combined on-the-job experience with formal management training at NIB and several associated agencies. The position

offered a salary and excellent benefits, while participants enjoyed networking opportunities and gained essential business leadership experience working on assigned projects. Upon completion of the program, the fellows landed their own highly competitive and career track managerial and leadership positions at NIB or its associated agencies. Since its inception in 2003, 14 fellows have graduated from the program.

Business Management Training

The following year, NIB launched Business Management Training in partnership with the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business. An MBA-level curriculum is offered that helps build business acumen in management, finance, marketing, production and manufacturing, human resources management and information technology. The program is conducted during five, one-week sessions over the course of 18 months where participants experience team-building and test their leadership skills. Success of the track is evident in the fact that a number of new CEOs at NIB associated agencies are graduates from Business Management Training. Another benefit of the program is that associated agencies are not just bringing on one professional who is blind, but are proactively identifying candidates for Business Management Training and then filling more and more managerial and executive vacancies with these graduates. There have been 79 graduates from this track, and 70 percent of these individuals have been promoted at least one time.



Ken Fernald, vice president of operations, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment in Binghamton, New York, one of the graduates of NIB's Business Management Training.

Leaders At All Levels

Another way NIB ensures that employees in associated agencies improve their chances of achieving their personal career goals is through the Leaders At All Levels track. Launched in 2005, Leaders At All Levels delivers fundamental leadership, team-building and interpersonal skills training on-site to all employees within NIB's network of associated agencies.

One of the distinctive aspects of Leaders At All Levels is that all of the instructors are blind, and they also play a key role in advising and reinforcing Leaders At All Levels principles with management. Training consists of eight modules and is conducted at associated agencies. More than 1,000 people receive this training each year.

Business Basics

Coupling excellence in distance learning from The Hadley School for the Blind with NIB's mission, Business Basics was introduced in 2007 as a means to develop entry-level business skills for people to excel in the business world. Courses are offered either on-line or by correspondence. NIB associated agencies recruit their employees, as well as clients and students, who are provided access to courses free of charge. The students take course loads that complement their work schedules, gain practical information and acquire skills geared toward upward mobility. As of 2013, 346 students at 53 associated agencies were enrolled, taking courses in business writing, general business concepts, spreadsheets, business communication and web-based research.

Effective Supervision: The Essentials

The fifth and newest track in NIB's Business Leaders Program — Effective Supervision: The Essentials — was introduced in 2010. Designed to develop participants' abilities to perform supervisory jobs with greater productivity, confidence and effectiveness, the track offers training to high-potential employees of NIB associated agencies and prepares them for higher levels of responsibility.

Effective Supervision: The Essentials includes self-study and three participant-centered classroom sessions, spread over a period of 10 months, covering topics such as understanding supervision, managing and leading the work and

managing and leading people. Facilitated by Management Concepts, the program is designed according to NIB's specifications and includes a session on performance coaching for participants' managers, who play a significant role in helping participants apply what they learn.



Graduates from 2011 Effective Supervision: The Essentials.

Award-Winning Program

The success of NIB's Business Leaders Program was recognized in 2011 by ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership with a Summit Award, the organization's highest honor, in "The Power to Create a Competitive Workforce" category. ASAE awards honor organizations that exemplify how the association industry and its professionals are essential to a stronger America and world.

Today, more than 1,000 people each year receive professional training through one or more of the various training tracks offered through NIB's Business Leaders Program, which recognizes how leadership development in today's business workforce is key to diversifying career opportunities for people who are blind. Since the NIB Board of Directors approved the Business Leaders Program in 2003 and continued financial investments in the program over the last decade, nearly 7,000 individuals have participated in at least one track.

Chapter 16

Specialized Services

Going back in time prior to the creation of NIB, agencies serving people who are blind sprang up in major cities in Alabama, Illinois, New York, North Carolina and Texas. Started largely through the efforts of volunteers, these organizations had many different purposes, ranging from serving as a home, school, social center or work program. As these agencies grew and became successful, more were established in other communities across the United States. There was a common prevailing theme that people who are blind benefit the most when separate categorical services are available. And over time, many agencies evolved into comprehensive social service agencies, specializing in providing a broad range of educational, rehabilitation, employment and other support services for people who are blind. Extensive fundraising occurs at many agencies to support the delivery of these much-needed services.



Early childhood intervention program at ABVI-Goodwill Industries in Rochester, New York.

In many NIB associated agencies, low vision clinics are common, because about 90 percent of people who are legally blind have some residual vision. Low vision specialists help clients make the most of their residual sight. As a result, everyday tasks at home, at school, or in the workplace are much easier. The demand for low vision services is anticipated to increase in the years ahead with aging baby boomers eventually needing services.

Some of the other common services offered by NIB associated agencies include orientation and mobility, Braille literacy, assistive technology, computer classes, skills of independent living for personal and home maintenance, as well as personal adjustment to the loss of vision. Services differ at each

agency, and recipients include children who are encouraged to explore their surroundings, to develop sensory awareness and space concepts, searching skills and independent movement. Adolescents benefit by developing appropriate social skills and building confidence. Prevocational training and career counseling give teens the opportunity to make informed choices regarding their vocational goals, the type and location of training they seek, and the assistive technology they may need for success in school and eventually in employment. Support programs for veterans are becoming more common in the NIB family. But the largest emerging population of people who are blind are older Americans. With vision loss among seniors expected to more than double in the next two decades, many NIB associated agencies are continuing to expand their offerings to meet the increased need for these services in the years ahead.



An occupational therapist instructs a program participant in the use of a video magnifier at Envision Rehabilitation Center in Wichita, Kansas.



Senior services offered at the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind in Texas.

Today, NIB associated agencies offer rehabilitation and other specialized services to more than 160,000 persons who are blind each year. Despite the differences in services, they share a common focus with NIB, empowering people who are blind to lead full and productive lives through diverse career choices available within their organizations or their communities. These services, coupled with NIB’s Business Leaders Program, Contract Management Support Program, Quality Work Environment initiatives, and other learning and development opportunities available through NIB, have made a difference. They have enabled people who are blind to master the most skilled positions available, resulting in the high achievers landing supervisory, management and executive positions in NIB and its associated agencies, as well as succeeding in

comparable positions in the private sector. Generation after generation, NIB and its associated agencies remain unparalleled in this respect as there is no corresponding expertise in any other group of organizations in the United States.

Chapter 17

Vision for the Future

In the 75 years since the passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act, the partnership created between the federal government and NIB has fostered the most successful program to provide employment to people who are blind in the history of the United States. While doing so, it has had minimal impact on the federal budget.

Benefits Outweigh Costs

The most significant financial benefit to the government is that persons who are blind become wage earners, thus paying more federal payroll and income taxes due to their employment. At the same time, these individuals are receiving lower welfare, unemployment and other benefits.

Aside from the quantitative value of the program, the qualitative factors are remarkable. NIB associated agencies provide employment to approximately 6,000 people who are blind annually. Some of these individuals never worked before, nor did they ever hope to work. Employment opportunities range from simple hand-assembly operations to complex

textiles and plastics manufacturing, metal fabrication, and knowledge-based jobs, such as administrative, call center, distribution, retail and contract closeout services.

Outdated Perceptions Still Exist in Corporate America

Many of these service careers have been made possible by assistive technology, and while it plays a critical role in leveling the playing field for persons who are blind to compete in the workplace with sighted peers, there is much work to be done in shaping the perspectives of businesses in the private sector.

To assess the attitudes and opinions among corporate decision makers regarding the hiring and employment of people who are blind or visually impaired, NIB commissioned a study in 2012 to collect attitudinal data among human resource and other professionals at companies in a wide range of industries in the United States. Performed by the market/opinion research firm Repass & Partners, the survey results indicated a majority of hiring managers believe there are few jobs in their organizations that a person who is blind can successfully perform and that it is more expensive to hire someone who is blind compared to someone without a disability. Further, for most hiring managers, it is a lower priority to recruit, train and retain employees with disabilities than to recruit, train and retain executives, senior managers, young employees and minorities.

The survey results support NIB's 75th anniversary educa-

tion campaign not only to dispel the myths about hiring and employing people who are blind, but to raise awareness and inform the business community about the capabilities of people who are blind.

In another research initiative to analyze blindness-related demographic information, NIB found through youth focus groups in 2010 and 2011 that individual career goals vary widely, but needs and expectations are consistent — post secondary education is needed and technology is integral to youths' daily activities. Youths generally believed that visual acuity will not hinder career goals; however, they cited low employer expectations of the capabilities of people who are blind or visually impaired as a primary obstacle to finding employment. Implications from these focus groups indicate there is an expectation that future job opportunities will match the level of education attained, technology usage will be an integral part of future jobs, social media presents a recruitment opportunity for the next generation and expanded career types will attract a wider range of candidates who are blind.

Strategic Directions

Despite the successes of NIB and its associated agencies, nearly 70 percent of working-age Americans who are blind are not employed. That staggering statistic, supplemented with additional research on the population of people who are blind, shaped the NIB Board of Directors' strategic plan.

Adopted in 2010, NIB's strategic plan is supported by

five key pillars: Stewardship, Employee and Customer Satisfaction, Employment Growth, Stakeholder Satisfaction and Broader Mission Fulfillment. These pillars have shaped NIB's strategic direction to significantly increase knowledge management and business intelligence capabilities, identify and develop new and existing market opportunities, increase partnerships and alliances, and build additional resource capabilities within business development and other support functions.

Some of these initiatives have already borne fruit, such as NIB's innovative Contract Management Support Program, rehabilitation engineering and training support provided to associated agencies to improve productivity and wages, business development and technical support to emerging agencies, and the addition of new agencies in geographic areas that were not already providing employment through the AbilityOne® Program.

Also included in the plan is an initiative to explore state-use support activities. The first opportunity in this area came about in 2012 when the New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (now known as New York State Commission for the Blind) announced that NIB would be the new designee to facilitate the distribution of orders for products and services made by people who are blind. It was a natural fit for NIB, because the New York State program, which requires state government agencies to purchase products made by people who are blind, was established in 1946 and modeled after NIB. As a result, NIB established an office in

Albany, New York, to manage the New York State Preferred Source Program for People Who Are Blind.

With a formal business plan under development, along with activities underway to enhance relationships with customers and participating nonprofit agencies, NIB looks forward to the challenge of broadening capabilities, increasing sales and expanding career options for New Yorkers in this important market.

What Lies Ahead

While many new initiatives are underway in the 75th year of the AbilityOne Program, NIB and its associated agencies face challenges to meeting NIB's mission. The U.S. Department of Defense is the largest AbilityOne Program customer, but a drawdown of military troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with reductions in the military and federal budgets, inevitably impact sales and employment. In addition, the trend in the United States is moving away from manufacturing and toward services. There is more aggressive competition from small business and other socioeconomic programs as well as limited resources. There are also lingering perceptions about facility-based employment because of the segregated environment.

At the same time, all associated agencies must maintain the percentage of hours performed by people who are blind, which is required by the AbilityOne Program. Coupled with all of these challenges, the blindness community is also aspir-

ing to higher-level career opportunities. But with the unique breadth and depth of knowledge, along with the specialized employment and rehabilitation services for people who are blind, NIB and its associated agencies will continue to evolve strategies and deliver business excellence for customers while meeting the changing career aspirations of people who are blind.

“NIB’s vision for the future is a blueprint, a map and much more. It weaves together innovation and imagination — envisioning what tomorrow could and should be,” said Kevin Lynch. “Our first 75 years is just the beginning for NIB. From here, we will grow services and opportunities as a catalyst for our associated agencies to empower the next generation of people who are blind to succeed in all aspects of their lives.”

Appendices

NIB Presidents

1938-1960: Chester C. Kleber was employed by the American Foundation for the Blind as director of the Talking Book Program before he became NIB's first general manager. Starting with an organization with a membership of 20 agencies, he supervised the production of goods for World War II and the post-war recovery. When he died in 1960, NIB was a thriving organization of 62 associated agencies.

1960-1970: Robert C. Goodpasture, an engineer with industrial marketing experience, helped NIB expand into a substantial business, entering new markets while increasing the number of associated agencies to 82. The entry into the writing instruments field and commercial markets, assembly of sanitation kits for the federal government's fallout shelter program and acquisition of a model demonstration industry were significant accomplishments under his leadership.

1970-1979: Noel B. Price became executive vice president when a substantial drop in government purchasing occurred. He focused on creating closer ties with commercial industry through subcontracts with industry to broaden markets for associated agencies. The first management orientation program was held during his tenure, paving the way for many additional learning and development initiatives in later years.

1979-1994: George J. Mertz became president in 1979, bringing his strong financial background to the office. NIB expanded product research into new fields, increased financial assistance programs offered to associated agencies, and expanded NIB's technical center into a comprehensive quality assurance and product research facility to support associated agencies. Under his leadership, NIB developed closer ties with consumer groups.

1994-1998: Judith D. Moore relocated NIB's headquarters from New Jersey to Virginia and consolidated operations. During her tenure, NIB created a new corporate image for its trade name, SKILCRAFT®, and the first military base supply center was opened by an NIB associated agency. Associated agencies took on new types of service opportunities in warehousing and distribution, customer service, and order and data entry.

1998-2008: James D. Gibbons became the first totally blind person to lead NIB. NIB launched JWOD.com, an e-commerce platform designed to provide quality, value and convenience to government and military customers. NIB expanded base supply centers to more than 100 across the United States, received ISO 9001:2008 certification for its quality management system, and launched the Business Leaders Program to develop management and business leadership skills for people who are blind.

2008-Present: Kevin A. Lynch became NIB's seventh CEO. Program sales surpassed \$700 million, providing employment to more than 6,000 persons who are blind. NIB launched the Effective Supervision: The Essentials track, a component of its Business Leaders Program. Contract Management Support training expanded career placements for people who are blind. NIB was honored with multiple awards, including being named by *The NonProfit Times* as one of the top nonprofits for which to work in the nation in 2013, and was also awarded the Summit Award, the highest honor by ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership in "The Power to Create a Competitive Workforce" category.

Chairpersons of the Board of Directors

The NIB Board of Directors consists of 20 members, 10 of whom are the chief administrators of agencies associated with NIB. The remaining 10 members are executives or leaders from the private sector, who by virtue of their experiences, achievements or other qualifications in the business, academic or disability world lend their time and expertise to the organization. Private-sector directors are eligible to serve as officers of NIB. The following individuals have served as Chairperson of the Board:

1938-1943	M. C. Migel
1943-1958	William Zeigler
1958-1970	Jansen Noyes, Jr.
1970-1985	Thor W. Kolle, Jr.
1985-1990	Abram Claude, Jr.
1990-1993	Grant M. Mack
1993-1999	Peter W. Connelly
1999-2001	Gerald M. Farkas
2001-2003	Allan J. Clelland
2003-2006	Ray R. Fidler
2006-2008	John C. Peoples
2008-2012	James A. Kutsch, Jr.
2012-Present	Gary J. Krump

NIB Board of Directors

The NIB Board of Directors determines the corporation's mission and purpose, selects and evaluates the performance of the president and chief executive officer, sets strategic direction, oversees finances, approves and monitors the programs and services, and assesses its own performance as NIB's governing body.

The Board meets in open session four times a year, operates under a number of key policies and conducts its work through several standing and special committees that meet regularly throughout the year. The following individuals serve on the 2013 NIB Board of Directors:

The Honorable Gary J. Krump, Esq., Chairperson

Ronald Tascarella, Vice Chairperson

Kristin Graham Koehler, Esq., Secretary

Jorge Asef-Sargent, CPA, Treasurer

Richard C. Bland

Lauren K. Branch, CPA

Michael G. Chew

Susan Costlow

Robert A. Council

Robert K. Hanye

William L. Hudson

Louis Jablonski, Jr.

The Honorable William A. Johnson, Jr.

John H. Mitchell, III

Jeanne L. Morin

Nancy J. Perkins

Major General Hawthorne L. Proctor, USA (retired)

Frederick J. Puente

Dennis L. Steiner

Janet P. Szlyk, Ph.D.

National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind

The National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind (NAEPB) is a membership organization of nonprofit agencies from across the United States that share the common goal of providing employment to people who are blind. Its mission is to represent and protect the collective interests of its member organizations to enable them to strengthen and maximize opportunities for people who are blind.

Formerly known as The General Council of Industries for the Blind, the NAEPB can trace its roots back to 1938. Soon after the Wagner-O'Day Act passed the House, representatives from 20 nonprofit agencies met at the headquarters of the American Foundation for the Blind to discuss the opportunities and responsibilities that would come from a large government market for their products.

Led by Peter J. Salmon, executive director of The Industrial Home for the Blind in Brooklyn, New York, the group discussed the provisions of the bill, particularly the one that called for a “central nonprofit-making agency to facilitate the distribution of orders among the agencies for the blind, and other relevant matters of procedure as shall be necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act.” They took steps to form a new nonprofit organization for this purpose, decided how to fund its operations and named it National Industries for the

Blind, which was incorporated on August 10, 1938.

With NIB's encouragement, this group formally united, and the NAEPB has been working closely with NIB to represent the interests of its member organizations for 75 years.

NAEPB Presidents

1938-1946	Peter J. Salmon
1947-1948	William S. Ratchford
1949-1950	Earl Bennett
1951-1952	Byron M. Smith
1953-1954	Carl E. Olsen
1955-1956	Noel B. Price
1957-1958	George E. Pearson
1959-1960	Harry W. Stuart
1961-1962	J. Arthur Johnson
1963-1964	James L. Wrigley
1965-1966	Geraldine Rougagnac
1967-1968	Claude W. Hirsch
1969-1970	Austin G. Scott
1971-1972	David LaCrosse
1973-1974	Rudolph E. Elmer
1975-1976	Ray Miller
1977-1978	William S. Thompson
1979-1980	Joseph J. Larkin
1981-1982	LeRoy F. Saunders
1983-1984	George H. Jacobson
1985-1986	James W. Wells

1987-1988	Bob R. Plunkett
1989-1990	R. T. (Deacon) Millard
1991-1992	Gibson M. DuTerroil
1993-1994	Milton J. Samuelson
1995-1996	Linda K. Merrill Parman
1997-1998	John Baumgart
1999-2000	William S. Thompson
2001	Hank E. Baud
2002-2004	Frederick J. Puente
2005-2006	J. Stephen Patterson
2007-2008	Lauren K. Branch
2009	Richard C. Bland
2010-2011	Karen S. Walls
2012-2013	John H. Mitchell, III

National Employees of the Year



Peter Salmon presents the first National Employee of the Year Award to Karl Randall of the Minneapolis Society for the Blind. Originally in the form of a bronze medallion, the award has evolved over the years to a plaque and a gift. All nominees for Employee of the Year Awards are offered the opportunity to attend the annual conference as guests of NIB.

Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award

In 1968, the NIB Board of Directors created the Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award to honor the accomplishments of employees in NIB associated agencies who excel in their positions. The award was named after Salmon, who was instrumental in fostering the passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act in 1938 and the subsequent formation of NIB. Presented annually since 1968, past recipients are:

- 1968** Karl Randall, Minneapolis Society for the Blind, Minneapolis, MN

- 1969** Albert L. Beasley, Mississippi Industries for the Blind, Jackson, MS
- 1970** Ellis J. Minatrea, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind, Dallas, TX
- 1971** Jerry McIsaacs, Lighthouse for the Blind, Seattle, WA
- 1972** Mazelle Sullivan, Alabama Industries for the Blind, Talladega, AL
- 1973** Angelo Castogna, Lighthouse Industries, Long Island City, NY
- 1974** Arne P. Nermo, Lighthouse for the Blind, Seattle, WA
- 1975** Warren Wilson, Rehabilitation Center for the Visually Impaired, Denver, CO
- 1976** Luther Morris, Virginia Industries for the Blind, Charlottesville, VA
- 1977** Vickie J. Norris, Southwest Lighthouse for the Blind, Lubbock, TX
- 1978** Cephus W. Munford, Helen Keller Services for the Blind, Brooklyn, NY
- 1979** Lillian Meske, Lighthouse for the Blind, Seattle, WA
- 1980** Clarence Wills, Rehabilitation Center for the Visually Impaired, Denver, CO
- 1981** Commodore Funderburk, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind, Winston-Salem, NC
- 1982** Betty Jo Parker, Mississippi Industries for the Blind, Meridian, MS
- 1983** Timothy Schmidt, Arizona Industries for the Blind, Phoenix, AZ

- 1984** Mario Sanchez, Lighthouse for the Blind, Houston, TX
- 1985** Robert Knapp, Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Utica, NY
- 1986** Jesalynn Washington, Blind Association of Western New York, Buffalo, NY
- 1987** Jesse L. Cooke, Wichita Industries and Services for the Blind, Wichita, KS
- 1988** Irma Acuna, Raleigh Lions Clinic for the Blind, Raleigh, NC
- 1989** David Barnes, Lighthouse for the Blind, New Orleans, LA
- 1990** C. Beecher Clark, Ed Lindsey Industries for the Blind, Nashville, TN
- 1991** Katherine Plunge, BESB Industries, West Hartford, CT
- 1992** Vito M. Basile, Lighthouse for the Blind of the Palm Beaches, West Palm Beach, FL
- 1993** Yim Futt Lee, Lighthouse Industries, Long Island City, NY
- 1994** Terry A. Thomas, Oklahoma League for the Blind, Oklahoma City, OK
- 1995** Bryan Roy Baldwin, San Antonio Lighthouse, San Antonio, TX
- 1996** Michael Campbell, Wichita Industries and Services for the Blind, Wichita, KS
- 1997** Mary Clardy, Lighthouse for the Blind, Houston, TX
- 1998** Manufacturing – Violet Thompson, ABVI-Goodwill Industries, Rochester, NY

- Service – Yoseph Getachew, Virginia Industries for the Blind, Richmond, VA
- 1999** Manufacturing – Eddie Gonzalez, Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired, Chicago, IL
Service – Michelle M. Mills, Wiscraft, Milwaukee, WI
- 2000** Manufacturing – Roosevelt Stevenson, Lighthouse for the Blind, Seattle, WA
Service – Susan, Muhlenbeck, Virginia Industries for the Blind, Richmond, VA
- 2001** Wayne Sibson, Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, TX
- 2002** Benjamin David Buckner, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind, Winston-Salem, NC
- 2003** Paul Schroeder, Industries for the Blind, Milwaukee, WI
- 2004** James “Ty” Case, Delaware Industries for the Blind, New Castle, DE
- 2005** Penelope Simon, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Binghamton, NY
- 2006** Britt Lincoln, The Clovernook Center, Cincinnati, OH
- 2007** Dennis Runyan, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Cincinnati, OH
- 2008** Jennifer Parrish, Lighthouse for the Blind of Houston, Houston, TX
- 2009** David Wayne Gwin, NewView Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, OK

- 2010** Joyce Talbert, Bosma Enterprises,
Indianapolis, IN
- 2011** Linda Allen, Travis Association for the Blind,
Austin, TX
- 2012** Frenchie Randolph, Beyond Vision,
Milwaukee, WI
- 2013** Gerald Jones, Lions Volunteer
Blind Industries, Morristown, TN

Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award

The Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award has been presented by NIB since 1996. Samuelson was the executive director of The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired and devoted his career to improving upward mobility opportunities for people who are blind. The award recognizes people who are competitively employed within or outside NIB associated agencies. Past recipients are:

- 1996** Diana Lewis, Virginia Industries for the Blind,
Richmond, VA
- 1997** Marie Blum, Arizona Industries for the Blind,
Phoenix, AZ
- 1998** William H. Hawkins, Alphapointe Association
for the Blind, Kansas City, MO
- 1999** Patricia C. Jarrett, Industries of the Blind,
Greensboro, NC
- 2000** Seprena Jackson, Columbia Lighthouse for the
Blind, Washington, DC
- 2001** Kim Utley, Blind Industries and Services of
Maryland, Baltimore, MD

- 2002** Robert H. Kim, The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired, Chicago, IL
- 2003** Jenne Arnold, The Lighthouse for the Blind, Seattle, WA
- 2004** Kellie Hightower-Spruill, Raleigh Lions Clinic for the Blind, Raleigh, NC
- 2005** Mark Murray, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind, Winston-Salem, NC
- 2006** James Benton, Sr., Raleigh Lions Clinic for the Blind, Raleigh, NC
- 2007** James R. Michaels, Bosma Industries for the Blind, Indianapolis, IN
- 2008** David Steinmetz, Arizona Industries for the Blind, Phoenix, AZ
- 2009** Sandra A. Werner, Industries for the Blind, West Allis, WI
- 2010** Kenneth Fountain, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind, Winston-Salem, NC
- 2011** Nina Bektic-Marrero, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Binghamton, NY
- 2012** Kevin Burton, Envision, Wichita, KS
- 2013** Christian Gorshing, NewView Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, OK

R. B. Irwin Award Recipients

Dr. Robert B. Irwin was one of three leaders back in the 1930s who encouraged independence, self-esteem and integration into society of people with severe visual disabilities. Together with M. C. Migel and Peter J. Salmon, Irwin was instrumental in the development and passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act in 1938, which led to the establishment of National Industries for the Blind. The R. B. Irwin Award is the highest honor bestowed by NIB to a professional or volunteer who has championed employment of people who are blind. Its recipients are:

1953	Lions International
1954	M.C. Migel
1957	L. L. Watts
1958	Harry Glickson
1959	R.E. Barrett
1960	Frank Van Mourik
1962	Robert LeFevre and Finis Davis
1966	William S. Ratchford
1967	Peter J. Salmon
1968	Paul Fryda
1969	Byron Smith
1970	Roberta Townsend and Eugene D. Morgret
1971	Carl E. Olsen
1972	John L. Parker
1975	Geraldine R. Rougagnac

1976	J. Arthur Johnson and John F. Brady
1977	Douglas F. Price
1978	Kemp Newman
1979	E. I. Mills, Jr.
1980	Noel B. Price
1981	Rudolph E. Elmer
1982	Harold Emler and George McFadden
1983	Durward K. McDaniel, Esq.
1984	James C. MacFarland and George E. Pearson
1985	Austin G. Scott
1986	Milton A. Jahoda
1987	Joseph J. Larkin
1988	Jansen Noyes, Jr.
1989	Claude W. Hirsch
1990	Harold Richterman
1991	Mervin J. Flander
1992	Abram Claude, Jr.
1993	Rear Admiral Wallace R. Dowd, Jr.
1994	George J. Mertz and Grant Mack
1995	John L. Granger
1996	Milton J. Samuelson and Ernest A. Ochel
1997	Wesley D. Sprague
1998	Artie Lee Hinds
1999	LeRoy F. Saunders
2000	Carl R. Augusto
2001	Gerald M. Farkas
2002	C. Ray Miller

2003	James W. Wells
2006	Ray Fidler, Esq.
2008	George H. Jacobson
2009	James M. Kesteloot
2010	Brenda D. Gumbs
2011	Arun B. Shimpi
2013	James A. Kutsch, Jr., Ph.D.

2013 NIB Associated Agencies

ALABAMA

Alabama Industries for the Blind
Talladega and Birmingham, AL

ARIZONA

Arizona Industries for the Blind
Phoenix, AZ
Southern Arizona Association for the Visually Impaired
Tucson, AZ

ARKANSAS

The Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind
Little Rock, AR

CALIFORNIA

Earle Baum Center of the Blind Inc.
Santa Rosa, CA
Junior Blind of America
Los Angeles, CA
Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Oakland and San Francisco, CA
Lions Center for the Blind
Oakland, CA
Valley Center for the Blind
Fresno, CA

DELAWARE

Delaware Industries for the Blind
New Castle, DE

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind

Washington, DC and Riverdale and Silver Spring, MD

FLORIDA

Center for the Visually Impaired Inc.

Daytona Beach, FL

Florida Center for the Blind Inc.

Ocala, FL

Lighthouse for the Blind of the Palm Beaches Inc.

West Palm Beach, FL

Lighthouse Central Florida

Orlando, FL

Lighthouse for Visually Impaired and Blind

Port Richey, FL

Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind

Tampa, FL

GEORGIA

Center for the Visually Impaired

Atlanta, GA

Georgia Industries for the Blind

Bainbridge, Albany and Griffin, GA

Vision Rehabilitation Services of Georgia Inc.

Smyrna, GA

ILLINOIS

The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

Chicago, IL

INDIANA

Bosma Enterprises

Indianapolis, IN

KANSAS

Envision Inc.

Kansas City and Wichita, KS

LOUISIANA

Blind Labor Training Center Inc.

Bastrop, LA

Louisiana Association for the Blind

Shreveport, LA

Lighthouse Louisiana

Baton Rouge, Crystal Springs, Gulfport and New Orleans, LA

MAINE

Lighthouse Industries of Maine Inc.

Portland, ME

MARYLAND

Blind Industries and Services of Maryland

Baltimore, Cumberland and Salisbury, MD

MASSACHUSETTS

The Carroll Center for the Blind Inc.

Newton, MA

MICHIGAN

Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Grand Rapids, MI

Midwest Enterprises for the Blind Inc.

Kalamazoo, MI

MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi Industries for the Blind

Jackson and Meridian, MS

MISSOURI

Alphapointe

Kansas City, MO

The Lighthouse for the Blind

Berkeley and St. Louis, MO

NEBRASKA

Outlook Nebraska Inc.

Omaha, NE

NEVADA

Blind Center of Nevada Inc.

Las Vegas, NV

NEW JERSEY

Bestwork Industries for the Blind Inc.

Runnemede, NJ and Philadelphia, PA

Cambridge Industries for the Visually Impaired

Somerset, NJ

Everas Community Services Inc.

Somerset, NJ

NEW MEXICO

New Mexico Commission for the Blind

Albuquerque, NM

NEW YORK

Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired – Goodwill

Industries of Greater Rochester Inc.

Rochester, NY

Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment Inc.

Binghamton, NY

Aurora of Central New York

Syracuse, NY

Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Utica, NY

Elizabeth Pierce Olmsted, M.D. Center for the Visually Impaired
Buffalo, NY

Lighthouse International
New York, NY

New York City Industries for the Blind Inc.
Brooklyn, NY

Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany
Albany, NY

Southern Tier Association for the Visually Impaired
Elmira, NY

Visionary Media
New York, NY

Visions/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired
New York, NY

NORTH CAROLINA

Industries of the Blind Inc.
Greensboro, NC

LC Industries Inc.
Durham, NC; Louisville, KY; Daytona, FL; and Ellisville,
Hazlehurst, Jackson, Natchez, Sanitorium,
Tupelo and Whitfield, MS

Lions Industries for the Blind Inc.
Kinston, NC

Lions Services Inc.
Charlotte, NC

RLCB Inc.
Raleigh, NC

Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind Inc.
Winston-Salem and Asheville, NC and Mayaguez, PR

OHIO

Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Cincinnati, OH

Cleveland Sight Center
Cleveland, OH

Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Cincinnati, OH and Memphis, TN

The Ohio Lighthouse for the Blind and Vision Impaired Inc.
Ravenna, OH

OKLAHOMA

NewView Oklahoma Inc.
Oklahoma City, OK

OREGON

Blind Enterprises of Oregon
Portland, OR

PENNSYLVANIA

Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh
Homestead, PA

Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Chester, PA

Chester County Branch Inc. Pennsylvania Association for the Blind
Coatesville, PA

ForSight Vision
York, PA

Keystone Vocational Services Inc.
Sharon, PA

North Central Sight Services Inc.
Williamsport, PA

Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Lancaster, Philadelphia and Somerset, PA

Washington-Greene County Branch Pennsylvania Association for
the Blind

Washington, PA

Westmoreland County Blind Association

Greensburg and Uniontown, PA

RHODE ISLAND

IN-SIGHT

Warwick, RI

TENNESSEE

Ed Lindsey Industries for the Blind Inc.

Nashville, TN

Lions Volunteer Blind Industries Inc.

Johnson City and Morristown, TN

TEXAS

Beacon Lighthouse Inc.

Wichita Falls, TX

Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind Inc.

Dallas, TX

El Paso Lighthouse for the Blind

El Paso, TX

Horizon Industries

Tyler, TX

Houston Industries for the Blind

Houston, TX

Lighthouse for the Blind of Fort Worth

Fort Worth, TX

San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind

San Antonio, TX

South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind

Corpus Christi and Victoria, TX

The Lighthouse of Houston

Houston, TX

Travis Association for the Blind

Austin, TX

West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind

San Angelo, TX

UTAH

Utah Industries for the Blind

Salt Lake City, UT

VIRGINIA

Virginia Industries for the Blind

Charlottesville and Richmond, VA

WASHINGTON

The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc.

Seattle and Spokane, WA

WEST VIRGINIA

The Seeing Hand Association Inc.

Wheeling, WV

WISCONSIN

Associated Industries for the Blind Inc.

Milwaukee, WI

Industries for the Blind Inc.

West Allis and Janesville, WI

Beyond Vision

Milwaukee, WI

Mission:

To enhance the opportunities for economic and personal independence of persons who are blind primarily through creating, sustaining and improving employment.

Vision:

To be a premier organization of empowered employees that exceeds expectations of all stakeholders and champions opportunities for people who are blind to achieve their full potential.

Values:

We are committed to maintaining the highest level of trust and integrity while conducting business with individuals, organizations, private industry and government.

We are committed to conducting business lawfully and ethically with all people who are blind, employees, associated industries, customers and suppliers.

A primary goal of NIB and our associated agencies is to enhance the opportunities for personal and economic independence of people who are blind. We seek to achieve excellence in delivery of service and provision of access, both physical and programmatic.

We are accountable for all our decisions and actions.

We are committed to providing excellent quality, value, competitive prices and superior service to all our customers who use products and services made and/or provided by people who are blind.

We are committed to recognizing the changing needs and preferences of our customers.

Acknowledgments

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About the Author



Mary Jane Surrago

Mary Jane Surrago has been associated with National Industries for the Blind (NIB) for almost 40 years. As Assistant Secretary of the organization, she has played a key role in chronicling NIB's progress over that span of time, having been a focal point for communication with and between the Board of Directors and senior management, particularly on corporate governance matters and historical issues. Surrago is also the editor of NIB's quarterly newsmagazine, *Opportunity*. Earlier, she was NIB's Vice President of Administration, responsible for corporate governance, administration, communications, events management and rehabilitation services.

Deeply involved in her community, Surrago serves on the Borough Council of Glen Rock, New Jersey, as Chairperson of the Division of Public Works. As a New Jersey State Certified Emergency Medical Technician, Surrago is past President and an active member of the Glen Rock Volunteer Ambulance Corps.

In *Empowering People*, the information, photos and quotes that Surrago has chosen for NIB's history remind us of the foundations on which NIB was built and show the evolution of vocational opportunities over the decades, which have made a positive impact on society's views of the capabilities of people who are blind. *Empowering People* is a valuable resource that can be shared for years to come.

"We are proud to share our achievements during our 75th anniversary year and look forward to a future with limitless opportunities for every American who is blind and wants to work."

Kevin A. Lynch, President and CEO
National Industries for the Blind

"The early leaders of the American Foundation for the Blind who were instrumental in NIB's creation would have been amazed with the diverse career opportunities now available for people who are blind."

Carl R. Augusto, President and CEO
American Foundation for the Blind



"I salute NIB for its successes in creating and diversifying career opportunities, which have empowered thousands of people with vision loss to achieve their full vocational potential."

Hon. Edolphus (Ed) Towns, former member of the U.S. House of Representatives and AbilityOne Congressional Champion