

A Publication of National Industries for the Blind

O PPORTUNITY

Volume 7 | Issue 4 | Fall 2014

PAGE 6

Training Tomorrow's Leaders

NIB's Business Leaders Program

PAGE 12

In the Driver's Seat

New Forklift Technology Creates Jobs

PAGE 4

In for the Long Haul

Richard T. Ginman,
Defense Acquisition
Policy Chief

PAGE 14

Growing Employment in the Empire State

New York State
Preferred Source Program

Meet former NIB Fellow Brent Burkholder, human resources representative, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Many of the skills shared by great business leaders – communication, critical thinking, business acumen, to name just a few – are not intuitive. Instead, they are developed over time through a blend of training and experience.

Today's challenging and rapidly changing business environment requires a thoughtful approach to developing leaders. Employees with leadership potential need to be identified and their skills nurtured over time through a deliberate, planned combination of on-the-job experiences, mentoring and formal training.

More than a decade ago, NIB's Business Leaders Program was born out of this philosophy. Since 2003, the program has been cultivating business leaders who are prepared to face the challenges of today's complex business environment.

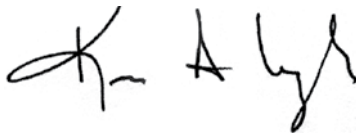
Through a combination of classroom instruction, fellowships and distance learning, more than 7,500 people who are blind working at NIB and its associated agencies have participated in the Business Leaders Program. Each gained skills and experiences necessary

to become not only effective business leaders, but more well-rounded professionals.

In this issue of Opportunity, we explore how NIB's Business Leaders Program has grown into a nationally recognized, award-winning program.

You'll read about how program graduates continue to build and strengthen their careers at NIB, its associated agencies, and in the public and private sectors. And you'll learn about some exciting new developments that will keep the program at the forefront of leadership and business training for years to come.

Developing effective leaders separates ordinary organizations from extraordinary ones. The Business Leaders Program is one of the many reasons why NIB and its associated agencies are the nation's leading employment resource for people who are blind.



Kevin A. Lynch
President and
Chief Executive Officer



OPPORTUNITY

OPPORTUNITY is published quarterly in the winter, spring, summer and fall. It is also available at www.nib.org.

Mary Jane Surrago
Editor

Laura Reimers
Vice President, Communications

Mike Johnson
Communications Program Director

OPPORTUNITY welcomes news and stories about the careers and capabilities of people who are blind. Contact editor@nib.org.

To add or change a mailing address, contact opportunity@nib.org.

Executive Team:
Kevin A. Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer

Angela Hartley
Executive Vice President and Chief Program Officer

Steven T. Brice
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer

John Qua
Vice President, Services

Marie-France Vareilles
Vice President, Products

Carrie Laney
Executive Director, New York State
Preferred Source Program for People Who Are Blind

CORRECTION

Shaun Sheeder, a production associate at Blind Industries and Services of Maryland, was misidentified on the cover of the summer issue of Opportunity. We sincerely regret this error and have corrected the online edition.



06

TRAINING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

NIB trains, mentors and inspires employees with high potential to be the next generation of leaders.

02 LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Leading by Example

04 IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Defense acquisition policy chief Dick Ginman shares his perspectives on the AbilityOne® Program.

05 NEWS & NOTES

- October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month
- Paul Henry Celebrates 35 Years at NIB
- Expanding Horizons

16 READY TO LAUNCH

NIB associated agencies introduce and update SKILCRAFT® products.

17 FAMILY MAN

Jim Tess of Beyond Vision overcame challenges to build a rewarding career and full family life.

18 QUOTED & NOTED

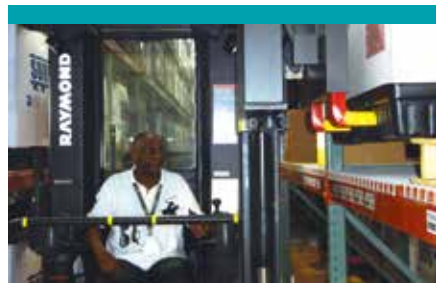
- NIB in the News
- 2014-2015 AbilityOne Catalog Now Available!
- NIB Connects with Wounded Warriors at BVA National Conference
- CrossFit Devotee Bettina Dolensek Featured on Fitness Blog
- Outlook Nebraska Honored as Business Innovator



11

PUBLIC POLICY GRASSROOTS FORUM

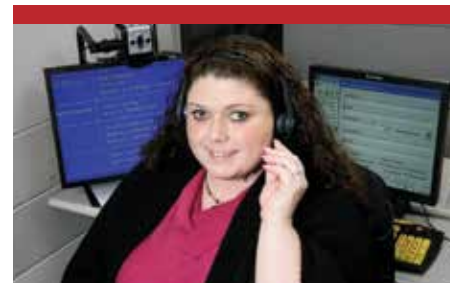
NIB associated agencies brought members of Congress and other elected officials onsite during the August recess.



12

IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

New technology and a new contract have enabled Travis Association for the Blind in Texas to create jobs for forklift operators who are visually impaired.



14

GROWING EMPLOYMENT IN THE EMPIRE STATE

The New York State Preferred Source Program undergoes transformation and renewal.

IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Important work, a talented staff, and the opportunity to make a difference every day – no wonder Richard “Dick” Ginman, Director of Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), tells his staff each day that “Life just doesn’t get any better than this.”

He may take a bit of ribbing for the comment, but Ginman is in a position to know – in a career spanning five decades, he has experienced government contracting from every side. He served 30 years in the U.S. Navy, including three tours afloat and in a variety of contracting leadership and acquisition positions; held private-sector positions, including director of contracts for a government contracting firm; and he now serves as the top civilian in procurement for the Department of Defense (DOD).

At OSD, Ginman advises the DOD contracting community that there is “a tremendous opportunity to make a big difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities by signing a contract, in accordance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation, with a participating AbilityOne nonprofit agency.” The AbilityOne® Program has been a strong presence throughout his career, says Ginman, who feels “fortunate to lead the Defense procurement policy community, where I can make a direct and positive impact by creating job opportunities through DOD contracts that result in the delivery of quality goods and services for the defense mission.”

“Employing people with disabilities is very personal for me and for my DOD colleagues who support the warfighter,” Ginman says, explaining that many soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines sustain severe, life-altering injuries while serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. “This is where a civil servant in the DOD contracting community can make a positive difference by following the federal contracting rules that result in employment opportunities for these military members and their families, and other people with disabilities, to help them live independent and productive lives.”

Ginman isn’t alone in this commitment. During his time working at OSD with Director of Defense Pricing Shay Assad, AbilityOne business with the DOD has grown nearly 35 percent. “Shay and I have experienced an exponential increase in commitment and advocacy of the AbilityOne Program by the contracting senior procurement executives, contracting officers, program managers and industry.”



▲ In recognition of his support for the AbilityOne program and his commitment to advancing economic and personal independence for people who are blind, Ginman received the NIB Spirit of Independence Award at the NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo in October.

Not only is the AbilityOne Program good for the American public, it serves as an important resource to the DOD. Ginman has seen the value in the AbilityOne Contract Management Support (CMS) program, which provides career-oriented employment for people who are blind, fulfills an important administrative need, and enables the DOD’s contracting workforce to focus on critical mission support for warfighters. “A couple of years ago, my office received a message from a severely injured wounded warrior who attributed his job on the CMS Program to saving his life,” Ginman recalls. “As I read about his journey from combat soldier, to service-disabled veteran, to AbilityOne employee, I understood the profound, life-changing impact the CMS Program had on this one veteran, and many other employees working on the AbilityOne contract closeout support teams.”

The recipient of NIB’s Spirit of Independence Award at the NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo in October, Ginman plans to remain at the Pentagon, where he can make a positive difference in public policy, and in the lives of people who are blind. ■

OCTOBER IS NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

“Expect. Employ. Empower.” is the theme for this year’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Each October, the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy organizes this national campaign to raise awareness about employment issues faced by persons with disabilities and celebrate their contributions to the workforce.

This year, NIB is working to reverse misperceptions and raise awareness about the capabilities of people who are blind. NIB associated agencies, AbilityOne® Base Supply Centers (BSCs), and distributors and wholesalers received toolkits from NIB to assist them in celebrating NDEAM and communicating the importance of creating meaningful employment opportunities for people who are blind.


As part of this effort, AbilityOne BSCs and other authorized AbilityOne distributors and wholesalers are prominently displaying NDEAM posters supporting employment of people who are blind or have severe disabilities through the AbilityOne Program.

Seventy percent of working-age Americans who are blind are not employed. Every purchase of SKILCRAFT® and other AbilityOne products and services sold through the AbilityOne Program helps employ people who are blind or have significant disabilities.


Join NIB in celebrating NDEAM! Follow and join the conversation on social media by using the hashtag **#NDEAM**. 



PAUL HENRY CELEBRATES 35 YEARS AT NIB

Paul Henry, senior cost accountant in the pricing support department, in August celebrated 35 years with NIB. Paul joined NIB’s Washington D.C. office in 1979 as a cost accountant after graduating from Georgia Tech. He has held positions as a senior cost accountant and senior price analyst over the years. “Helping to provide employment opportunities for people who would not otherwise have them is a fulfilling mission,” Henry said. 




 In this photo from NIB’s 1980 Annual Report, new employee Paul Henry talks with former employee Chrissy Clark. In August, Paul celebrated 35 years with NIB.

EXPANDING HORIZONS

Since its rebirth in 2008, Opportunity magazine has been guided by Editor-in-Chief Mary Jane “MJ” Surrago, one of many hats she wears at NIB. As NIB’s mission continues to grow and expand, Surrago has decided to doff her editor’s cap to concentrate on the other valuable services she provides, both in her official role as assistant secretary of the NIB Board of Directors and, after almost 40 years with the organization, as its unofficial historian.

“When the decision was made to revive Opportunity magazine, MJ was the natural choice to lead the effort,” NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch said. “With her deep knowledge of NIB and relentless enthusiasm for our mission, she has been an outstanding editor-in-chief.” In addition to her work on the magazine, Surrago is the author of “Empowering People: The Story of National Industries for the Blind and its Associated Agencies” published last year to mark the 75th anniversary of NIB and the AbilityOne® Program.

After putting her 25th issue of Opportunity to bed, Surrago will concentrate her talents on other areas of NIB’s mission. Over the years she has served NIB as vice president-administration and has been responsible for Board relations, corporate communications, event management and rehabilitation services. 

▼ Doug Powell, instructor, conducts Leaders At All Levels class at Lions Industries for the Blind in Kinston, North Carolina.



TRAINING TOMORROW'S LEADERS



Ten years and more than 7,500 participants since its inception, NIB's Business Leaders Program continues to energize, inspire and empower people who are blind by offering essential business training to managers, supervisors and entry-level employees.

Today's leadership positions have become more challenging, requiring a broad range of expertise and competencies. Because there is every reason to believe that the expectations of leadership skill standards will continue to climb, every organization should be asking forward-looking questions. What are we doing to prepare our next generation of leaders? Is our pipeline filled with the right talent to carry out our mission and inspire our employees?

In reality, too many organizations are more concerned with reducing headcount than with nurturing future leaders. NIB has made leadership development a priority, partnering with its associated agencies and leading educational institutions to turn out well-rounded professionals with an array of business skills they can use to take their careers to the next level. And the program offers something for everyone, as evidenced by the more than 7,500 individuals who have participated in at least one of the five professional tracks offered through NIB's Business Leaders Program over the last decade.

Fellowship for Leadership Development

NIB launched the first track – the Fellowship for Leadership Development – in 2003. Rather than sit back and wait for new, fully developed leaders to emerge, NIB actively sought out candidates with leadership potential and found ways to nurture and develop that talent.

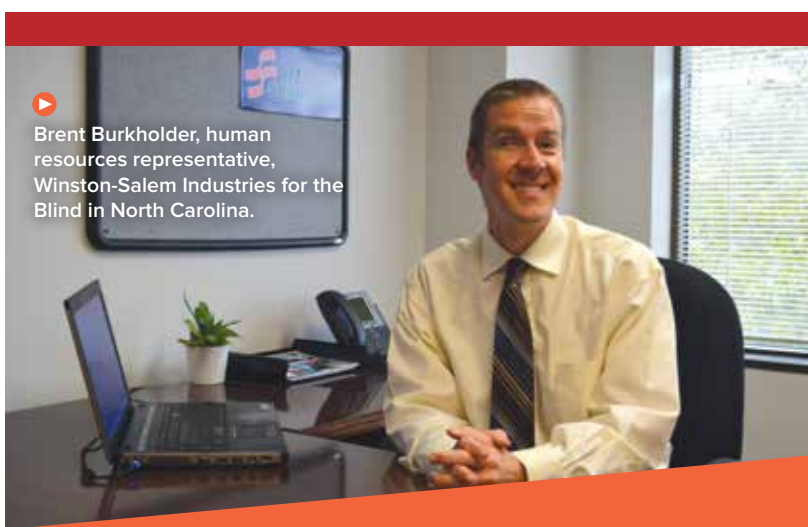
In a highly selective process, fellows from around the country who are legally blind were hired based on academic achievement, experience, motivation, references and interviews. Fourteen of the 15 fellows accepted for the highly competitive program later landed professional or executive-level positions. Each fellowship term ran two years, requiring multiple relocations of the candidates to gain different experiences and a significant investment of resources for support.

Business Management Training Track

Nearly 75 percent of the 79 graduates from NIB's 2005, 2007 and 2010 Business Management Training (BMT) classes have received at least one job promotion, advancing their careers and the mission of NIB and its associated agencies. BMT targets qualified, high-potential employees who are blind working at NIB and its associated agencies and who exhibit motivation and leadership capability. Being surrounded by smart and talented classmates drives candidates to do even better, and the students form an invaluable network they can turn to throughout their careers.

The curriculum consists of five intensive 3 ½-day educational sessions, taught by the faculty of George Mason University's School of Business. BMT has always covered the strategic link between mission fulfillment and business performance, but now the first session includes a class on performance coaching for participants' managers. As a result, managers are engaged

Continued on page 8



Brent Burkholder, human resources representative, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina.

CAREER CHANGING OPPORTUNITY

Brent Burkholder was a scheduling manager for nurses at a busy 100-bed rehabilitation and long-term care center in Maryland. Despite having a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Baltimore, Burkholder found his career stalled due to his limited vision.

Looking for ways to resuscitate his career, Burkholder applied for a fellowship at NIB and was given the opportunity to work on various human resources and marketing projects. After a few months, he relocated to Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (WSIFB) in North Carolina, for the second fellowship rotation, which encompassed on-the-job experience in all WSIFB operations. As part of the rotation he developed a web-based, accessible orientation module for offsite employees in 45 locations; created a tutorial for the organization's timekeeping system that increased the accuracy of electronic records; analyzed product pricing data; and identified job satisfaction trends by surveying 250 employees during annual compliance reporting. When Burkholder completed the remaining fellowship rotations, WSIFB offered him a career-track position as a human resources representative with numerous employee relations responsibilities.

"The fellowship was a life-changing experience for me," said Burkholder. "It brought out leadership and professional skills that I never realized I had. I love the fact that I am now working for an organization where I am able to make decisions with a high sense of autonomy." □

TRAINING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

Continued from page 7



Luigi DiRusso, production supervisor,
A.V.R.E., Binghamton, New York.

WHAT IT TAKES TO SUCCEED

Luigi DiRusso came to the United States from Italy in 1963. At first, school was very difficult because he could not speak English and could not see the blackboard. Although he was losing his vision, he never let it interfere with any of life's activities.

After graduating from high school, DiRusso started in an entry-level manufacturing position for IBM and worked his way up to production manager. But he was laid off a few years later, after Endicott Interconnect Technologies took over the operation.

DiRusso learned about A.V.R.E. in Binghamton, New York and started at an entry-level position in 2010. He quickly moved up to team leader and A.V.R.E. management saw his potential. DiRusso was offered an opportunity to enroll in the Effective Supervision: The Essentials track of NIB's Business Leaders Program.

"I will never forget that experience because of the facilitators, coaches and my colleagues who attended from other NIB associated agencies," DiRusso says. "Although I have taken many classes with my previous employer, I was never able to directly apply what I learned. The course materials

and presentation style of the facilitators enabled me to apply what I learned immediately to my job."

Shortly after DiRusso's 2013 graduation from Effective Supervision, A.V.R.E. promoted him to production supervisor. Today, he is responsible for all aspects of the organization's manufacturing operations, including meeting production objectives, quality, packaging, cost reduction, continuous improvement, and training and mentoring employees.

When not at work, DiRusso leads a very busy life with his wife and four daughters. For almost 25 years, he was involved in the Greek Peak Adaptive Ski Program, which instructs, guides and skis with people who have disabilities. He was co-chairman of the Maine-Endwell Field Hockey Booster Club as well as co-founder of the local blind softball team – the Broome Beepers – and an organizer of local and regional tournaments. DiRusso has also served as a Meals on Wheels Volunteer delivery assistant, and his efforts to arrange the donation of exercise equipment for volunteer fire fighters earned him the distinction of honorary member of the Endwell Fire Department. □

to support their students' overall success and encourage participants to apply what they've learned on the job.

The current class started in September, with 20 employees selected through a competitive application process. They will learn how to think through solutions and analyze tough business issues to develop a framework for applying their own critical thinking skills and judgment. Case studies, faculty-guided discussions and interaction with other students are part of the process, with concepts applied to real-life scenarios. Pre- and post-session reading assignments, special project work and team conferencing keep class members engaged prior to and between the sessions, which run through September 2015. The sessions cover business strategy and frameworks for business development; finance and performance through financial management; aligning development operations and marketing; growing the business; and leadership for personal, team and organizational performance. Over the five sessions, students interact with George Mason faculty, who are experts in their disciplines and eager to collaborate with students. Between sessions, students complete assignments, incorporate feedback on special project presentations and prepare for the next session.

Years after graduating from the BMT class of 2005, Ken Fernald, the new president and CEO of the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (A.V.R.E.) in Binghamton, New York, says "I continue to value the quality of BMT and what I learned. I greatly appreciate having had the opportunity to participate because it gave me a foundation to build upon, as well as access to a network of professionals that I still count on for ideas and advice."

L. C. Benson, a customer care center lead from Lighthouse Central Florida in Orlando, is a member of the current BMT class. For him, NIB represents and embodies

what people who are blind and visually impaired can accomplish. "In May of 2013, a trainer from NIB's Business Leaders Program visited Lighthouse Central Florida to facilitate several 'Leaders At All Levels' training sessions," Benson wrote on his application. "The impact she had on me reinforced that there is no limit to what people who are blind can do. At that point, I wanted to know more about NIB and what other programs they have to offer."

Effective Supervision: The Essentials

The newest track of NIB's Business Leaders Program, Effective Supervision: The Essentials, develops participants' ability to perform supervisory jobs more productively, effectively and responsibly, and keep business operations running smoothly. High-potential employees who are blind apply to participate in this track, which includes self-study and three participant-centered classroom sessions over a period of ten months. Topics include understanding supervision, managing and leading the work, and managing and leading people. The program includes a session on performance coaching for participants' managers, who play a significant role in helping students apply what they learn.

Business Basics

NIB's Business Basics track offers free distance learning courses in entry-level business concepts to anyone who is legally blind. The courses, produced in partnership with The Hadley School for the Blind, provide the building blocks for developing fundamental skills, such as business writing, general business concepts, working with spreadsheets, business communications and web-based research. The self-paced courses are popular, convenient and provide practical concepts that can be implemented immediately, as Cheryl Kindig learned.

In 2003, Kindig took a job making highway pole markers and packing Army combat uniforms at VisionCorps in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. After a few years, she wanted to learn other skills and began taking the Business Basics courses. In 2009, Kindig was one of 38 people completing all of the courses. Today, she works in the administrative office of VisionCorps' Rehabilitation Department. She says her success in changing careers is a result of the Business Basics courses on using Excel and writing for business. "One of my duties is to efficiently input client data into Excel spreadsheets," Kindig says. "I couldn't do that before I took the course. The opportunity to take this course free of charge ... was a huge benefit. And the instructors were wonderful!"

Leaders At All Levels

NIB introduced Leaders At All Levels in 2005 to offer on-site training in fundamental leadership skills to all employees in NIB associated agencies. NIB instructors, all of whom are legally blind, use videos, discussion and group exercises to teach skills in nine modules that run 60

to 90 minutes each. The newest module, Re-think Thinking for Workplace Interactions, was introduced this summer and is offered along with other modules on workplace-related topics such as teamwork, giving and receiving feedback, practical coaching, communication and more.

The instructors combine the most popular topics in a compressed format so they require less classroom time. Two new seminars are tailored to specific audiences – one for rank-and-file employees and one for managers and supervisors – but all participants leave the classroom with more tools to meet their workplace challenges. Libby Murphy, public policy director of the Louisiana Association for the Blind, expressed her appreciation of the Leaders At All Levels seminar in a note to facilitator Doug Powell, the NIB-certified instructor for the course. "Thank you for a wonderful, productive seminar yesterday," Murphy wrote. "You have given me new approaches to try on old issues, and I appreciate that The timing of your visit couldn't have been better."

The Lighthouse for the Blind (LHB) in St. Louis, Missouri, was among the first to participate in the track in 2005. Recognizing the value of the program, LHB reached out to NIB again in 2012 to request the modules be repeated and new ones presented at their plants in Berkeley and Trenton. More than 100 LHB employees, including managers and directors, have participated in Leaders At All Levels. "LHB's management recognizes the value of Leaders At All Levels in enhancing a sense of teamwork, supporting efforts to improve employee skill sets, supporting employee goals for advancement and improving organizational communication," said Clint Cruse, vice president of manufacturing at LHB Industries. "I would highly recommend the training to other agencies interested in improving employee skill sets, organizational communication, teamwork and morale."

Piloting New Concepts

The newest track is well under development, with a pilot being conducted at LHB Industries in St. Louis and Outlook Nebraska Inc. (ONI) in Omaha, where two promising employees are engaged in entry-level leadership programs. With NIB providing guidance and training materials, the organizations are offering opportunities to learn supervisory tasks and various responsibilities and roles in manufacturing operations.

During the program, participants maintain their current job and at designated times shadow others, receive specific instruction, participate in training and coaching, and complete projects. Participants are expected to spend five to ten hours of personal time each week reviewing lessons and completing additional assignments. In the final phase of the program, the trainees must demonstrate competency to independently handle a team lead or supervisory position. If applicants succeed and advance in their

TRAINING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

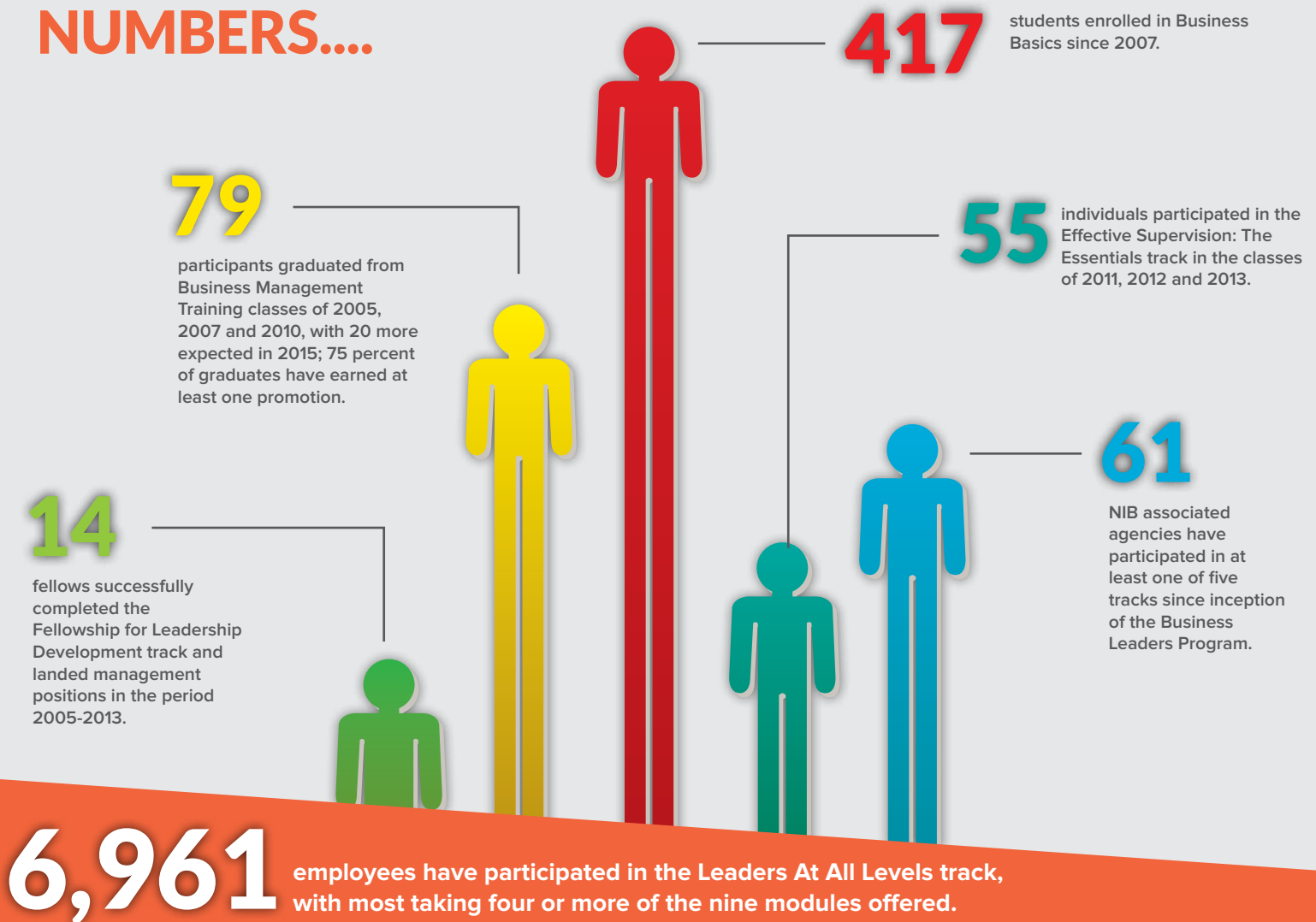
positions, NIB pays the difference in salary for a one-year period. Pending the results of this pilot, NIB may roll this opportunity out to employees in other associated agencies.

Jonathan Botsford, a machine operator at ONI, started the new program in May and has completed two phases. He has taken several Business Basics courses, learned different computer programs and is now shadowing supervisors to learn more about supply chain management, warehousing and distribution. "ONI management is committed to providing the training and tools for candidates participating in this management development program," said Mark Plutschak, ONI director of human resources. "Through a competitive internal process we are positioning promising employees for possible leadership positions in the future."

Identifying the Best and Brightest

Participants in NIB's Business Leaders Program are rising to the top. They are proactive, reliable and committed employees who are highly creative, quick learners and fast implementers. These individuals do more than just identify problems, they come up with solutions and become the kind of leaders that businesses require – innovators, willing to master change and accept new challenges. Because leadership development starts early, with management assessing each employee's development needs five to 15 years before the employee is expected to reach full potential, the Business Leaders Program offers a wide variety of learning and development opportunities to prepare the next generation of leaders at NIB and its associated agencies. ■

BY THE NUMBERS....



GRASSROOTS FORUM BRINGS MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TO AGENCIES

NIB associated agencies brought members of Congress and other elected officials onsite during the August recess.


Members of Congress visited NIB associated agencies throughout the month of August and even into September as part of the Third Annual NIB/NAEPB Grassroots Forum. Also paying visits to agencies were congressional staff members and several state and local elected officials. Agency representatives met with members of Congress or staff members at their state or district offices when lawmakers' schedules precluded a visit to the agency.

Sixty-three members of the House of Representatives agreed to sign-


on to a letter led by Representatives Lee Terry (R-NE2) and Sanford Bishop (D-GA2) to Administrator Dan Tangherlini of the General Services Administration. The letter addresses significant concerns around compliance with the AbilityOne® Program.

House Members visiting agencies included Representative Pete Gallego (D-TX23) to San Antonio Lighthouse in Texas; Representative Cedric Richmond (D-LA2) to Lighthouse Louisiana in New Orleans; Representative Mike Doyle (D-PA14) to Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania;


and Representative Louie Gohmert (R-TX1) to The Lighthouse/Horizon Industries in Tyler, Texas. Leadership from ABVI-Goodwill in Rochester, New York visited Representative Louise Slaughter (D-NY25) at her district office.

Other agencies hosting lawmakers, staff and congressional candidates include Outlook Nebraska in Omaha, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind in Little Rock, Industries for the Blind in Milwaukee and VisionCorps in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. 



 Foreground: Lighthouse Louisiana Line Supervisor Anthony Hardester shows Congressman Cedric Richmond and Lighthouse Louisiana President Renee Vidrine mess trays produced for the U.S. military. Looking on (left to right) are the Congressman's District Director Enix Smith, III; Earl Michael Willis; and NIB Public Policy Manager Tony Stevens.



 U.S. Congressman Mike Doyle and Pittsburgh Blind Association Industries employee Evelyn Nichol discuss her current sewing project.



 Pictured left to right: Arkansas Lighthouse employee Brenda Walker shows Buckley O'Mell from the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce; Arkansas Secretary of State Mark Martin; and Bill Johnson, former Arkansas Lighthouse CEO, how moisture wicking T-shirts are folded before sale to the Defense Logistics Agency.



▲ Bright yellow paint provides maximum color contrast on a turret truck operated by Schubert Whitaker, warehouse specialist and forklift operator, Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, Texas.

IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

New technology, coupled with a new contract with the U.S. Army, help the Travis Association for the Blind create more career offerings for people who are blind.

Advocates often say people who are blind can do almost any job – except one that involves driving. But technology is changing that, and the Travis Association for the Blind (TAB) in Austin, Texas, is using access technology to expand career opportunities for employees.

As part of a new contract for refurbishing and warehousing Organizational Clothing and Individual Equipment (OCIE) for the U.S. Army, TAB is on track to create 30 to 35 jobs for people who are blind, in addition to two who have already been trained to operate Raymond® Swing-Reach forklifts. Unlike forklifts that move freely about a warehouse, swing-reach lifts operate on sensors, with guide wires

that run the length of every aisle buried in the warehouse floor. Magnets hidden in the floor at the end of each aisle automatically slow the forklift down and, past a certain point, will completely stop its motion to prevent operators from overshooting the aisle.

Efficient and Easy

Forks that turn 180 degrees in either direction allow operators to engage a pallet on either side of an aisle and pick or place it without having to turn the forklift. While standard forklifts may require that operators have acute vision and depth perception to see 20 feet or more overhead and place a pair of forks in a four-inch slot, the Swing-Reach forklifts let operators ride up and down with the forks, keeping

them within four to six feet of the target pallet. The new forklifts also require less warehouse space, because aisles need only be six-feet wide; traditional forklifts require aisles nine to 12-feet wide.

A selection feature on the new forklifts allows rack heights to be preprogrammed in the forklift's computer. When operators specify a rack level, the lift will automatically move to the preprogrammed height. Operators carry portable screen enlarging devices for any needed spot reading. High-contrast paint on the forks, plus variable lighting, make the surrounding work environment more visible to the operator.

Safety is Priority One

Safety and efficiency were paramount

concerns in TAB's design, training and use of the forklifts. "We spent over two years developing this system to ensure there was no concern about the safety of our operators and other warehouse employees," said Tim Gates, TAB's project development manager. "An operator cannot move the forklift if any of the built-in safety features, such as dual-foot switches and front and side rails, are not properly engaged. We also zoned off our warehouse to minimize distractions, so that the only traffic allowed in a specific zone is the forklift operator."

Past Performance Counts

The new OCIE contract came about as part of an Army effort to trim costs by reducing the size of its Central Issue Facilities around the country. TAB has been in the supply chain management business for almost two decades and earned recognition from numerous customers for its results-oriented approach and outstanding contract performance. Through a contract with the Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support, TAB employees receive, stock and ship uniforms and related accessories and apparel in a 365,000-square-foot warehouse. The new OCIE contract brings TAB's total warehouse and distribution space to 550,000 square feet.

Labor Intensive Operations

As items for the OCIE contract are received, employees count, sort, reclassify and, when necessary, disassemble them. Products are then inspected, laundered, reassembled, repaired, repackaged, stored and shipped when requested. Every piece of used gear must be thoroughly examined because each has been subjected to different environments and situations that may cause a variety of nonconformities. The operations are labor intensive, requiring 12 people to receive, sort and reclassify one truck load of items per day.

Additional employees perform the other operations. More than 1,300 different items such as duffle bags, tactical



▲ Joseph Honeycut, TAB warehouse specialist and forklift operator, uses a voice-activated device to verify the correct pallet to pick.



▲ Kenneth Carpenter, assembler, disassembles Army assault packs at TAB.

vests, cold weather gear and MOLLE (modular lightweight load-carrying equipment) systems, are cleaned, repaired, warehoused and distributed. That number is expected to grow with the Army's needs.

Prior to this project, there was no standardized refurbishment program to help the Army recycle gear used in training and war zones. Clothing and equipment soldiers no longer needed were often deemed unserviceable due to minor issues such as stains, small tears, or missing buttons or hardware, and new gear ordered. Now, this mission-critical equipment can be refurbished and delivered by TAB in a shorter amount of time and at lower cost than replacements.



▲ Nichole Nobles, TAB washer/assembler, launders Army assault packs.

TAB's warehouse management system helps control the flow of storage and picking operations. Using a radio frequency voice-activated system, computers and employees wearing headsets talk to each other between every inventory transaction, eliminating the need for vision and increasing productivity while ensuring accuracy.

"The project was made possible due to the confidence and support of the Army in our operations," TAB Executive Director Jerry Mayfield said. "We are saving the American taxpayer money by recycling and refurbishing expensive military items, meeting the needs of our customers in a time- and cost-efficient manner, and putting more people who are blind to work in a challenging work environment." □

GROWING EMPLOYMENT IN THE **EMPIRE STATE**

The New York State Preferred Source Program for People Who Are Blind (NYSPSP) provides quality and value to customers – from the heart of Brooklyn to the northwest corner of Buffalo.



A Members of the ESERB Board of Directors, from left to right, Kevin Lynch, vice chairman and treasurer; Ronald Tascarella, chairman; Brian Daniels, associate commissioner, New York State Office of Children and Family Services; Rudy D'Amico, secretary, with Executive Director Carrie Laney (center).

Not long after the passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act in 1938, many states adopted similar legislation, creating more markets for the sale of products made by people who are blind. New York enacted legislation in 1945 and created Industries for the Blind of New York State the following year. The law designates qualified agencies serving people who are blind as a preferred source of products and services required by the state and its political subdivisions. New York's was the first state-use law of its kind in the nation,

and today remains one of the strongest. Procurement guidelines are established by the State Procurement Council under the New York State Finance Law.

Transition and Renewal

The program underwent a major transformation in 2012 when the New York State Office of Children and Family Services/New York State Commission for the Blind (OCFS/NYSCB) looked to NIB to take over the operations of Industries for the Blind of New York State. Based on NIB's 75-year track

record of successfully meeting the needs of both federal government customers and its associated agencies, OCFS/NYSCB signed an Interim Letter of Designation with NIB to create the New York State Preferred Source Program (NYSPSP). Satisfied with NIB's investment in the NYSPSP of leadership oversight and support functions, the Letter of Designation was renewed and finalized in December 2013.

As the new steward of the NYSPSP, NIB created a wholly-owned nonprofit corporation, Empire State Employment Resources for the Blind (ESERB), to manage the variety of services provided to the nine affiliated nonprofit agencies located throughout the state. Led by Executive Director Carrie Laney, the new organization is committed to providing challenging, knowledge-based career opportunities for people who are blind in high-energy, quality work environments.

Charting a Course of Action

In August, the ESERB Board of Directors adopted a strategic plan that charts a course to grow business opportunities with the greatest impact on employment and career growth. Goals of the plan include:

- Creating and prioritizing business opportunities that maximize employment outcomes.
- Growing sales by 10 percent over three years by cultivating new customers and deepening sales with existing customers.
- Expanding business opportunities with new business lines, markets and partners.
- Strengthening advocacy and program integrity by improving internal systems, cultivating program champions within state government and improving awareness of the program with elected officials.

Growing Employment Opportunities

Today, 420 people who are blind are employed through the NYSPSP. The

Procurement Council has already approved two large new projects – incontinence briefs and ZEP cleaning products – for the preferred source program, and sales are up 6 percent over last year. In addition, a \$2 million transit vest contract with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has been renewed, as has a \$3 million contract for incontinence products for the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation. In Manhattan, VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired recently acquired its first state project: Staffing a facility help desk at the New York City Administration for Children's Services.

According to Laney, the New York State Office of General Services (OGS) has become a strong advocate, promoting the preferred source mandate and providing direction to procurement personnel. In addition, OGS has eliminated the backlog in approving smaller projects for affiliated agencies.

"I am excited about our growth potential with our partners at OGS, OCFS and our affiliated agencies," said Laney. "We have big plans for the future of employment services in New York. We've hired a director of business development, have several large product lines recently added to the program, with several more new product and service offerings in the pipeline. In the months ahead, we are launching a rebranding effort to support our employment creation goals."

Brian Daniels, ESERB board member and associate commissioner of OCFS, feels the need to expand employment opportunities is great. "There is still so much left to accomplish. Many figures suggest there are high numbers of working-age people who are blind who are not employed – as many as 70 percent," Daniels said. "We have a tremendous opportunity to leverage the state's enhanced advocacy of preferred source programs to make a difference in the lives of the people we serve." □



▲ Armando Montezuma, sewing machine operator, Northeastern Association of the Blind, Albany, New York.



▲ Contact center employees of the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired – Goodwill Industries in Rochester, New York.



▲ Michele LaComb labels JAWS detergent bottles at A.V.R.E. in Binghamton, New York.

NEW YORK STATE PREFERRED SOURCE PROGRAM PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

- Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany
- Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Binghamton
- Alphapointe NYC, formerly New York City Industries for the Blind, Brooklyn
- Olmsted Center for Sight, Buffalo
- Southern Tier Association for the Visually Impaired, Elmira
- VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, New York
- Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired
 - Goodwill Industries, Rochester
- Aurora of Central New York, Syracuse
- Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Utica

For more information on NYSPSP's products and services, please visit www.nyspsp.org or request a catalog by calling 1-800-421-9010.

NEW PRODUCTS

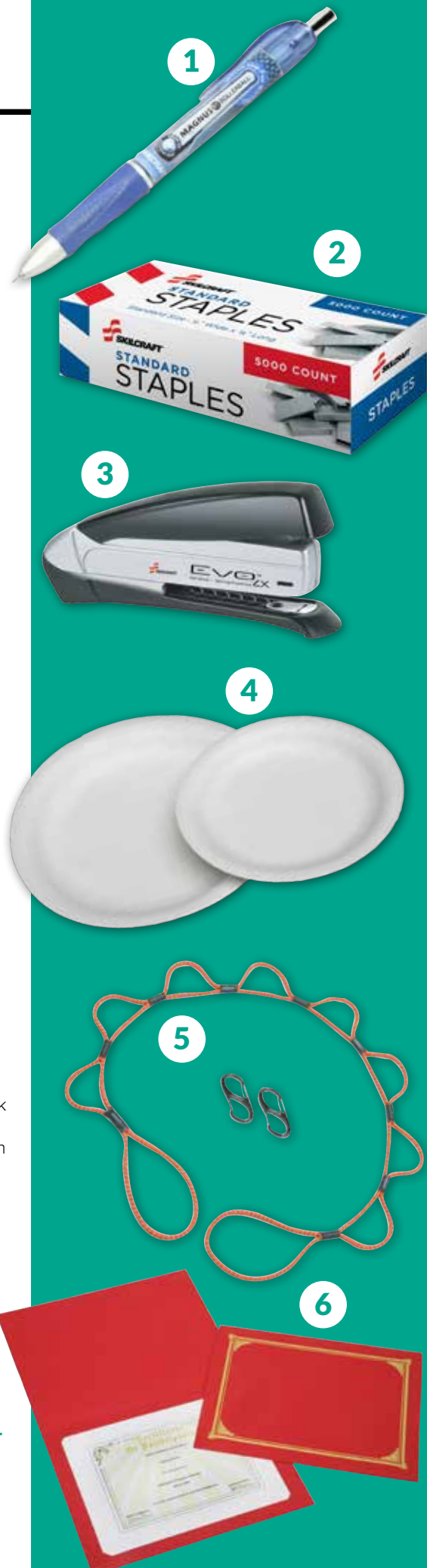
READY TO LAUNCH

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

NIB and its associated agencies are launching several new products in 2014. Highlights include a variety of SKILCRAFT® office products and cleaning supplies produced by people who are blind employed at NIB associated agencies.

1. **SKILCRAFT® Retractable Needlepoint RollerBall Pen:** San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind produces these refillable, retractable needlepoint rollerball pens that offer a sleek design and unique liquid ink feed system that's airplane-safe and maintains consistent writing flow. The latex-free rubber grip delivers added writing comfort and a translucent barrel allows ink-level monitoring. Available in blue or black ink with .5mm or .7mm points.
2. **SKILCRAFT® Standard Staples:** Produced by Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina, SKILCRAFT high-quality standard staples offer dependable, easy stapling. Rust-resistant, zinc coated wires have sharp chisel points that deliver precise paper puncture with less jamming. Each box contains 5000 staples with 210 staples per strip.
3. **SKILCRAFT® PaperPro EvoLX® Desktop Stapler:** Staple up to 20 sheets of paper with the push of a finger with this desktop stapler produced by Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina. The lightweight metal design with full spring-powered performance is engineered for fewer jams. Uses SKILCRAFT standard staples and includes a detachable staple remover.
4. **SKILCRAFT® Paper Plates – Compostable:** Lighthouse Louisiana in New Orleans produces these premium-strength, disposable paper plates that are water and grease resistant and have a flat-bottom, nesting design. Made from molded pulp and certified compostable, these plates meet Food and Drug Administration requirements. Available in 6 1/2" and 9" diameter sizes.
5. **SKILCRAFT® LoopRope® Fastening System:** Secure loose items on your all-terrain vehicle (ATV), utility-terrain vehicle (UTV) or truck using one of the most versatile fastening systems available, the SKILCRAFT® LoopRope® Fastening System produced by LC Industries of Durham, North Carolina. Unlike bungee cords, LoopRope never tangles and has multiple attachment points, reducing the risk of snap back. Link two LoopRopes together to build a custom cargo net. The doubled-up 1/4" heavy-duty shock cord and two steel double-gated safety clips fill nearly every light- to medium-duty fastening need. An easy three- step method can be used to tie down multiple items with a single rope. Available in a variety of sizes and colors.
6. **SKILCRAFT® Certificate Holders** Preserve your award certificates and documents with SKILCRAFT certificate holders featuring an elegant gold foil design. Produced by Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind and made of 80lb linen stock with four reinforced die-cut slots on the back cover, they securely hold vertical or horizontal certificates and documents. Covers measure 12 1/2" x 9 3/4" and fit 8 1/2" x 11", 8" x 10" and A4 size certificates or documents. Six holders per package. □

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



FAMILY MAN

Jim Tess of Beyond Vision overcame challenges to build a rewarding career and full family life.



▲ Jim Tess feels the engine roar on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle specially adapted for Beyond Vision employees.



▲ Jim Tess (right), with his son Cody and wife Kandra in 2006, before Jim found his way to Beyond Vision in Milwaukee.

Most parents say they would do anything for their child, but few are called to test the limits of that pledge. James Tess, call center team leader at Beyond Vision in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is one who has.

Diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes as a child, Tess went to the optometrist one day for floaters in his eyes and ended up enduring 12 surgeries before ultimately losing each eye to diabetic retinopathy. But deteriorating vision wasn't the only crisis Tess was dealing with – at the same time, his kidneys were failing.

By January 2003, Tess was on kidney dialysis a significant part of each day. Two years later, doctors said he had two months to live without a kidney transplant. The decision to pursue the transplant was not one Tess made lightly.

"I knew someone would have to die in order for me to live," he said. But there was another side to the equation: his son.

"My father died six weeks before my 6th birthday," Tess explained. His own son was five when Tess's kidneys began to fail. The feeling of déjà vu was impossible to ignore, but Tess was determined to change the outcome. "I grew up without a father," he said, "I didn't want to do that to my son."

Tess received a kidney and pancreas transplant a few months later, but complications kept him in the hospital for two weeks. Once at home, a blister led to a 10-month medical ordeal that nearly cost him his foot. It wasn't until the medical issues resolved that the full weight of what he had endured caught up with Tess. "I never had time to deal with losing my vision, because of the kidney issues," he recalls. "We didn't even have a cane in the house." For about six months, Tess sat at home, in a deep depression, until one day he realized "I couldn't just sit on the couch after having the transplant. I couldn't honor my donor doing that."

Determined to live the kind of life that would make his family and donor proud, Tess earned his GED and found his way to the call center at Beyond Vision, where he conducts customer research for Harley-Davidson. When

Harley-Davidson learned Tess had ridden motorcycles before his vision loss, they specifically asked that he talk with their customers. Satisfaction with Tess's performance led to more call center contracts and to a special opportunity for call center employees: The chance to ride a real Harley-Davidson motorcycle!

As part of a tour of Harley-Davidson headquarters designed to help them learn about products, each call center employee got to ride a motorcycle on a stationary dynamometer. With the exhaust piped outside the building they could start the bike, shift through the gears and feel the power of the engine at full throttle.

"Finally our call center staff knew what these Harley owners were so passionate about," Beyond Vision President Jim Kerlin said. "There really is nothing quite like riding a Harley." For Tess, the experience elicited fond memories of riding, and happiness for his co-workers, who experienced something most people who are blind never get to.

Tess hopes to stay at Beyond Vision and continue to advance within the organization. "It's more like a family here than just a company," he said. For a man who's endured so much to be there for his son, it's clear that family means everything to Jim Tess. ■

QUOTED & NOTED

NIB IN THE NEWS

This summer, several magazines featured NIB, its services to associated agencies and the capabilities of people who are blind.

An article in July's special veterans edition of *Careers and the disABLED* magazine highlighted NIB's Wounded Warrior Program and opportunities for training in business-focused careers such as Contract Management Support.

A profile in the July issue of the National Association of Manufacturers Member Focus magazine featured NIB

and several employees at Blind Industries and Services of Maryland in Baltimore. The article looked at how the capabilities of people who are blind can help close the skills gap for employers seeking qualified candidates, and included examples of large corporations that rely on NIB associated agencies to manufacture products for their customers.

The articles can be read at www.nib.org/media/articles. □



2014–2015 ABILITYONE CATALOG NOW AVAILABLE!

The 2014–2015 AbilityOne® Program catalog is now available, featuring more product offerings and a renewed commitment to green products. The AbilityOne Program has been the preferred source, and SKILCRAFT® the brand of choice, for federal purchasers for more than 75 years.

The 2014–2015 catalog offers a great selection and one-stop shopping for thousands of products that deliver value, convenience and unmatched quality. This year's catalog includes new products and old favorites, plus

a number of clearly marked green products to benefit the environment.

The AbilityOne Program makes it easy for federal customers to do the right thing. Purchases of AbilityOne and SKILCRAFT products not only help provide job opportunities for people who are blind or significantly disabled, they help protect the environment as well. For more information about SKILCRAFT or other products produced through the AbilityOne Program, call customer service at 1-800-433-2304 or email customer_service@nib.org. □

NIB CONNECTS WITH WOUNDED WARRIORS AT BVA NATIONAL CONVENTION

Representatives from NIB and several of its associated nonprofit agencies met with recently blinded active duty and retired service members who served in Operation Enduring Freedom and/or Operation Iraqi Freedom at the 69th Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) National Convention in Sparks, Nevada.

The BVA National Convention provides blind service members with information about national and local resources available to help re-establish their personal and professional lives. For the ninth year, NIB representatives met with convention attendees in the exhibit hall to share information about employment opportunities available at NIB and its associated nonprofit agencies through the AbilityOne Program. NIB associated agency exhibitors included The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. in Seattle, The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired and The Lighthouse of Houston. □



▲ Laura Russell, executive assistant to the NIB president and CEO (second from left), and Ned Rupp, NIB Veterans Affairs specialist, Wounded Warriors (far right), meet with representatives from the United Kingdom at the Blinded Veterans Association conference in Reno, Nevada.

CROSSFIT DEVOTEE BETTINA DOLINSEK FEATURED ON FITNESS BLOG



▲ Bettina Dolinsek, health and wellness specialist at the Lighthouse for the Blind of Fort Worth, with her CrossFit Coach Jim Bob Steen. Photo by Mark Graham courtesy of 360 West magazine.

Bettina Dolinsek, health and wellness specialist at the Lighthouse for the Blind of Fort Worth, was recently featured on personal trainer Bev Childress' blog, Faces of Fitness. Three years ago Dolinsek, who was born blind, accepted a sighted co-worker's invitation to join him at a CrossFit gym during lunch. Reluctant at first, she spent several weeks walking on the treadmill or riding the stationary bike rather than joining the strenuous workouts.

"... I didn't want to quit, or be known as a quitter when the going got rough," Dolinsek told Childress. "I also figured because I was blind perhaps I would not have to do certain things like box jumps, running, etc. Boy was I mistaken, and I am so glad no exceptions were made."

To learn a new movement or lift, Dolinsek feels her coach perform it. "[M]y coach will get into position, and I check out everything I need to know regarding form. We will go through the movement in slow motion, so I can feel every stage of it, and then I try the movement," she explained.

Today, Dolinsek has her CrossFit Level One Trainer Certificate and encourages people who are blind to get involved in fitness programs. It's a difficult task, something she thinks may be a result of so many people who are blind being told they can't do things. Whatever the reason, Dolinsek plans to keep working on improving herself and others: One day she hopes to open her own CrossFit "Box."

Read the full interview with Bettina Dolinsek at <http://www.bevchildress.com/blog/2014/7/28/face-of-fitness-betina-dolinsek> ▣

OUTLOOK NEBRASKA HONORED AS BUSINESS INNOVATOR

Outlook Nebraska Inc. (ONI) received the 2014 Business Excellence Innovator Award from the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce. The award recognizes an individual or business creatively making a difference by incorporating innovation as part of their everyday routine and providing tangible benefits through their work.

ONI is the largest employer of people who are blind or visually impaired in Nebraska and the only agency of its kind in a seven-state region. "Since 2000, ONI's innovative approach has helped the company and our community grow," award presenter Greg Donsbach said. "As ONI continues to increase blind employment, this positively impacts our local economy."

In accepting the honor on behalf of ONI, CEO Eric Stueckrath said the award "is encouraging and motivating to everyone in our organization, and it also has helped build awareness about our programs among the Omaha business community members."



▲ Outlook Nebraska Inc. representatives with the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce 2014 Business Excellence Innovator Award. Pictured front row, left to right: John Wick, Johnny Botsford, Kenny Blackman, Rachel Carver. Back row, left to right: Patrick MacBride, Mike Evanovsky, Luke Olson, Jeff Simons and Eric Stueckrath.

Stueckrath told attendees at the awards luncheon that ONI is "committed to growth and finding additional innovative ways to adapt technology and provide additional resources for the blind and visually impaired in our community." ▣



1310 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314

PRSR STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
WASHINGTON, DC
PERMIT #3070



VALUE

THAT WORKS

We deliver quality, cost-effective solutions whenever and wherever you need them. You help create jobs for people who are blind.

- ▣ Nationwide infrastructure
- ▣ Tailorable, scalable solutions
- ▣ Highly skilled workforce
- ▣ Tremendous social impact

MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU.

www.NIB.org ☎ 1-877-438-5963



NATIONAL INDUSTRIES FOR THE BLIND

An AbilityOne®
authorized enterprise.