

A Publication of National Industries for the Blind

OPPORTUNITY

Making the Most of Low Vision

Plus

- Medical Transcription Services
- Financial Assistance Programs
- NIB/NAEPB Public Policy Forum

Volume 5 | Issue 2 | SPRING 2012

Having a Doctor in the House

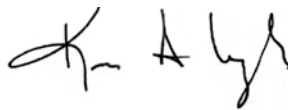
Among the many rehabilitation services provided by NIB associated agencies across the county, low vision clinics are widely offered because about 90 percent of people who are legally blind have some vision — ranging from light perception, to limited central vision, to lack of central vision with some peripheral vision. There are dozens of different low vision conditions, the most common being age-related macular degeneration, which accounts for half of all cases of visual impairment. Other common causes of low vision include glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, optic nerve atrophy, retinitis pigmentosa, cataracts and traumatic brain or eye injuries. Doctors who are certified low vision specialists make the most of residual sight for the millions of Americans who are living with low vision.

As the nation's largest employers of people who are blind or visually impaired, NIB associated agencies recognize the value of having an optometrist available in house who can work with clients and employees to try out a full range of low vision devices, such as magnifiers, special lighting or closed-circuit televisions, to make everyday tasks easier and increase an employee's productivity and work station comfort. Many times a device prescribed by the doctor may need

to be fine tuned for the environment and lighting conditions outside the clinic. Low vision therapists follow up with clients to make appropriate adjustments in the office and home, in an industrial setting or for other everyday activities. All of these on-site services are extremely beneficial to employees in our associated agencies and are integral to on-the-job success.

I invite you to look over our cover story in this issue of *Opportunity*. It features low vision rehabilitation services provided by our associated agencies. We cover one of the newer low vision clinics opened by the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment in Binghamton, New York, as well as the largest and one of the oldest clinics operated by The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired.

Some rehabilitation professionals feel it is the single most important service offered by our associated agencies to ensure job success and enhance opportunities for economic and personal independence for the people we serve.



Kevin A. Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer



OPPORTUNITY

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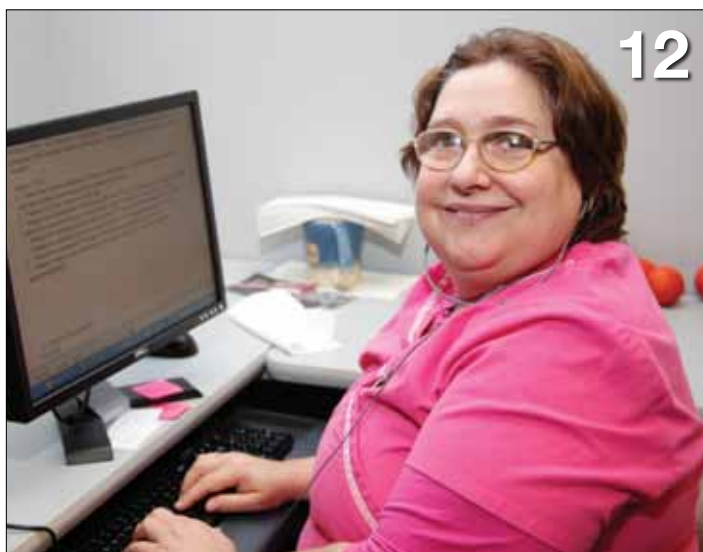
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OPPORTUNITY



Dr. James Simmons, low vision optometrist, Olmstead Center for Sight, Buffalo, New York, with patient, Diane Harris, testing a lighted hand-held magnifier during a low vision examination.



Donna Calcote, medical transcriptionist, The Lighthouse of Houston, Texas.



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NIB's new chairman of the board, the Honorable Gary J. Krump, has spent half his career championing the AbilityOne Program.

Gary Krump has always had a lot on his plate. As senior vice president at Cassidy & Associates, Judge Krump works with the firm's clients to expand their federal customer base and navigate the complex world of federal contracting. He is one of Washington's leading experts in federal contracting and market development and is a frequent speaker and writer on a variety of topics related to federal procurement policy. In January, he took on another major responsibility when he was elected NIB's chairman of the Board of Directors.

When Judge Krump retired from federal service, he was the chairman and chief judge on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Board of Contract Appeals, responsible for ensuring the fair and timely disposition of disputes involving construction, supply and service contract challenges on a wide variety of cases. Judge Krump also served as chair of the executive committee and vice chairman of the Procurement Executives' Council, which was composed of senior procurement officials from across the entire federal arena.

Prior to his appointment to the bench, Krump served as deputy assistant secretary for Acquisition and Materiel Management at the VA, where he directed and set policy in support of all VA facilities as well as other government agencies and managed the VA's Office of Acquisition and



The Honorable Gary J. Krump, chairman of the NIB Board of Directors.

Materiel Management; the VA's National Acquisition Operations Service in Washington, D.C.; the National Acquisition Center at Hines, Illinois; and the Denver Distribution Center. And for 34 years, Krump served in the Army's JAG (Judge Advocate General) Corps and retired as Lieutenant Colonel Staff Judge Advocate for the 65th Regional Support Command, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Krump began his federal career in 1972 and has spent half of it involved in the AbilityOne Program. In 1993, President Clinton appointed Judge Krump to the U.S. AbilityOne Commission (the operating name for the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled) to represent the VA, where he served until his retirement from federal service in 2006, including

serving two terms as chairman. There he gained a solid perspective on the opportunities and challenges facing the program. "Early in my tenure on the Commission, everything was about products, products, products," said Krump. "Today, AbilityOne participating nonprofit agencies have branched out very successfully into providing services to federal customers, which in turn, has created a broader range of career choices."

"I have also been impressed with how these agencies have raised the bar by becoming ISO 9001 certified, by implementing quality work environments, and by raising the technical and professional expertise of their management teams," added Krump. "This is critical, because the key to capturing more business is by providing 'best value' to the federal customer."

From all of his experiences and perspectives as a member of the Commission, as an NIB Board member and as a federal customer, Judge Krump possesses a keen understanding of the AbilityOne Program. "It is important that the AbilityOne Program 'stay the mission' and continue to serve those who cannot find the appropriate training and employment otherwise," said Krump. "There is nothing more gratifying than knowing that we can make a difference in the lives of people who are blind or have other severe disabilities." ■■

NIB Recognized as LearningElite Organization

NIB's Learning and Development program has been recognized by *Chief Learning Officer* (CLO) magazine as a 2012 "LearningElite" organization.

CLO's LearningElite program is the only peer-based benchmarking initiative in the industry. The awards program was developed under the guidance of chief learning officers and senior workforce development practitioners, using best practices to objectively assess the scope and value of the learning and development services that companies provide. The awards program recognizes excellence

in functional areas such as learning strategy, learning execution, internal learning impact, business performance results, leadership development, use of technology, executive buy-in, and content development and delivery.

NIB is one of 45 finalists, including corporations and organizations in industries such as health care, technology, education, law, financial services and commercial products, which will be honored at an awards ceremony April 1 in Miami Beach, Florida. ■■

NIB Services Launches Section 508 Assurance



New NIB service offering ensures accessibility of electronic systems, documents and websites.

Section 508, an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, mandates that all electronic and information technology systems and websites developed, procured, maintained or used by the federal government must be accessible to people with disabilities.

To support this requirement, NIB Services created a new service offering to address software, systems and website accessibility and usability conformance with Section 508. This is a new business line identified under NIB's strategic plan to provide testing, validation and remediation services for websites, portals

and applications; electronic documents; and legacy applications.

Information technology (IT) specialists check for conformance with the law, and also evaluate for usability. The team first uses automated testing tools, then manual testing is conducted by a team of blind and sighted IT accessibility specialists.

As new business opportunities are identified, NIB will work with its associated agencies to deliver on the customer requirements. NIB is currently finalizing two commercial contract opportunities. ■■

Coming this Fall: 2012 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo



Mark your calendars for the 2012 National Conference and Expo hosted by NIB and the National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind (NAEPB), planned for Wednesday, October 24 through Saturday evening, October 27 at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront in Baltimore, Maryland.

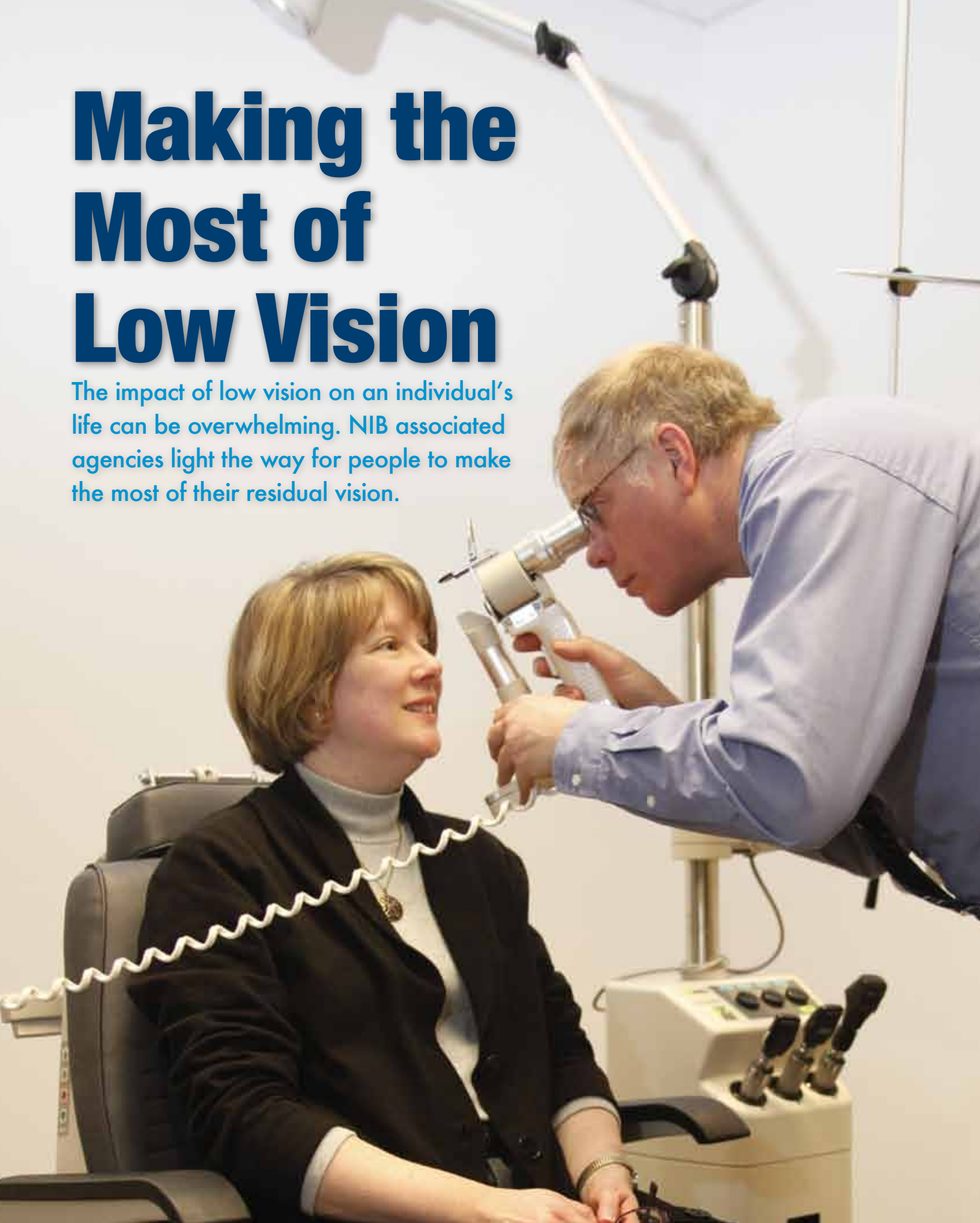
This year's event combines the sales-focused Opportunity Forum, including the vendor fair, and the Annual Training

Conference, which recognizes NIB associated agency Employees of the Year. General sessions will feature industry leaders and breakout sessions on a wide range of topics to support NIB's mission of creating jobs for people who are blind.

Check the NIB website at www.nib.org for more details.

Making the Most of Low Vision

The impact of low vision on an individual's life can be overwhelming. NIB associated agencies light the way for people to make the most of their residual vision.





Low vision is an impairment not corrected by medicine, surgery, standard eyeglasses or contact lenses. It interferes with one's ability to accomplish everyday activities and may involve reduced visual acuity, a loss of visual field, intolerance to light, double vision, wavy distorted vision, loss of contrast sensitivity or visual perceptual disorders. Sometimes, there is a combination of these impairments present in an individual. A few of the common causes of vision loss are age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, retinitis pigmentosa, glaucoma, traumatic brain injury, corneal degeneration and eye injuries.

Visual impairments affect all aspects of life including early development, education, work and recreation. Children may experience delays in development, while adults may lose their jobs. Perhaps the greatest impact is felt by seniors, who make up the largest segment of the visually impaired population, and who may experience vision loss in conjunction with health problems, which interfere with their independence.

Legal blindness is defined as having central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best possible correction, or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. Of the more than 10 million Americans who are visually impaired, less than 10 percent are totally blind, making low vision services extremely beneficial to the majority of Americans with severe visual impairments. Because of this, many NIB associated agencies offer low vision rehabilitation services on site to enable a person to utilize any remaining vision to its fullest potential. Low vision doctors typically prescribe prescription eyewear, magnifiers, adaptive equipment, telescopic eyewear and other independent living aids.

One of the newer low vision clinics operated by an NIB associated agency is located at the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (A.V.R.E.) in Binghamton,

New York. Opened in 2007, the Norman Richterman Low Vision Clinic is staffed by Dr. Michael Lange, an optometrist certified in low vision who also has a private practice, and Diane McMillan, a certified low vision and vision rehabilitation therapist. Both are trained in understanding how various eye conditions affect a person's ability to work and to live independently.

Comprehensive Low Vision Assessment

Dr. Lange starts his low vision examination with a complete medical history. Eye health testing includes examination of the external eye structures and a dilated internal examination of the retina. Tests are also performed for glaucoma. Special emphasis is placed on the patient's functional problems, such as reading, cooking, working and traveling independently. He examines depth perception, color vision and contrast sensitivity, and measures visual acuity and visual fields.

Dr. Lange's recommendations to enhance residual vision are individualized to each patient's needs for work, recreation and independent living. For patients with decreased acuity, Dr. Lange may test various telescopic systems to magnify distance vision or assess a patient's response to filters to control glare. Reading aids, such as magnifiers, special lamps, software that enlarges print on computers, large print keyboards, voice systems, dedicated computer eyewear and closed circuit televisions, may be tested. Preferences for image size, type of contrast, color and comfort are determined. Reverse telescopes, which minify the image so a wider area of information falls within the patient's residual field of vision, may be tested on patients with tunnel vision.

McMillan then prescribes the appropriate devices consistent with Dr. Lange's examination of the patient and trains the patient in their use. She may walk a patient

Dr. Michael Lange examines Michele LaComb at the Norman Richterman Low Vision Clinic operated by the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment in Binghamton, New York.

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Not Ready to Retire

Continued from page 7



Dan Davis, small machine operator, A.V.R.E., Binghamton, New York.

To correct blinding cataracts he experienced as a child, Dan Davis underwent numerous surgeries, which restored much of his sight. He enjoyed a long career at Security Mutual Life Insurance before anterior ischemic optic neuropathy, strokes of the optic nerve, took most of his remaining vision. Although traditional solutions involving contrast, lighting and devices didn't help save his job, he started a second career at age 67 at Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment in Binghamton, New York.

through daily activities to tailor the recommendation to the specific patient's needs, and make recommendations to modify the patient's environment during the process.

Michele LaComb is one of those patients who benefitted from Dr. Lange's low vision prescriptions. Years ago, LaComb worked at New York State Electric and Gas in various clerical positions. She was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa during her years as a stay-at-home mother. Prior to seeing Dr. Lange, LaComb used extra lighting, flashlights and sunglasses to control glare. Now LaComb says, "a special magnifier with a light has assisted me in reading fine print in phone books, on medicine bottles and on cosmetic products." A.V.R.E.'s assistance to LaComb in her home equipped her with low vision aids for cooking, and orientation and mobility training, improving her ability to shop and travel to work. "It gave me a boost in confidence to continue living as usual," said LaComb. Today, she has reentered the workforce as a part-time A.V.R.E. production employee and has enrolled in NIB's Business Basics Course, to update her office skills. "When I land a clerical position someday," said LaComb, "I know A.V.R.E. will help me with the low vision aids I need for the job."

A.V.R.E.'s low vision clinic is just one piece of its comprehensive rehabilitation services available to the community. "We opened the clinic to enhance patient care," said Rick McCarthy, director of program services. "Previously, we contracted out for low vision services and wound up talking around the patient, rather than with the patient. Our clinic provides patients with immediate benefits, as solutions can be placed in the individuals' hands that day, and they experience immediate improvement in the use of their residual vision — either through magnification, glare control or lighting modification."

A Pioneer in Low Vision Services

There are many other NIB associated agencies that have low vision clinics on site. While A.V.R.E.'s clinic is one of the newer ones, the largest and one of the oldest low vision clinics in the United States is at The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired. Founded in 1954 and originally dedicated by Helen Keller, the Sandy and Rick Forsythe Center for Comprehensive Vision Care embodies the concept of comprehensive, multidisciplinary low vision services of the 21st century. The Forsythe Center is dedicated to maximizing the remaining vision of people who have low vision



Sandy and Rick Forsythe Center for Comprehensive Vision Care at The Chicago Lighthouse.

by providing the most advanced devices and professional services. The Chicago Lighthouse is also home to the Pangere Center for Inherited Retinal Diseases under the direction of internationally acclaimed ophthalmologist Dr. Gerald Fishman and the Bergman Institute for Psychological Support. The extraordinary expertise of doctors and range of services have made The Chicago Lighthouse a model for low vision clinics throughout the country.

“The Lighthouse expects aging baby boomers and an increasing number of war veterans returning with vision loss to increase demand for its services,” said Dr. Janet Szyk, Lighthouse president and executive director, “and we have to be equipped to handle the increasing demand for services.”

That’s why the Lighthouse expanded its clinic and store in 2010 and started a research component. The 3,000-square-foot, cutting-edge clinic features larger patient rooms, conference space and updated technology, including computerized eye charts. A large optical display area with glasses and sun filters is available. Its optometrists specialize in low vision and are available to serve patients five days a week.

Directly connected to the clinic is a new, 1,200-square-foot New Tools for Living Store, more than double the space of its old location. It features more than 700 products, such as high-magnification gadgets, folding canes, hand-held devices that convert text to audio, Braille playing cards and toys for children with visual impairments. An open floor plan, high contrast paint, contrasting light shelves and dark carpet flow through the store to maximize accessibility. At the center of the store is a small table and consultation space where customers learn about the products that can make life a little easier.

To reach out to more individuals living with vision loss, the Lighthouse also operates seven satellite low vision centers in the city as well as in surrounding suburbs.

In 2012, the Lighthouse opened a comprehensive rehabilitation vision center in Glenville, outside of its main headquarters, in an effort to accommodate more individuals living in the northern suburbs of Chicago. The site mirrors their headquarters and boasts a state-of-the-art vision care clinic offering optometry, psychological counseling and occupational therapy services, a legal clinic and a retail store that offers the latest in adaptive technology services. The center also has an array of enrichment programs for seniors and children.



Dr. James Simmons demonstrating screen magnification software, ZoomText, to Jeanne Heckel at the Olmstead Center for Sight, Buffalo, New York. Enlarging the text and changing the color contrast on the computer through this software allows those with visual impairments to use computers effectively.



Dr. Kara Crumbliss, director of clinical services, consults with Dr. Alfred Rosenbloom, founder of the low vision clinic, at The Chicago Lighthouse.

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Patricia Rodriguez, customer relations supervisor, low vision clinic, The Chicago Lighthouse.

When Patricia Rodriguez was a young child, school professionals placed her in speech therapy. They thought it would improve Rodriguez's communication skills and enable her to participate in classroom discussions. They were unaware that Rodriguez's inability to participate was simply because she couldn't see very well. And having been born with low vision, Rodriguez did not realize that her vision was any different from other children. It was not until Rodriguez was a teenager, that a correct diagnosis was made and she started to receive appropriate services. The turning point for Rodriguez came in her early 20s after a visit with Dr. Alfred Rosenbloom at the Low Vision Clinic operated by The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired. By prescribing special eyeglasses with shades, Dr. Rosenbloom brought Rodriguez's vision in one eye from 20/400 to 20/80. The shades reduced glare caused from photophobia, a condition in which a person experiences discomfort in the eyes due to light exposure. "It made a huge difference for me," said Rodriguez. "For the first time in my life, I was able to do a lot of things and maintain a job."

Today, the busy mother of two children is a customer relations supervisor at The Chicago Lighthouse. With ZoomText software on her computers at work and at home, Rodriguez can function effectively and independently. A magnifier with a light that enlarges an image five times its size helps Rodriguez while she is away from her desk, and a small telescope aids her with distance vision tasks when traveling in unfamiliar places.

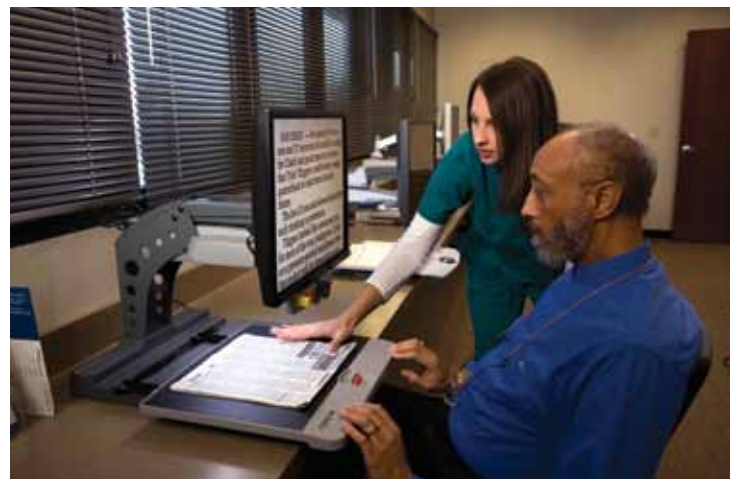
"After I received help, I became passionate about the Lighthouse and what it does for people with low vision," said Rodriguez. "Part of my job is to encourage others and to help them figure out new ways to do things."

A Common Service

The Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired, headquartered in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, operates the Steinman Eye Clinic, which provides a full range of low-cost optometric services to uninsured and under-insured clients. Its low vision stores, located in Lancaster and Lebanon, are stocked with hundreds of items, including talking watches, check writing guides, magnifiers, Braille items and more.

ABVI-Goodwill Industries' state-of-the-art Low Vision Center in Rochester, New York, is the best resource in its community for evaluation, visual aids and recommendations to improve visual abilities. Low vision doctors work in consultation with primary eye care providers to evaluate and improve patients' functional vision and recommend aids and strategies to use remaining vision. ABVI's InSight Shop offers a large selection of talking and large print timepieces, kitchen aids, large button telephones, large print calendars and check registers, lamps, writing guides and games.

Lions Services offers persons with limited income or without insurance an opportunity to obtain quality eye health care in the Lions Services Eye Clinic in Charlotte, North Carolina. The 15-year-old clinic provides low vision services each year to almost 6,000 people, almost half of whom are children. "With access to affordable eye care and prescription glasses, children learn better in school, working adults succeed in their careers, and seniors retain personal independence and an enhanced quality of life," said Jim Cranford, president and CEO. "It's just another service that we, like many other NIB associated agencies, offer in our community to provide eye healthcare for the prevention of blindness and preservation of sight." ■■



Envision Rehabilitation Center occupational therapist Karen Kendrick helps a client to use a screen magnifier.

Low Vision Conditions

Having low vision is not the same as being blind. An individual may have blurred central vision that may limit one's ability to see people's faces or to read, or may lose peripheral vision but may still see clearly to read through the use of central vision. While there are dozens of eye diseases causing low vision, the most common ones are cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration and retinitis pigmentosa.

Cataracts is a condition in which the lens of the eye becomes cloudy or opaque. They generally form slowly, but over time may interfere with vision, causing images to appear blurred or fuzzy. People with cataracts may benefit from anti-glare sunglasses, bright lighting and magnifying lenses.

Glaucoma is a disease in which the pressure of the fluid inside the eye is too high, resulting in the loss of peripheral vision. The disease often progresses with no symptoms or warning signs and if left undiagnosed and untreated, can lead to blindness.

Diabetic Retinopathy is an eye condition resulting from the effects of diabetes on the circulatory system of the retina. These changes in the tiny blood vessels of the retina can lead to vision loss. The longer an individual has diabetes, the greater the likelihood of developing this condition.

Macular Degeneration affects central vision by causing dysfunction of the macula, an area in the middle of the retina that makes possible the sharp central vision needed for everyday activities. It causes blurred, distorted or dim vision or a blind spot in the center of the visual field. Age-related macular degeneration is the leading cause of low vision among older people.

Retinitis Pigmentosa is a degeneration of the retina. It results in decreased night vision and gradual loss of peripheral vision. As the degeneration progresses, it can lead to blindness. Electronic magnifiers, night-vision scopes and other special devices can benefit people with this condition.



Normal Vision



Cataracts



Glaucoma



Diabetic Retinopathy



Macular Degeneration



Retinitis Pigmentosa

The Lighthouse of Houston is the nation's premier provider of medical transcription training for people who are blind.



The Lighthouse of Houston, Texas.

One of the fastest growing careers in the medical field is medical transcription. Medical transcriptionists (MTs) listen to dictated recordings made by physicians and other healthcare professionals and transcribe them into medical reports and correspondence, while editing for grammar and clarity. They produce physical examination reports, medical histories, operation summaries, consultation reports, discharge summaries, diagnostic-imaging studies and autopsy reports. Although transcription equipment has changed from manual typewriters, to electric typewriters, to computers, and from cassettes to digital recordings, the skills for this profession require mastery in medical terminology and editing, as well as strong typing, spelling and grammar skills.

“...once MT students have mastered the requirements and completed our course, they are well poised for a very rewarding career.”

Shelagh Moran, vice president and chief operating officer, The Lighthouse of Houston

The Lighthouse of Houston has been training MTs since 1973. To begin the program, candidates must type at least 50 words a minute and possess post-high school level spelling and grammar

skills. Traditionally, training has been conducted at the Lighthouse's Center for Education and Adaptive Technology on a full-time basis over 18 months, but in 2006, the Lighthouse eliminated another obstacle to employment for people who are blind by offering online MT training. Distance learners connect via the Internet to a virtual conference room every day with their instructor who teaches students across several time zones. In either format, the college-level syllabus is challenging and intensive, with sections on anatomy and physiology, pharmacology, medical terminology, medical ethical issues and a variety of specialties, such as cardiac, orthopedics and advanced surgery. Those who make it through the program are high achievers, like Jennifer Parrish, who was NIB's

2008 National Employee of the Year. Blind since birth, Parrish completed the course and took the next step by passing a six-hour examination conducted by the Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity and becoming a Certified Medical Transcriptionist — a rare credential, with approximately 1,500 people having earned this certification nationwide.

MT Careers at The Lighthouse

Although the Lighthouse has been offering MT training for four decades, most students were placed in medical offices or hospitals. It was not until the 1990s that the Lighthouse landed its first MT contract with the Department of Veterans Affairs and was able to offer full-time employment for trained MTs. Over the years, the Lighthouse grew this service and today provides MT services for the Navy Pacific Fleet; Navy Medical Center San Diego; Camp Pendleton; and VA medical facilities in Portland, Boise, Houston and Alexandria, Louisiana. The Lighthouse has also landed medical and other contracts with the University of South Carolina Medical Center, the Bureau of Land Management, the Grand Canyon Historical Society, as well as Baylor College of Medicine and MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Approximately 30 MTs complete the work either at the Lighthouse or at home, all across the country. By having employees work at home in different time zones, the Lighthouse is able to provide customers with rapid turn-around time for emergency room reports in less than two hours, 24/7, 365 days a year. And employees like having a professional career with no commute, flexible work schedules and productivity-based income.

For the MT service to work with so many employees and customers located around the country, the Lighthouse uses iChart — an Internet-based capability. Physicians can simply pick up any telephone, dial into an 800 number, enter a physician and site code and then dictate. An MT supervisor uses iChart to assign work to the MTs located around the country. The MTs listen to the voice file, type the report and transmit the patient file electronically back to the source for immediate remote access by any physician who is authorized to review the patient information. This method meets the increasing demand for MT services, which has been spurred by a growing and aging population, as well as the need for electronic documentation that can be shared easily among providers, third-party payers, regulators and health information systems.

“We believe there is a great future in MT careers and the demand for experienced transcriptionists will remain high,” said Shelagh Moran, vice president and chief operating officer at The Lighthouse of Houston. Although speech recognition, which electronically translates sound into text and creates drafts of reports, is increasingly being used, MTs are still needed to format the report; edit the document for mistakes in translation, punctuation and grammar; and check for consistency and wording that does not make sense. “Our employees will have the opportunity to be cross trained as ‘editors,’ so they are prepared for the future,” added Moran. “It is a very difficult training program, but once MT students have mastered the requirements and completed our course, they are well poised for a very rewarding career.” ■■



2008 National Employee of the Year Jennifer Parrish, CMT (certified medical transcriber), The Lighthouse of Houston, Texas.



Terrance Gosey, transcriptionist, The Lighthouse of Houston, Texas.

Telling our Story: Public Policy Forum Raises Awareness on Capitol Hill

Congressional members and staff hear from constituents in NIB associated agencies about job creation and training for people who are blind.



Advocates for Leadership and Employment, pictured left to right: Courtney Williams, Lions Volunteer Blind Industries; Anastasia Powell, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind; Rachel Carver, Outlook Nebraska; Jimmy Dean, Alabama Industries for the Blind; Nan Magness, Louisiana Association for the Blind; Stephen Comency, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment; Toni Fraser, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind; Jude Lucien, Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired; Luis Narimatsu, Georgia Industries for the Blind; Chris Montavon, Alphapointe Association for the Blind; and Blake Lindsay, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind.

The importance of building relationships with Members of Congress, not only on Capitol Hill, but back home, was a theme heard throughout the 2012 NIB/NAEPB Public Policy Forum, held February 28-29 in National Harbor, Maryland, outside of Washington, D.C. This year's Forum was attended by more than 160 people, with 39 NIB associated agencies represented, more than in 2011.

The Forum offers an opportunity for NIB associated nonprofit agency leaders and staff to network, communicate with their Members of Congress, and receive updates on legislative issues that affect NIB and its associated agencies.

Advocates for Leadership and Employment

One of the highlights of the Forum was the introduction of the inaugural class of Advocates for Leadership and Employment, a team of 14 NIB associated agency employees who are blind, and interested in learning more about the public policy process and telling the NIB story to legislators. The advocates were selected through a competitive process, and after attending training via webinar in January, they received classroom and on-the-ground training for meetings with their Members of Congress at the Forum.

Over a two-year period, the advocates will learn more about topics such as effective communications, advocacy

strategies and grassroots initiatives. The employees' agencies benefit by having a trained advocate working on behalf of the shared mission to increase employment of people who are blind. The Advocates for Leadership and Employment are:

- Rachel Carver, Outlook Nebraska
- Stephen Comency, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment
- Jimmy Dean, Alabama Industries for the Blind
- Toni Fraser, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind
- Nan Magness, Louisiana Association for the Blind
- Chris Montavon, Alphapointe Association for the Blind
- Lisa Pace, Bosma Enterprises
- Anastasia Powell, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind
- Misty Stenberg, Midwest Enterprises for the Blind
- Blake Lindsay, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind
- Jude Lucien, Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired
- Luis Narimatsu, Georgia Industries for the Blind
- Courtney Williams, Lions Volunteer Blind Industries
- Carlos Paraskevas, Arizona Industries for the Blind

New AbilityOne Champions

This year, 12 Members of Congress have been named AbilityOne Champions. These elected federal policymakers

demonstrate support for the AbilityOne Program and for related community-based, not-for-profit agencies in their district or state through congressional actions. Several new AbilityOne Champions received plaques during the Forum:

- Senator John Boozman (R-AR)
- Representative Dan Benishek (R-MI1)
- Representative Tim Griffin (R-AR2)
- Representative Richard Hanna (R-NY24)
- Representative Vicky Hartzler (R-MO4)
- Representative James Lankford (R-OK5)
- Representative Paul Tonko (D-NY21)

Hearing from the Experts

Forum speakers noted how personal visits from constituents, not just letters and phone calls, make a big difference with legislators and their staffs on Capitol Hill. They stressed the importance of inviting legislators to associated agency facilities and participating in local district events.

In a luncheon address on February 28, political commentator Fred Barnes, co-founder and executive editor of *The Weekly Standard*, offered his perspectives on the national political scene and the 2012 elections. Barnes said he had a very positive opinion of the AbilityOne Program, which creates job opportunities that might not otherwise exist for people who are blind or severely disabled.

“Opportunity is what America is all about,” said Barnes, noting that “work is enabling.” He encouraged Forum attendees to tell their own personal stories on Capitol Hill.

A panel of experts on government affairs and disability employment issues reminded Forum attendees that despite the challenging U.S. economy, the lengthy legislative process and election year distractions, it is important to reach out to Congress and for the disability community to come together on issues that impact employment.

A panel was moderated by A. Gidget Hopf, Ed.D, NAEPB vice president of public policy and president and CEO, Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill. Panelists were Andy Imparato, senior counsel and disability policy director, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions; Bonnie O’Day, senior researcher, Mathematica; and Liz Roberts, principal, Capitoline Consulting. Imparato



Senator John Boozman (R-AR), pictured at center, receives an AbilityOne Champion plaque from Kevin Lynch, president and CEO, NIB, and Bill Johnson, CEO, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind.



John Mitchell, NAEPB president and executive director, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired; Representative Donna Edwards (D-MD4); and Angela Hartley, executive vice president, NIB.



Eric Stueckrath, executive director, Outlook Nebraska; Senator Mike Johanns (R-NE); and Rachel Carver, communications/public relations facilitator, Outlook Nebraska, and Advocate for Leadership and Employment.

noted that the federal government has hired 10,000 people with disabilities as a step toward reaching its goal of hiring 100,000 by 2015. He said the business community, especially federal contractors, was beginning to follow suit.

At breakfast on February 29, Rep. Donna Edwards (D-MD4) reminded attendees to discuss the importance of both job creation and training, topics that are supported by all elected representatives, whatever their political affiliation. “It makes a huge difference to hear directly from people impacted by legislation,” she said.

Legislative “Asks” on Capitol Hill

In more than 140 appointments with legislators and their staffs February 29, NIB associated agency teams communicated about two major legislative “asks” to request that Congress support:

- Inclusion of consumer choice language in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) that ensures placements at NIB associated nonprofit agencies are counted as successful employment outcomes.
- The currently-operating Benefit Offset National Demonstration pilot program in which individuals on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) have their benefits gradually reduced (\$1 in reduced benefits for every \$2 earned) as they exceed the “substantial gainful activity” threshold. Support for this pilot program can lead to future legislation to permanently remove this “cash cliff” barrier to career advancement for individuals receiving SSDI benefits.

The second annual AbilityOne Program reception with NISH on Capitol Hill was an excellent opportunity to thank AbilityOne Champions and meet and greet legislators and their staffs.

NIB Public Policy team members — Rick Webster, vice president, public policy; Tony Stephens, public policy specialist; and Julie Shaffer, program advocacy manager, drew on their own experience in Washington to coach and prepare Forum attendees to communicate effectively in their Capitol Hill meetings and to “raise the profile” of the AbilityOne Program.

The Forum laid the groundwork for grassroots initiatives throughout the year, including the 2012 First Annual NIB/NAEPB Grassroots Virtual Forum, to be held locally in communities nationwide August 13-17. 🌐



Pictured left to right: Representative Tim Griffin (R-AR2); Julie Shaffer, NIB program advocacy manager; Kevin Lynch, NIB president and CEO; Bill Johnson, CEO, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind; and Toni Fraser, customer service representative, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, and Advocate for Leadership and Employment.



Representative Rodney Alexander (R-LA5) with Shelly Taylor, president and CEO, Louisiana Association for the Blind.



Moderator A. Gidget Hopf, Ed.D, NAEPB vice president of public policy and president and CEO, Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired – Goodwill, with panelists Bonnie O'Day, senior researcher, Mathematica; Andy Imparato, senior counsel and disability policy director, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions; and Liz Roberts, principal, Capitoline Consulting.

NIB's financial assistance programs for associated agencies create new opportunities for people who are blind.



John Gates and Annie Whitehead, cutter operators at Georgia Industries for the Blind, Griffin, Georgia.

“Our financial assistance programs are really an investment in our associated agencies, which... create and improve more employment opportunities for people who are blind.”

Steve Brice,
vice president and CFO, NIB

Annie Whitehead was a sewing machine operator and ran a packing machine for many years at Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) in Griffin until GIB purchased and installed a Gerber GTxL automated cutting system for textile products. Prior to the purchase, materials were hand cut by an employee with sight.

With the new spreading machine, GIB promoted Whitehead, who is legally blind, to operate the complex piece of equipment. After preparing the layers of fabric on the table, she uses the Gerber's computer console and selects the correct cut file in the software program, which guides the Gerber's cutting head into position, making all cuts, drill holes and notches required within the marker. Once the set-up process is completed, Whitehead activates the cutting head to cut the fabric. After each block is cut, the in-feed conveyor pulls the cut fabric away, and moves the next block of fabric into place. Whitehead picks off the cut material from the conveyor, while allowing scraps to fall into a

disposal bin. The process is continued until all parts are cut and stacked.

“The automated cutting system has increased the quality and efficiency of our cutting operations as well as improved employee safety,” said GIB Industrial Engineer Tom Henderson. “The purchase of the Gerber cutting system enables GIB to seek out more detail-oriented cutting and sewing projects, to perform contract cutting for other NIB associated agencies and to offer the position to an employee who is blind.”

The Gerber system was purchased by GIB with the assistance of a Compensation and Productivity Improvement (CPI) Grant established by the NIB Board of Directors. “We are starting to see results from our associated agencies who have applied for and received monies,” said Steve Brice, vice president and CFO at NIB. “The goal of this particular grant is to improve employee productivity to increase their compensation, as well

as to convert operations so that they can be accomplished by persons who are blind or visually impaired.”

The CPI grant supports the NIB Board resolution to endorse, promote and encourage the payment of at least the federal minimum wage for all employees who are blind, but there are many other assistance programs offered by NIB, including financial incentives to grow and retain employment of people who are blind. In addition, NIB's loan programs provide funding to associated agencies to take on new projects by assisting with the purchase of equipment or the renovation or expansion of facilities, and mentoring grants foster sharing of technical expertise among associated agencies. “Our financial assistance programs are really an investment in our associated agencies, which in turn take those funds to create and improve more employment opportunities for people who are blind,” said Brice. ■■

NIB Fellow Gains Experience at 3M Corporation

Al Avina, a participant in the NIB Fellowship for Leadership Development, completed an internship at 3M's Government Markets office in Washington, D.C. The company is the first private-sector organization to partner with NIB to host a fellow.

While at 3M, Avina developed a new contact relationship management system to highlight company-to-company relationships and identify new business opportunities, focusing on 3M/AbilityOne Program partnerships with the General Services Administration and the Defense Logistics Agency.

For years, 3M has partnered with NIB to supply materials for the production

of office supplies and other products by people who are blind at several of NIB's associated agencies. During Avina's rotation at 3M, he worked with the company's Government Business Development Manager, George Foley, who is well known by many NIB associated agencies.

"We were so impressed with Al and his contributions to our business development initiatives," said Robert Council, 3M's general manager of government markets and member of NIB's Board of Directors. "Our partnership with NIB delivers value to our customers and we look forward to hosting more NIB fellows. It's a win-win relationship."



Al Avina, NIB fellow, and Robert Council, 3M general manager of government markets.

NIB's Fellowship for Leadership Development is a salaried program that combines business-focused, on-the-job experience with professional development activities for high-potential individuals who are blind. ■■

Honored to Serve Each Other

To thank employees at Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (WSIFB), one of NIB's associated agencies in North Carolina, for producing the Operation Enduring Freedom Camouflage Pattern (OCP) combat shirt to support U.S. warfighters, airmen at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan sent a message in a photo.

WSIFB employees were delighted to receive the photo from their customers and responded with their own team photo and message of thanks to the airmen for their service to the United States. When NIB staff sent the WSIFB photo to the 455th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron Commander at Bagram Air Base, the response was enthusiastic. Said Lt. Col. Kevin Cullen: "That is so cool! I just sent it out to my entire squadron. Thanks for making my day!" ■■



Airmen at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan.



Employees at Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina.

Presidential Memo Promotes BioPreferred Products

President Barack Obama directed the Secretary of Agriculture to work with the AbilityOne Program to promote products produced by people who are blind or severely disabled. An excerpt from the February 21 memo to executive department and federal government agency leaders, entitled "Driving Innovation and Creating Jobs in Rural America through Biobased and Sustainable Product Procurement," states:

"Sec. 7. Education and Outreach. In compliance with the 2002 Farm Bill, several agencies established agency promotion programs to support the biobased products procurement preference . . . I direct:

" . . . Section 7-c: the Secretary of Agriculture to work actively with the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled to promote education and outreach to program, technical, and contracting personnel, and to purchase card holders on BioPreferred AbilityOne products."

Examples of BioPreferred products produced through the AbilityOne Program are the new notebooks produced by the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind (see story below). Other BioPreferred products include cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer and hand soap, and SKILCRAFT® BioWrite® ballpoint pens, which have pen barrels made from corn starch products. ■■

Arkansas Lighthouse Celebrates New Products, Founder's Day

Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind (ALB) announced its new line of 17 environmentally friendly notebooks at a "Green Notebook" Open House, held February 22 at ALB's facility in Little Rock.

"Kudos to the people of the Arkansas Lighthouse who were not satisfied with the status quo and decided to provide federal employers with office products that are sustainable," said Lisa Wilusz, director for the USDA's Office of Procurement and Property Management and a member of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission.

The Arkansas Lighthouse began paper operations in 1976, and today produces more than 1.6 million notebooks annually and employs 19 people who are blind. The new notebook products, manufactured using 100% post-consumer waste and "bagasse" biodegradable paper made from sugar cane, are expected to double both sales and the number of



Speaking at the podium is Lisa Wilusz, director, USDA Office of Procurement and Property Management, and member of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission. Pictured left to right: Bill Johnson, ALB CEO; GSA Northeast Supply Center Director Ruben Vazquez and Deputy Director Susan Chin; and Jim Kesteloot, Commission member.

blind and visually impaired employees in the department within three years. At a reception February 21 at the Arkansas Governor's Mansion to celebrate ALB's Founder's Day, NIB

President and CEO Kevin Lynch congratulated the Lighthouse for its 72 years of service to the community and its customers. Arkansas First Lady Ginger Beebe is a member of the ALB Board. ■■



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HELP US CREATE JOBS

National Industries for the Blind and its network of 90 associated nonprofit agencies serve as the largest employer of people who are blind in the country. Help us create jobs and develop careers through challenging, knowledge-based positions in high-energy, quality work environments. Purchase products or services produced through the AbilityOne® Program, including quality SKILCRAFT® products, and support employment and training opportunities for more than 50,000 Americans who are blind or have other severe disabilities. Join us in breaking down job barriers by supporting this dedicated workforce.



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