

A Publication of National Industries for the Blind

# OPPORTUNITY



## Celebrating 75 Years!

**Plus**

- NIB's Growth Years — 1963 - 1988
- Former National Employees of the Year
- QWE at Midwest Enterprises

Volume 6 | Issue 2 | SPRING 2013

## Still Winners!

NIB's planning for the year-long celebration to commemorate the passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act and the formation of NIB in 1938 is fully underway. Included in the planning are special events, advertising, publications, social media postings and the engagement of customers and AbilityOne® Program partners. We have also developed a toolkit for use by our associated agencies in promoting successes over the past 75 years. We are lining up speakers and developing the program for the 2013 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo that will be held in National Harbor, Maryland, during National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October.

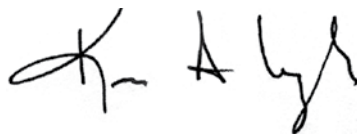
Some of our special guests for this conference will be nominees for NIB's national Employee of the Year awards. Started 45 years ago, this awards program recognizes the national winners, as well as all of the candidates for this honor. The program has grown from just a handful of nominees in its early years, to more than 70 in 2013.

As we look forward to this celebration at our conference, we also decided to look back on the accomplishments of some of the past winners of these awards. In this issue of *Opportunity*, we showcase a dozen of the past award recipients. As you read their stories, I am sure you will agree that

they are all still winners! Some have moved on to careers outside the NIB family. And those who have stayed in the network of associated agencies are continuing to move up in their careers and taking on leadership positions and responsibilities.

This issue also includes the second of a three-part historical feature about NIB's growth and achievements from 1963 until 1988. It was a period of aggressive growth, tempered by financial difficulties that followed when government business plummeted in the early 1970s. But NIB emerged as a stronger and financially sound organization. We expanded services and helped our associated agencies to enter new product lines, which grew employment dramatically.

NIB and our associated agencies have helped empower people who are blind to achieve their vocational potential. We invite you to join in NIB's diamond jubilee celebration and partner with us as we reach even greater heights in the years ahead.



Kevin A. Lynch  
President and Chief Executive Officer



## OPPORTUNITY

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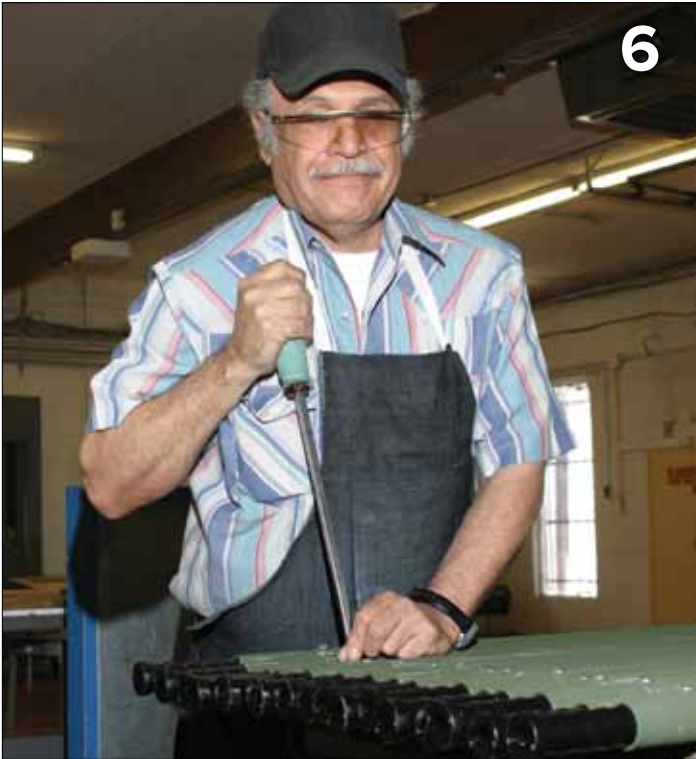
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Spring 2013

# OPPORTUNITY



Francisco Roblez, machine operator and litter assembler, Arizona Industries for the Blind in Phoenix.



2001 Peter J. Salmon National Employee of the Year Wayne Sibson from Travis Association for the Blind in Austin, Texas.



Misty Stenberg, promoted to public policy liaison at Midwest Enterprises for the Blind.

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### ON THE COVER:

Mark Murray, 2005 Milton J. Samuelson National Employee of the Year from Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina.

# Under Vice Admiral Harnitchek's leadership, the Defense Logistics Agency is making great things happen for people who are blind.

"Teams are only great when everyone gets to play." That quote by Vice Admiral Mark D. Harnitchek, director of the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), captures the essence of his passion for teamwork. "In the military, it's all about teamwork...NIB is a big player on the DLA team, and our challenge is to make the recently signed memorandum of agreement between DLA and NIB a reality," said Harnitchek.

Under Harnitchek's leadership, DLA is making great things happen for people who are blind. Last year, DLA hired several individuals trained through NIB's Contract Management Support (CMS) program to be contract closeout specialists. Recognizing that the bulk of support that NIB associated agencies deliver to the military is providing clothing and other textile products, Harnitchek feels that DLA and NIB have to become more creative to continue to develop opportunities in the current federal budgetary environment. Already a major user of NIB's CMS contract with the Army, DLA is looking to significantly increase its use across the DLA enterprise. But DLA isn't stopping there. "There are more opportunities for contract management support, and I suspect we'll discover other services that can be performed by NIB associated agencies," said Harnitchek. "Technology is the great leveler, and today there's pretty much nothing people who are blind can't do."

As DLA director, Harnitchek is responsible for providing the U.S. military and other federal agencies



Vice Admiral Mark D. Harnitchek

"Technology is the great leveler, and today there's pretty much nothing people who are blind can't do."

Vice Admiral Mark D. Harnitchek

with logistics, acquisition and technical services, including logistics information; materiel management; procurement, warehousing and distribution of spare parts, food, clothing, medical supplies and fuel; reutilization of surplus military materiel; and document automation and production. While doing all this, DLA's goal is to also reduce costs. "I'm counting on NIB and all of our industry partners to help us figure out where we can make our processes

more efficient and save warfighter and taxpayer dollars," said Harnitchek.

This "can do" attitude is grounded in a solid foundation of education and experience. Harnitchek received a bachelor of arts degree from Penn State University in 1977 and was commissioned through the Navy Reserve Officers Training Corps program. In 1987, he received a master's degree in management from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. He served on a variety of sea tours including two submarines, *USS Will Rogers* and *USS Buffalo*; two ships, *USS Holland* and *USS Proteus*; and the aircraft carrier *USS Theodore Roosevelt*. His short tours included serving as commander, Submarine Group 7, Yokosuka, Japan; the Navy Ships Parts Control Center, Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia; and the Chief of Naval Operations Staff. Flag assignments include commanding officer, Naval Inventory Control Point; vice director for logistics, the Joint Staff; director, Strategy, Policy, Programs and Logistics, U.S. Transportation Command; director, U.S. Central Command Deployment and Distribution Operations Center in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom; and deputy commander, United States Transportation Command.

"DLA is NIB's number one customer, but we can still do more as there are lots of opportunities," said Harnitchek. "We need to try new things and come up with new ideas. The country and the taxpayers demand it." ❖❖

## Survey Assesses Views of Hiring Managers

NIB recently commissioned a study to assess the attitudes and opinions among corporate decision makers regarding the employment of individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The results will support NIB's 75th anniversary education campaign to address the myths and misconceptions regarding the capabilities of people who are blind.

Repass & Partners conducted more than 400 telephone interviews and online surveys to collect attitudinal data among human resources directors and other hiring managers at U.S. companies in a wide range of industries.

The survey revealed the need for more education among hiring managers as misconceptions still exist in the business community about the capabilities of people who are blind, the nominal cost of assistive technology and the positive impact of creating an inclusive and diverse workforce.

Survey results indicated that education about hiring individuals who are blind was especially important for smaller businesses that are less likely to consider hiring employees who are blind, companies that do not have formal educational programs about hiring employees with disabilities, and firms where the hiring manager does not know anyone personally who is blind.

A majority of hiring managers mistakenly believe there are few jobs in their organizations that a person who is blind can successfully perform; it is more expensive to hire someone who is blind compared to someone without a disability; and it is a lower priority to recruit, train and retain employees with disabilities compared to executives, senior managers, young employees, and minorities.

"The survey results demonstrate the need to increase awareness of the skills and value that employees who are blind and visually impaired can bring to U.S. businesses, and we know that when given the facts, managers are open to hiring people who are blind," said Kevin Lynch, NIB president and CEO.

Information from this research study will be used to develop content for distribution to news media, as well as for marketing and advertising materials and other resources for employers. NIB and its associated agencies will invite business, community and government leaders to visit their facilities and learn about the wide array of jobs currently being performed by people who are blind, including production, administrative, technical, professional, managerial and senior executive roles. ❖

## Save the Date for 2013 Conferences

Mark your calendar for two upcoming conferences hosted by NIB and the National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind (NAEPB):

**2013 NIB/NAEPB  
Public Policy Forum  
May 14-16, 2013  
Sheraton Pentagon City  
Arlington, Virginia**



Focused on the theme, "Opening Doors to Opportunity Through Employment," this annual event enables NIB associated agency leaders and staff to network, communicate with their Members of Congress, and learn about current legislative initiatives. The forum will open on Tuesday, May 14 with a luncheon address by political strategist Donna Brazile, and will include a reception on Capitol Hill the evening of Wednesday, May 15.

**2013 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo  
October 9-11, 2013  
Gaylord National  
National Harbor, Maryland**

The year-long celebration of NIB's 75th anniversary will culminate with this annual event, including general sessions featuring government and industry leaders, informative breakout sessions addressing topics to support NIB's mission of creating jobs for people who are blind, a vendor fair to exchange ideas and build business relationships, and recognition of NIB associated agency Employee of the Year nominees and national award winners. An evening welcome reception is planned for Tuesday, October 8; the Awards Gala is Friday evening, October 11.

Learn about the important events and people that have contributed to NIB's success since it was established in 1938 by visiting NIB's 75th anniversary website: [www.nib75years.org](http://www.nib75years.org).

Check the NIB website for details about both conferences: [www.nib.org](http://www.nib.org). ❖



# Celebrating 75 Years!

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## Growth and Expansion — 1963 - 1988

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The second in a three-part series about the history of National Industries for the Blind, *Opportunity* covers NIB's aggressive growth during the 1960s, financial challenges in the 70s and technical advances in the 80s.

*Part of the modern military litter department at Arizona Industries for the Blind, which has been making litters since 1982.*

*Inset photo: NIB's fleet of SKILCRAFT trucks at one of its warehouses distributed household products to retail stores in six major cities in the late 1960s.*

Read the first in the three-part series about NIB's history in the [Winter 2013 issue of \*Opportunity\*](#).



The 1960s brought dramatic changes to NIB and its associated agencies. They were years of progress, but also years of experimentation and risk. Employment had leveled off in the program, and NIB associated agencies were looking for ways to increase opportunities through a national consumer sales program. There was also interest in engineering assistance, centralized purchasing and a research and development program.

In the early 1960s, NIB moved from a position of extreme conservatism to a new era of activity under the leadership of NIB Vice President and General Manager Robert Goodpasture. An engineer with industrial marketing experience, Goodpasture was willing to take risks to increase employment. During the decade, he introduced a number of new programs and special projects. Some were successful; others were not, but many proved to be sound and laid the foundation for future growth.

### **Dramatic Expansion**

In 1966, NIB launched a supermarket rack-jobbing program to support the sale of a line of household products marketed under NIB's tradename SKILCRAFT® and sold in supermarket, department and hardware stores in six major cities and at military commissaries throughout the United States. The products were shipped by associated agencies to NIB's warehouses located in St. Louis, Missouri; Atlanta, Georgia; Washington, D.C.; and Columbus, Cincinnati and Toledo, Ohio. From these warehouses, the products were distributed by NIB's fleet of trucks to retail stores and stocked onto 1,500 racks in five major market areas.

In 1967, NIB acquired the Modglin Company, a leading housewares manufacturer located in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The goal was to convert these two facilities into additional employment sites for people with severe visual disabilities. The company was renamed

*Continued on page 8*



After successful production of ball point pens, many more writing instruments were developed for production by people who are blind. Camelia Woodson packages woodcased pencils made at Industries for the Blind in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

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eventually as Royal Maid Association for the Blind, and would serve also as a center to test new products and procedures and to establish a source of component parts made by people who are blind.

That same year, NIB opened a Research and Development Center in St. Louis, staffed by designers, engineers, machinists and technicians. The center became the headquarters for all NIB marketing, merchandising and sales for the SKILCRAFT rack and Military Resale programs, as well as research and development efforts.

### Ball Point Pen Project

In 1967, General Services Administration (GSA) found itself with 13 million defective ball point pens from one of its suppliers and offered to NIB associated agencies the opportunity to produce

them as long as they could provide 70 million pens and refills a year, beginning in 1969. NIB divided up the project among four associated agencies. Performance specifications were high, inspection strict and tight quality control procedures were essential. For the first time in its history, NIB was designated the prime contractor for a government-use item. NIB engineers

selected and set up equipment, wrote specifications, set up production lines and provided training on hot-stamp

*U.S. government retractable ball point pen produced by NIB associated agencies beginning in 1969.*

printers, assembly machines and pen testing and packaging equipment. Because it was not practical for each associated agency to establish its own laboratory facility, NIB established and equipped a product testing laboratory in St. Louis, designed to perform all of the 28 quality tests required by the ball point pen specifications issued by GSA.

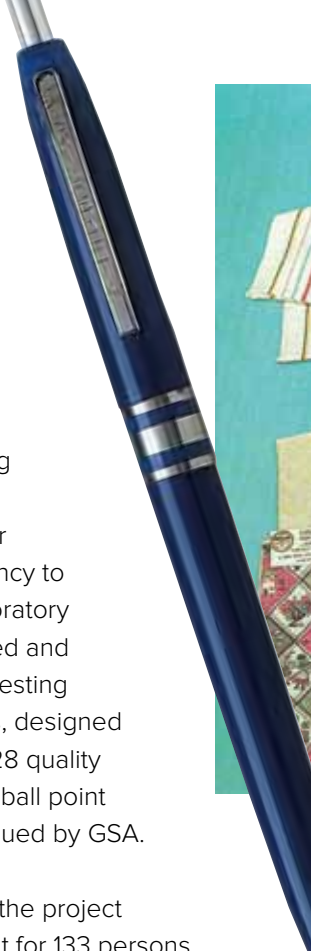
During that first year, the project provided employment for 133 persons who were blind, who made more than 68.6 million ball point pens and refills for the government. But the key to the success of the project was the quality of the pens, and with proven capability in this area, NIB focused on the next most promising area — office products — for development and production in associated agencies. As a result, the NIB family developed a full line of writing instruments and office products over the next few decades.

### Recognizing Employees

At the 30th anniversary of the Wagner-O'Day Act in 1968, there were 78 associated agencies employing 4,600 people, who manufactured hundreds of items for sale to government and commercial markets. As part of that celebration, NIB created the Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award to honor outstanding employees who are blind, and Peter Salmon presented the first award to Karl Randall of the Minneapolis Society for the Blind.



Dr. Peter J. Salmon presented the first national Employee of the Year Award in 1968 to Karl Randall of the Minneapolis Society for the Blind in Minnesota.







SKILCRAFT kitchen textiles made in NIB associated agencies. Early designs are pictured on left and modern designs appear on right.

The next year, NIB established a rehabilitation services division to help associated agencies start or improve evaluation and training programs to increase skills and abilities of people who are blind, particularly those with additional severe disabilities.

### Financial Challenges

In the late 1960s, federal government business grew to approximately \$23 million a year due to the United States' escalation of its military presence in Vietnam. By 1970, combat troops were gradually withdrawing from southeast Asia, resulting in a substantial drop in government-use sales to \$14 million. The military drawdown had a dramatic impact on NIB's budget, operations and services to associated agencies. The organization could no longer sustain so many new initiatives, which required NIB to take a hard look at operations.

In 1970, the NIB Board of Directors appointed Noel Price as executive vice president. Price had many years of experience as the general manager of Mississippi Industries for the Blind, one of the largest and most successful

agencies associated with NIB. He brought operations in line with financial realities, and directed more resources to expand government and Military Resale sales, while drastically cutting back other programs. NIB closed the St. Louis and Cincinnati rack programs; its Military Resale warehouse in Tuxedo, Maryland; and the Research and Development facility in St. Louis. NIB associated agencies, on a voluntary and individual basis, loaned \$230,000 to NIB to help deal with urgent financial obligations. A \$160,000 grant from the American Foundation for the Blind also assisted NIB, which was later fully repaid. NIB also relocated its headquarters from New York City to the suburbs of New Jersey to trim operating costs.

### Amendments to the Wagner-O'Day Act

Meanwhile, leaders in the disability community called on NIB for assistance in creating a federal market for their industries. With NIB's support, Senator Jacob Javits of New York introduced amendments to the Wagner-O'Day Act in 1971 to enable agencies serving people with other severe disabilities

to participate in the program. The other significant provisions of that amendment included: agencies serving people who are blind have first priority, after Federal Prison Industries, in the sale of products to the federal government; services to the federal government be incorporated in the program; and military commissaries and exchanges be included among agencies subject to the Act.



Senator Jacob K. Javits of New York sponsored legislation in 1971 to amend the Wagner-O'Day Act.

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NIB's 25,000-square-foot Technical Center built in St. Louis in 1985.



Technical Center personnel assist associated agency staff with product specifications.

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The JWOD Act also brought about changes to the Committee on Purchases of Blind-Made Products, which was renamed the Committee for Purchase of Products and Services of the Blind and Other Severely Handicapped. Its membership was expanded from seven to 14, and for the first time, a Congressional appropriation provided operating funds to support a small staff.

In June of 1972, retired Army General Charles Fletcher became the Committee's first paid executive director. He developed new regulations, established formal procedures for agencies to participate in the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program and worked with the six central nonprofit agencies serving people with other severe disabilities and NIB to administer government contracts. In 1975, those six agencies formed National Industries for the Severely Handicapped (known today as NISH).

Today, membership on the Committee stands at 15 presidential appointees, 11 representing major federal agencies and four representing people who are blind or otherwise severely disabled. The Committee's name was changed to the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely

Disabled, and today, its operating name is the U.S. AbilityOne Commission™.

### Supporting Associated Agencies

In 1975, NIB conducted its first management orientation program for executives from associated agencies. Later, NIB developed many additional training seminars to strengthen management skills of NIB and associated agency staff. NIB initiated its first financial assistance program for associated agencies that same year. The program provided financial support to agencies that took on new projects, thus fostering additional product development. In addition, NIB created a subcontract department to assist associated agencies in obtaining contract work from large corporations and small businesses.

### New Leadership, New Product Fields

With Price's retirement in 1979, George Mertz became president of NIB, bringing to the position extensive financial and administrative experience. Under his direction, NIB increased technical support to associated agencies and developed closer ties with organizations in the blindness field. NIB entered new product fields and developed more technical manufacturing

sophistication, as evidenced in many new products, such as aerosol paints, flyer kit bags, paper pads and tablets.

In 1981, NIB established a compliance department to assist associated agencies with legal and regulatory requirements of the JWOD Act and other workplace regulations. NIB set up a loan program, which enabled associated agencies to borrow funds from NIB to purchase equipment and raw materials needed to manufacture government-use products. The first contracts for accessories for the Army's Kevlar helmet were allocated by NIB to 12 associated agencies, creating 80 jobs.

NIB designed satellite establishment grants in 1982 to create employment for people who are blind who lived too far away to work at the headquarters of an associated agency. NewView Oklahoma, located in Oklahoma City, was the first agency to take advantage of this program, opening a satellite in Tulsa with a \$150,000 grant from NIB.

By 1983, NIB's original investment in Royal Maid Association for the Blind was showing success. The company was financially strong enough to operate on its own, and it was providing employment for more than 300 employees who were blind. NIB divested itself from the operations of



Production employees Kurt Lantz (left) and Mark Shively (right), inspect a SKILCRAFT/Quartet cork board at Inland Northwest Lighthouse, a satellite established by The Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle, Washington, with the assistance of an NIB grant.

Royal Maid, while still using the facility as a management training center for other associated agencies.

In 1985, NIB developed a long-range plan, which called for intensified product development initiatives and increased services to associated agencies. A major part of the plan focused on greater utilization of opportunities within the JWOD program in non-traditional product areas, along with an emphasis on assisting agencies to increase their involvement in non-government markets. A new 25,000-square-foot technical center was constructed to provide NIB staff with advanced laboratory facilities, production-line testing, rehabilitation engineering and training capabilities. The plan called for investments in capital equipment to develop new chemicals, electronics, plastics and more complex textile products such as coat liners, t-shirts and jackets for the military. Agency management and supervisors visited NIB's Technical Center in St. Louis often for training in the technologies used to produce more sophisticated products. In the Military Resale market, NIB and its associated agencies introduced product line extensions and new merchandising techniques and



During the 50th anniversary gala in 1988, NIB hosted a "Thanks, Congress" event on the steps of the U.S. Capitol. Senators and Representatives greeted nominees for the Employee of the Year Award, who thanked Congress for the opportunity for employment through the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program. Pictured are NIB Board Chairman Abram Claude, Jr.; National Employee of the Year Irma Acuna of RLCB Inc. in North Carolina; and NIB President and CEO George J. Mertz.

increased sales representation to gain the confidence of military commissary headquarters, as well as the military consumer. To expand job opportunities, more competitive product categories, such as air fresheners, candles and various liquid and solid cleaning products were introduced.

### Golden Anniversary Celebrated in 1988

NIB and its associated agencies celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Wagner-O'Day Act in 1988 with an extensive public and government relations campaign. Although it was a

year to celebrate many achievements, new challenges lay ahead for NIB and its associated agencies when GSA implemented industrial funding. This required GSA sales to support its operations, and dramatic changes in procurement practices in the government marketplace followed.

The next issue of *Opportunity* will cover these challenges and how NIB responded with aggressive marketing to government customers, major changes in the product distribution system and a focus on developing new employment opportunities in service occupations. ::

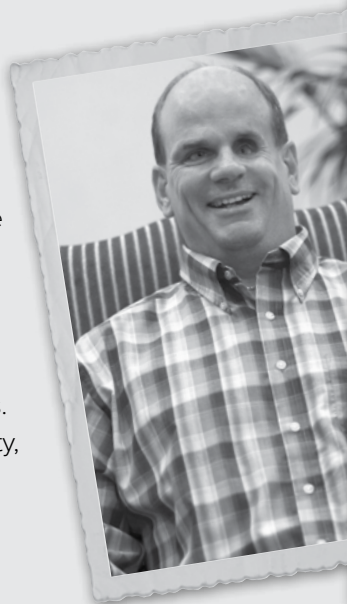
# Opportunity magazine checks in on former national Employee of the Year winners.

Previous winners of the Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award and Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award, all of whom are blind, continue to flourish inside and outside of the workplace. Many still work at NIB's associated agencies, while others continued on to other exciting ventures. Whether they've earned promotions, started their own businesses, or volunteered in their communities, one thing is certain — past awardees have been busy!

### Mark Murray

2005 Milton J. Samuelson Award Winner  
Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind Inc.  
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Years ago, Mark Murray set a goal for himself: to be completely self-supportive. Even after building a successful 20-year career at Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (WSIFB), Murray's ambitions continue to burn bright. He worked his way up to sales manager of WSIFB's mattress business, nearly tripling mattress sales since 2007. Murray's success earned him the title of "Mr. Mattress" by his colleagues. He continues to be active in the community, where he volunteers for Habitat for Humanity helping to sort materials, label products for sale, and man the phone lines. Murray is an avid sports fan, and he showed off his golf skills by winning the "closest to the pin" contest at WSIFB's golf tournament last year.



Mark Murray in 2005 (left) and in 2011.

## Nina Bektic-Marrero

2011 Milton J. Samuelson Award Winner  
Association for Vision Rehabilitation  
and Employment Inc.  
Binghamton, New York

The past couple years have been exciting for Nina Bektic-Marrero. While working full-time as a switchboard supervisor at the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (A.V.R.E.), she completed her master's degree in public administration from Baruch College in New York and just started a doctoral program in business administration at Walden University. When she wasn't at work or in the classroom, Bektic-Marrero

found the time to complete her book, "Thriving Through Life's Storms," in which she explores major internal and external hardships one must overcome to achieve personal and professional fulfillment. Her book was recently sent to the printer and will be available for purchase this spring.



Nina Bektic-Marrero in 2009 (left) and in 2012.

## David Steinmetz

2008 Milton J. Samuelson Award Winner  
Arizona Industries for the Blind  
Phoenix, Arizona

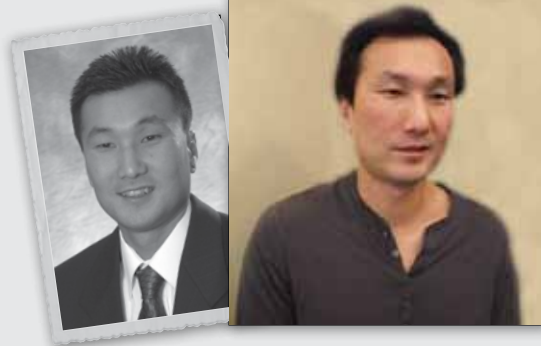


David Steinmetz in 2008 (left) and in 2013.

After graduating from NIB's Business Management Training in 2007, David Steinmetz found success as an administrative manager in the Distribution Services Unit at Arizona Industries for the Blind. The on-the-job training and experience he gained while supporting government and commercial customers helped Steinmetz earn a promotion to unit manager for Arizona Industries' Digital Data Scan business in 2012. In this role, he oversees 10 employees while running the day-to-day operations of the unit. Steinmetz remains active in his community, and now serves as a committee member of the Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairments. He sits on the Public and Information Committee, where he is helping develop an online service to provide resources for people who are blind in the state of Arizona.

## Robert Kim

2002 Milton J. Samuelson Award Winner  
The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who  
Are Blind or Visually Impaired  
Chicago, Illinois



Robert Kim in 2002 (left) and in 2013.

Like many others with a visual impairment, Chicagoan Bob Kim stays focused on his dreams. He took the skills he gained as an instructor in the Adult Living Skills program at The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired and carried them into a new adventure — running his own personal trainer business. "Ever since I was a kid, I was interested in sports," says Kim. "Having a vision impairment made me appreciate the importance of staying fit and healthy and sharing that with others." Kim spent much of the last eight years helping others to get fit and feel good about themselves, and often appears on television promoting self-defense for women.

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## Bryan Baldwin

1995 Peter J. Salmon Award Winner  
San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind  
San Antonio, Texas



Bryan Baldwin in 1995 (left) and in 2013.

As an assistive technology trainer at the San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind, Bryan Baldwin helped the Texas Commission for the Blind with its technology requirements and training needs. Drawing on the skills he learned while at the Lighthouse, Baldwin left in 1997 to start his own technology company. After running his business for several years, he looked for more stability during difficult economic times. In 2002, Baldwin found a job with the state of Texas, and has since been working in the Division of Blind Services as an employment assistance specialist. In this position, he helps customers identify the types of assistive technology that best help them with their vocational goals.

## Michelle Mills

1999 Peter J. Salmon Award Winner  
Associated Industries for the Blind Inc.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

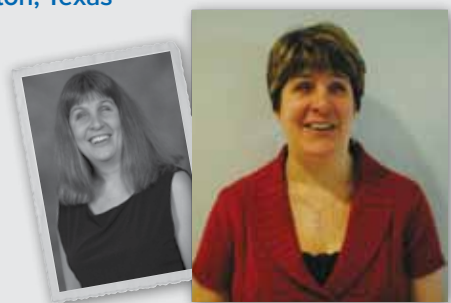


Michelle Mills in 1999 (left) and in 2013.

Since beginning work at the Naval Station Great Lakes Base Supply Center in 1999, Michelle Mills has become a familiar face to her customers. She continues to work as a customer service representative, and Mills helps manage nearly every facet of the store's operations — including retail checkout, showroom maintenance and inventory control. She recently learned to use new assistive technologies, including ZoomText with speech and JAWS. With the right attitude and a little training, Mills proves that there's no difference between the capabilities of people who are blind and sighted at work. "Some customers that I've known for years never realized I was visually impaired," she says.

## Jennifer Parrish

2008 Peter J. Salmon Award Winner  
The Lighthouse of Houston  
Houston, Texas



Jennifer Parrish in 2008 (left) and in 2013.

Jennifer Parrish brings an uncommon expertise to her position at the Lighthouse of Houston. Since becoming a Certified Medical Transcriptionist (CMT) — a prestigious credential that is difficult to obtain — Parrish was promoted to quality control lead in her department. She continues to serve as the recognized expert in dictation and transcription, and in 2010, successfully passed the CMT recertification exam. Parrish is proud to report that thanks to the opportunities she's had through her job at the Lighthouse, she no longer needs Social Security Disability Insurance benefits. "I am completely independent of supplemental income," she says.

## James Michaels

2007 Milton J. Samuelson Award Winner  
Bosma Enterprises  
Indianapolis, Indiana

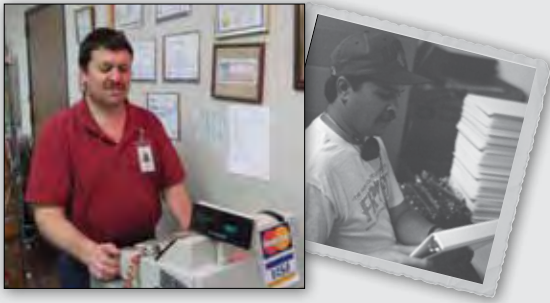


James Michaels in 2007 (left) and in 2013.

Since joining Bosma Enterprises in 2002, James Michaels has been a rising star on the leadership track. He was recently promoted to senior director of rehabilitation, joining Bosma's executive leadership team. Michaels also led efforts to develop the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program, helping people who are blind or visually impaired become small business owners. Outside of the office, Michaels says, he is "still striving to be the best parent I can be to my son Jessie." He recently started teaching Jessie to play the guitar using the TalkingTabs™ instructional guide.

## Wayne Sibson

2001 Peter J. Salmon Award Winner  
Travis Association for the Blind  
Austin, Texas



Wayne Sibson in 2001 (right) and in 2013.

In 2001, Wayne Sibson operated an ultrasonic welding machine at Travis Association for the Blind, punching holes in webbing used for military helmets. Not even Sibson could have predicted the new direction his career took him several years later. In 2008, he opened a cafeteria in the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services building in Austin, Texas. As the self-described “boss man,” Sibson manages the Grand Slam Café, named after his love for baseball. The path to running a food service operation didn’t come easy — he went through 16 weeks of training to become a ServeSafe® food handler, licensed and certified by the National Restaurant Association. Sibson is living proof that career paths are often full of surprises.

## Dennis Runyan

2007 Peter J. Salmon Award Winner  
Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Cincinnati, Ohio



Dennis Runyan in 2007 (right) and in 2012.

Dennis Runyan is always finding ways to grow his skills and capabilities. As a palletizer, he was the first person who is blind at the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) to operate a hoist that loads 2,000-pound rolls of tape, and he has palletized on all three of CABVI’s tape machines. His job includes more responsibility than ever before, and he now assembles kitchen gadgets. Reflecting on his 15-year career at CABVI, Runyan is most proud of his safety record and improved efficiency. CABVI Executive Director John Mitchell explains, “Dennis is a shining example for all of us.”

## Kim Utley

2001 Milton J. Samuelson Award Winner  
Blind Industries and Services of Maryland  
Baltimore, Maryland



Kim Utley in 2001 (right) and in 2012

Since landing a retail associate position at the AbilityOne® Base Supply Center (BSC) located at Dover Air Force Base (AFB) in 1998, Kim Utley’s career has been on the fast track. Only two years into the job, she earned a promotion to assistant manager and took on various management and human resource responsibilities. In 2004, she became the first AbilityOne BSC manager who is blind. Today, as manager of the Dover AFB BSC, she oversees 16 associates and manages all aspects of store operations. Utley says that her job at Blind Industries and Services of Maryland has afforded her the opportunity to own her home and provide a comfortable living for her family.

## James Benton

2006 Milton J. Samuelson Award Winner  
RLCB Inc.  
Raleigh, North Carolina



James Benton in 2006 (right) and in 2013

Having a positive attitude comes naturally to James Benton. In 2006, Benton suffered a minor heart attack, which made him realize what’s most important in life. “I now understand just how fleeting and precious our time is,” he says. With a clean bill of health, and renewed outlook on life and his job, Benton continued his work for the North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind in Raleigh, North Carolina. As a community employment specialist, he provides job skills training and coaching for students at the Governor Morehead School for the Blind. Benton was recently named a board member at RLCB, where he worked years ago, and credits the agency for helping him become successful. ❖

## Midwest Enterprises for the Blind embraces the Quality Work Environment initiative for continual improvement.



Midwest Enterprises for the Blind employee William Drain was promoted to business development coordinator.



Midwest Enterprises for the Blind employees pictured left to right: David Pressley, promoted to production supervisor after graduating from NIB's Effective Supervision training in 2012, and colleague Kenneth Lhamon.

With 27 of NIB's associated nonprofit agencies currently implementing the U.S. AbilityOne Commission's Quality Work Environment (QWE) initiative, the program enters Phase II of the agency rollout process that began in January 2010. NIB plans to facilitate initial QWE self-assessments at all of its producing associated agency locations by December 2014.

QWE's continual improvement process helps associated agencies adopt employment practices that enable employees who are blind to improve productivity and quality, as well as maximize earnings and employment opportunities. Agencies are embracing QWE as a business practice improvement "system-in-a-box" that directly touches their employees.

"QWE is a people-centered, ISO-type process using AbilityOne agency best practices as employment practice guidelines," said Jason Bryn, NIB workforce development

program director. "That means QWE action items for NIB's associated agencies are mission-driven."

Agency QWE action items center around improving communication, employee skill development, assistive technology and other accommodations, facility access, employee involvement and employee engagement. For many NIB associated agencies, QWE can help an employee culture to become more transparent.

### A Win-Win Situation

One of NIB's associated agencies realizing the benefits of QWE is Midwest Enterprises for the Blind (MWEB) in Kalamazoo, Michigan, regarded as one of America's most "blind-friendly" cities.

Founded 20 years ago, MWEB has grown through four relocations, employing 30 employees, 25 of whom are blind or visually impaired. The company provides light manufacturing of products such as folding tables and

chairs, and offers a range of business, packaging and supply chain services.

"Looking at our accomplishments in the last two years since we first started the QWE program, we are stronger as individuals and we are a stronger agency," said Vicky Hickok, MWEB administrative manager. "This is definitely an example of a win-win situation as MWEB employees have learned how to turn individual success into team success."

After embracing the Commission's QWE initiative, MWEB was recognized by NIB for its outstanding efforts in applying best practices and making positive changes in the organization. "Our employees totally ran with it," said Hickok.

### Teamwork = Results

MWEB leaders report numerous benefits of the QWE program, including improved communications. Employees demonstrate leadership skills and have



a better understanding of how decisions are made. It's more than management making a decision and directing employees. It's not a top-down or even a bottom-up management approach. With QWE, everyone is working together and employees have a voice in how the company moves forward.

Another area of improvement for MWEB is upward mobility. The company promoted six of its 25 employees who are blind into new roles, including four employees moving from production to administrative or supervisory positions.

### Raising Awareness

MWEB also enhanced its footprint in the local community through public relations efforts, such as developing a newsletter to raise awareness among business and legislative leaders. The publication has led to new business contacts that were previously unaware of MWEB and its mission to employ people who are blind. MWEB has stepped up its networking activities in local business organizations.

In the public policy arena, the company is represented on the local Chamber of Commerce's legislative committee that

keeps abreast of local, state and federal issues. MWEB appointed one employee to serve as public liaison, devoting part of her time to meet with local elected officials to promote the agency. The mayor of Kalamazoo recently visited the agency, and state and federal representatives have committed to visiting MWEB later this year.

U.S. Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI6) and U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Carl Levin (D-MI) continue to praise and support MWEB's work. All three legislators have been named AbilityOne Champions, a designation given to Members of Congress who demonstrate support for the AbilityOne Program through congressional actions.

Upton, who helped dedicate MWEB's new 39,000-square-foot facility in 2009, said, "This program demonstrates how important it is for us to focus on individuals' abilities, not their inabilities."

### Creating Momentum

In a community already known for providing opportunities to people who are blind or visually impaired, MWEB has raised the bar and

gained recognition for innovative programming and quality work.

"Thanks to teamwork, honest self-assessment and high standards, MWEB employees believe even better employment opportunities at our organization are on the horizon," said Hickok.

"Our employees have demonstrated tremendous leadership as part of their commitment to this organization," says Karen Walls, MWEB president. "As they have grown as individuals, the strength of our program has improved."

MWEB's mission complements other resources for individuals who are blind in Kalamazoo, such as training programs at Western Michigan University and services at the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (formerly Michigan Commission for the Blind). Through its culture of continual improvement, MWEB is making a difference for citizens in the community and beyond, creating jobs for people who are blind and delivering quality products and services for its customers. ❖



Midwest Enterprises for the Blind Production Associate Ann Johnson.



Pictured left to right: Gary Thompson, Midwest Enterprises for the Blind production associate, discusses calculator assembly processes with U.S. Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI6).

### World Blind Union Launches Global Employment Resource

NIB leaders attended the World Blind Union (WBU) and International Council for Education of People With Visual Impairment (ICEVI) joint General Assembly in Bangkok, Thailand, November 12-16, focused on “Achieving Our Vision Through Empowerment and Partnerships.”

NIB is a voting member of the WBU, represented by Ron Tascarella, vice chairperson of NIB’s Board of Directors. A member of the WBU’s Employment Working Group, Angela Hartley, NIB executive vice president, chaired the conference plenary session on employment issues. The session offered a forum for panelists from a variety of organizations worldwide to share information

about initiatives to address the high rates of unemployment of persons who are blind or have low vision.

One of the highlights at the 2012 WBU-ICEVI General Assembly was the launch of Project Aspiro, a career planning and employment website for people who are blind or partially sighted as well as for service providers, friends and family, and employers. NIB hosted a reception on November 15 to launch the site: [www.projectaspiro.com](http://www.projectaspiro.com).

The WBU is increasing its focus on employment issues and the conference provided an opportunity for NIB to communicate its mission to the more than 1,200 attendees from across the globe. ❖

### NIB on 2013 Training Top 125 List

NIB was recently named to the 2013 “Training Top 125” list by *Training* magazine, the leading business publication for learning and development professionals. This designation recognizes companies from a wide range of industries for excellence in employer-sponsored training and development programs globally.

The *Training* Top 125 ranking is determined by assessing a range of qualitative and quantitative factors, including financial investment in employee development, the scope of development programs, and how closely development efforts are linked to business goals and objectives. ❖

### NIB Presents Sword at Navy Supply Corps School

During the graduation ceremony at the Navy Supply Corps School in Newport, Rhode Island, NIB Chief Operating Officer Scottie Knott presented the NIB Graduate Sword to the 4th Battalion, Delta Company Honor Graduate, Ensign Christopher Battagello.

To recognize NIB’s ongoing relationship with the Navy Supply Corps, NIB created an enduring gift — an officer’s sword to be presented to the valedictorian at each Basic Supply Corps School graduation.

Knott was invited to attend the event by Rear Admiral Mark Heinrich, commander, NAVSUP Command Chief of Supply Corps, and Captain Mark R. Pimpo, commanding officer, Navy Supply Corps School. Captain Pimpo accepted the sword on behalf of Rear Admiral Heinrich during the 2012 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo last October.

Rear Admiral Vincent L. Griffith, deputy chief of staff, Fleet Ordnance and Supply, and fleet supply officer, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, was guest speaker at the graduation ceremony on November 16, 2012. ❖



Pictured left to right: Captain Mark R. Pimpo, commanding officer, Naval Supply Corps School; Scottie Knott, COO, NIB; Ensign Christopher Battagello; and Rear Admiral Vincent L. Griffith, SC, USN, deputy chief of staff, Fleet Ordnance and Supply, and fleet supply officer, U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

## NIB Lands Commercial Contact Center Services Contract

NIB Services signed a five-year contract with consulting and training company, Fresh Revenues, to enhance the company's telephone "mystery shopping" services, a critical component for measuring training and coaching effectiveness.

Five NIB associated agencies will support Fresh Revenues through 10 part-time employees who are blind or visually impaired. The agencies are Beyond Vision in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Lighthouse Central Florida in Orlando; The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. in Seattle, Washington; Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Utica, New York; and Lions Volunteer Blind Industries in Morristown, Tennessee.

"Partnering with NIB and its national network of associated nonprofit agencies makes good business sense," said Fresh Revenues founder and Chief Cultivating Officer Don Farrell. "We've seen employees who are blind in action, and the quality of their work rivals today's leading service providers." ❖

## NIB Launches Updated Website

To help tell the NIB story during the organization's 75th anniversary year, NIB refreshed its corporate website with a contemporary look that reflects its progressive and innovative culture. The new website was designed to provide a more accessible, user-friendly experience for visitors. New features include interactive locator maps, a "Contact Us" form and a media page with streaming videos.

The new website was reorganized to make information easier to find. While most of the content from the old site was preserved, some content was edited and condensed into a more web-friendly format.

Visit NIB's website at [www.nib.org](http://www.nib.org). ❖



## New BSC at Securities and Exchange Commission



Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina opened its 18th AbilityOne Base Supply Center at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, D.C., in January. There are 148 base supply centers operated by nonprofit agencies associated with the AbilityOne® Program.

## NIB Sponsors Disability Inaugural Ball

NIB was proud to partner with other organizations in the blindness and disability community as a sponsor of the second Disability Inaugural Ball on January 19, prior to the inauguration of President Barack Obama. The event was organized by Disability Power and Pride and the American Association of People with Disabilities. NIB also sponsored the first ball in January 2009.

The gala at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., was attended by Members of Congress, such as Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Rep. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL8); former

Congressman Tony Coelho (D-CA15); and hundreds of disability advocates and leaders from government, nonprofit and community organizations.

The festive event included messages of hope and inspiration, including the desire to continue to increase access to programs and services for all Americans. Coelho noted the importance of the disability community to rally every four years in solidarity and to display its strength as a community. ❖



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