

A Publication of National Industries for the Blind

# OPPORTUNITY



## Celebrating 75 Years!

**Plus**

- Technology and Services Years — 1988 - 2013
- Section 508 Assurance Services
- NIB/NAEPB Public Policy Forum

Volume 6 | Issue 3 | SUMMER 2013

# Business as Unusual

Midway through a year-long celebration of NIB's 75th anniversary, many NIB associated agencies are partnering with us to celebrate our successes and educate elected officials about the importance of the AbilityOne® Program for people who are blind.

We are pleased that so many associated agency representatives attended the 2013 NIB/NAEPB Public Policy Forum in Washington, D.C., this spring. They are following up this summer, as part of the second annual Grassroots Forum, by inviting senators, representatives and local elected officials to learn firsthand the role of the AbilityOne Program in the lives of people who are blind. Some associated agencies are publicizing our anniversary in press releases and on their websites, while others are starting blogs.

But amid these celebrations, there is a mood of concern among our associated agencies and NIB regarding sequestration and uncertainties relating to the federal budget. Our federal customers have been holding off purchasing office supplies and many other products we offer through the AbilityOne Program. We are also experiencing substantial declines in orders for our products that have been used to support military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

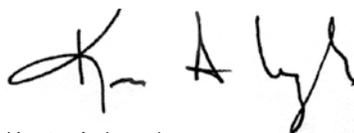
The reduction in orders have resulted in a number of our associated agencies reluctantly cutting back work hours or even reducing the number of employees. These challenging times have renewed the need to diversify. This means not only expanding the types of products and services we offer, but also exploring new markets. We continue to pursue opportunities outside of the AbilityOne Program with a focus on commercial textiles, contact

centers and supply chain management. And if the words "made in America" are any assurance of unsurpassed quality, we will be formidable competitors.

As we work to diversify, we will continue to engage our federal customers to lessen the impact of the decline in orders for SKILCRAFT® and AbilityOne products. This includes remaining vigilant in identifying and correcting "essentially the same" violations, and urging government agencies without a strong track record of support to start utilizing the program.

In this issue of *Opportunity*, our historical feature story covers the progress our associated agencies have made in the last few decades to diversify career opportunities by creating more knowledge-based, higher-level positions. The story tells how NIB has supported these efforts with learning and development initiatives. One of our newest services, Section 508 Assurance, is also featured in this issue.

There is a great deal more work to do to promote our program during these challenging times. We're going to continue to share the stories of employees who are living independently, raising families, purchasing their own homes and pursuing the American Dream, thanks to employment opportunities at NIB associated agencies. During our 75th anniversary year, it is also a time to focus on the future, while learning from the past. With so much possibility, it is like a new beginning.



Kevin A. Lynch  
President and Chief Executive Officer



## OPPORTUNITY

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# OPPORTUNITY



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**ON THE COVER:**

Brian Hurley, NIB workforce relations program director, came to NIB with a masters degree in management from Carnegie Mellon University. He exemplifies the idea that "the sky's the limit" for people who are blind.

### Little did NIB's 2013 R.B. Irwin Award winner Dr. James A. Kutsch know that his doctoral dissertation research to develop the first talking computer in 1975 would make such an impact on careers for people who are blind.

Prior to becoming blind and losing part of his right hand in a home chemistry accident as a teenager, Jim Kutsch was not interested in school or college. The accident turned out to be a life-changing event. Kutsch graduated from West Virginia University several years later with a Bachelor of Arts in psychology and a Master of Science in computer science. During his doctoral studies in computer science at the University of Illinois, he was searching for ways a blind person could access a computer independently. That led to the development of the first computer terminal with computer-generated speech.

After college, Kutsch became a professor of computer science at West Virginia University. He spent a good portion of his career in the telecommunications industry as an executive at AT&T Bell Laboratories, AT&T Universal Card Services and Convergys Corporation. In 2006, Kutsch became president and chief executive officer of The Seeing Eye, which provides specially-bred and trained dogs to guide people who are blind, instructs in the use and care of these dogs and advocates on behalf of people who are blind for their right to travel freely and independently.

Kutsch is also president of the Council of U.S. Dog Guide Schools, vice chairperson of the Board of the International Guide Dog Federation and a member of the Morris Animal Foundation Board of Directors. He has served on the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. Prior to assuming the role of president at The Seeing Eye, he served 10 years on their Board of Trustees.

It was not until his tenure at Convergys that Kutsch learned about NIB's work in creating employment opportunities for



*Jim Kutsch and his seeing eye dog, Vegas.*

people who are blind. When asked to serve on the NIB Board of Directors, there was no hesitation on Kutsch's part. "Obtaining employment is one of the biggest issues faced by people who are blind," said Kutsch. "The ability to support oneself and family is an essential part of being independent and self-sufficient as a person."

While on the NIB Board, Kutsch served on many key committees, leading to his election as chairperson. He served on the board until his retirement in 2011. His exemplary service was recognized earlier this year when the NIB Board of Directors selected Kutsch as the winner of the 2013 R.B. Irwin Award, named after one of the leaders who worked toward the formation of NIB. The award recognizes volunteers and professionals who make outstanding contributions to creating employment for people who are blind.

"One of the most incredible experiences of being on the NIB Board was the opportunity to visit so many associated agencies. The quality, safety, professionalism and teamwork within NIB associated agencies are truly awesome," said Kutsch. "My hope is that through NIB's leadership, the unemployment rate for people who are blind becomes no different than the overall national unemployment rate. Through the work of NIB and its associated agencies, more employers are realizing that people who are blind are incredible assets to their organizations." ❖

## NIB on “Best Nonprofits To Work For” List

NIB was named one of the nation’s best nonprofits for which to work by *The NonProfit Times*. The “Best Nonprofits To Work For” list identifies, recognizes and honors the 50 best places of employment in the nonprofit industry. NIB was ranked #15 on the overall list, and #7 among medium-sized organizations with 50 to 249 employees.

The 2013 “Best Nonprofits To Work For” study is a comprehensive assessment of how employees perceive their

jobs, covering topics that range from leadership and compensation, to teamwork and work-life balance.

“It’s particularly special to earn this recognition during our 75th anniversary year,” said Kevin Lynch, NIB president and CEO. “This award reflects not only our workplace environment and culture, but also the passion and dedication NIB employees have in fulfilling our mission to create employment opportunities for people who are blind.” ❖



## Wall Street Journal Article Features NIB

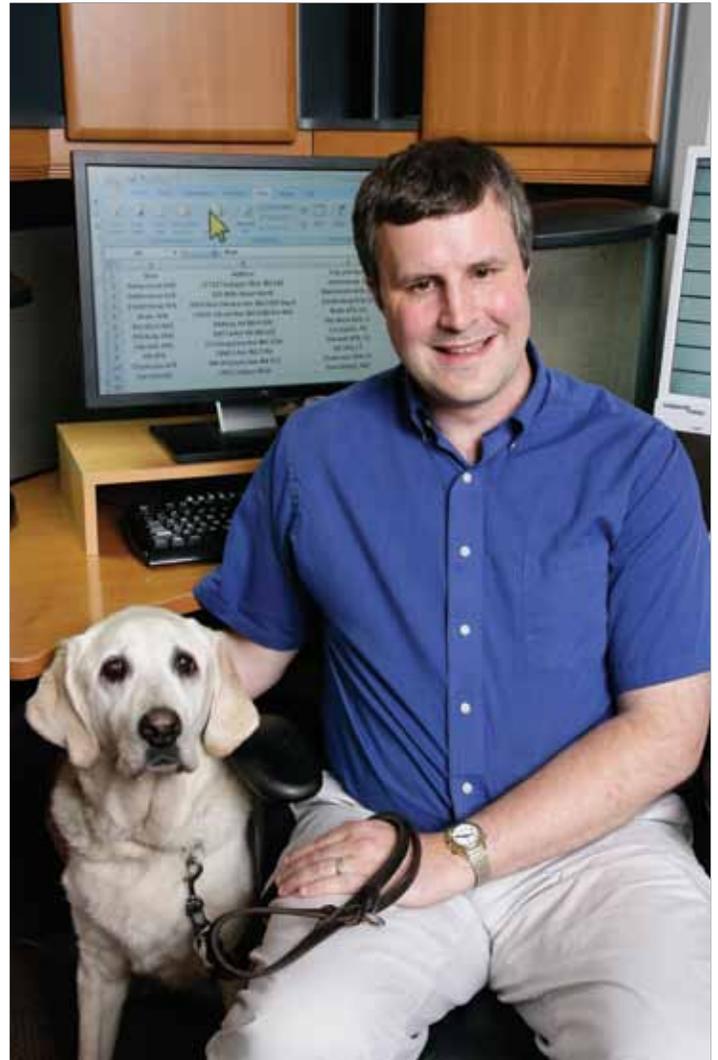
NIB was highlighted in a March 18 article in the *Wall Street Journal*, “When It Comes to Hiring, Blind Workers Face Bias,” reporting on the results of the NIB-commissioned survey of hiring managers about attitudes toward hiring people who are blind.

The article said that when it comes to hiring people who are blind, many employers remain skeptical, incorrectly assuming such employees cost more, produce less, and are more prone to workplace accidents and less reliable than other employees. While the majority of executives claim they want to hire and train people with disabilities, many view blind employees as an inconvenience.

NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch dispelled the misconceptions among hiring managers, noting that, for certain jobs, only a modest investment in technology is needed for companies to provide “reasonable accommodations” for an employee who is blind, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. A great many jobs require no investment at all.

Lynch said many computers and smartphones already have built-in features that enable users to change font size and light intensity. For example, installing voice technology software allows computers to “read” text to a blind employee.

“There are very few jobs that a person who is blind cannot perform — and with advances in technology — that list grows shorter every day,” he said. ❖



Steve Heesen, inside sales associate, and his dog, Rattan, Industries for the Blind, West Allis, Wisconsin.



# Celebrating 75 Years!

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## Technology and Services — 1988-2013

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NIB and its associated agencies innovate and adapt to changing customer and consumer expectations in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century in this final installment of a three-part historical series.

*Paperclips, a Base Supply Center (BSC) at the U.S. Department of Census in Suitland, Maryland, operated by Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina. BSCs provide retail-type employment opportunities to people who are blind and offer a wide range of SKILCRAFT® and other AbilityOne® products to government and military customers. This additional distribution channel helps to sustain manufacturing jobs in NIB associated agencies.*

Read the first in the three-part series about NIB's history in the [Winter issue of Opportunity](#) and the second part in the [Spring issue](#).



With the 1980s drawing to a close, a combination of factors, including massive changes in the federal government's procurement procedures, disruptions to the distribution supply chain for SKILCRAFT® products, and the beginning of widespread use of new media such as the Internet, led to a realignment of resources at NIB and its associated agencies.

By the end of 1988, NIB created a marketing program to increase government-use sales, attract new customers and open up new opportunities for associated agencies to provide products and services to the government. NIB focused on trying to minimize the effect of the new government credit card and industrial funding purchasing systems implemented by the General Services Administration (GSA), and educating government purchasers on the benefits of purchasing through the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act, now operating as the AbilityOne® Program.

For the first time, NIB published a product catalog and installed a toll-free number at NIB headquarters to respond to customer inquiries and promote communications between NIB and GSA customers. NIB and associated agency sales

personnel increased attendance at government trade shows to make SKILCRAFT products and services more visible to potential buyers. Videos, brochures and other marketing collateral were designed, produced and distributed.

As GSA was looking for ways to reduce costs, it released a Multiple Award Schedule for office products. The contract required 24-hour desktop delivery. NIB worked to ensure the solicitation followed the intent of the JWOD Act, that contractors stocked SKILCRAFT office products and that similar commercial items would not be allowed. Delivery, payment terms, shipping methods and minimum order quantities were identified. As a result, when the solicitation was issued, it supported JWOD in that no commercially similar items would be allowed. NIB refined product descriptions and artwork for use in distributor catalogs and staff monitored those catalogs for similar items.

### **Meeting the Military's Needs**

While the government procurement system was undergoing an overhaul, Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm created a massive production surge at NIB associated

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Frances Black, textile cutting inspector at Blind Industries and Services of Maryland in Baltimore, ensures the material is flat prior to cutting components for the Army Combat Uniform.



Military litter department at Arizona Industries for the Blind in Phoenix.

Continued from page 7

agencies. As in the past, the agencies met the challenge by supplying American troops with \$67 million worth of critically needed products during the war in the Persian Gulf. Plastic flatware, desert neckerchiefs, canteen caps, coat liners, cable assemblies, wheel chocks, sea markers, mattress pads and bed pillows, paper towels, detergents, equipment and trouser belts, helmet bands and writing instruments were some of the products delivered to the military troops. Never before had NIB associated agencies been called upon to deliver so many products in such a short period of time.

### New World of Procurement

Over time, the government's procurement system transformed from centralized to decentralized and became less predictable. Historically, NIB's major customers facilitated order taking, transportation, warehousing, inventory control and marketing of SKILCRAFT products. Product specifications went by the wayside in favor of commercial descriptions. Government employees were empowered as buyers, rather than acting through procurement personnel, and credit cards replaced purchase orders. In addition, government warehousing was outsourced to third parties, and military base supply stores were contracted out to the private sector.

### Co-Branding Opportunities

When large corporations started to co-brand their products in the 1990s, NIB associated agencies formed co-branding alliances with commercial companies. Starting with a formal co-branding agreement between The Lighthouse of Houston in Texas and SC Johnson, and another between 3M Corporation and the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill Industries in Rochester, New York, these alliances became very popular for office and cleaning products sold by NIB associated agencies. NIB agencies provided the labor

to make products and commercial firms supplied the raw materials. The solid reputation of two well-respected brands helped each partner by attracting new customers, lowering marketing costs and keeping jobs in the United States.

### New Initiatives

In 1994, Judith D. Moore, an executive with Eastman Kodak, was appointed president and chief executive officer of NIB. She brought to the position extensive commercial marketing experience and orchestrated a major reorganization of NIB to use resources more aligned with the changes occurring in government procurement.

To be closer to government customers, NIB relocated its headquarters from northern New Jersey to Virginia in 1995 and consolidated operations. NIB created a new corporate image for its trade name, SKILCRAFT, with a logo redesign and a uniform packaging program. It also developed a test program to take credit card orders from government customers.

Cuts in the defense budget made it financially difficult for the military to continue operating its Base Supply Centers (BSCs), forcing military and civilian personnel to shop off-base for office, cleaning and other needed products. NIB saw this as an opportunity to create more jobs for people who are blind and to develop a new distribution channel for SKILCRAFT products. LC Industries in Durham, North Carolina, took the lead in 1995 and opened the first BSC operated by an NIB associated agency at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Within a year, LC Industries opened three more BSCs and worked with NIB to help other associated agencies become involved. Taking control of a portion of the supply distribution network was considered an important step, because as much as 50 percent of the products sold to GSA were distributed



Mary Ann Booker, utility packer in the gadgets department at the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Ohio, labels OXO kitchen utensils.



Oscar Olvera, assembly line employee, box department, Lighthouse for the Blind of Fort Worth in Texas.

through BSCs. This change would help ensure manufacturing jobs for people working in NIB associated agencies. In addition, each BSC had the potential to create two to three new retail service jobs for people who are blind.

The competitive environment and dramatic change in government customers' purchasing behaviors created a need to build more distribution and marketing capabilities. With these changes came tremendous opportunities for NIB associated agencies. They took on new types of service opportunities in warehousing and distribution, customer service, order entry and invoicing, data entry and database management.

In 1998, James D. Gibbons, president and CEO of ATT Campus Solutions, became the first blind president and chief executive officer of NIB. A year later, NIB launched JWOD.com, an e-commerce platform designed to provide quality, value and convenience to government and military customers. NIB developed this distribution channel to provide customers with direct access to SKILCRAFT products, build the SKILCRAFT brand and better sustain employment opportunities for people who are blind. With this state-of-the-art online ordering capability, JWOD.com expanded the number of ways federal customers could order SKILCRAFT products. In addition to online orders, federal customers could order by phone, mail or fax.

### War on Terrorism

In the aftermath of terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, war readiness again became a focus for NIB and its associated agencies. Helmet covers, moisture-wicking T-shirts, combat shirts, ammunition pouches, poncho liners, entrenching tools and canteens

were a few of the products supplied to the military in support of the war on terrorism. By this time, NIB associated agencies expanded BSCs to 100 across the United States.

### Planet-Friendly Products

Meanwhile, the federal government was issuing more stringent policies on environmental issues. NIB associated agencies introduced greener cleaning, maintenance and office products that met or exceeded the government's requirements. These products incorporated biobased technologies and contained more recycled materials. Janitorial and sanitation products were redesigned to earn Green Seal certification, a widely recognized mark of environmental responsibility.

Paper products were redesigned to use post-consumer recycled materials. Biobased flatware, made with 50 percent wheat-based raw material, replaced plastic flatware in military dining packets. New packaging designs reduced use of polyvinyl chloride plastics. The goal was to eliminate all non-recyclable materials, such as polyvinyl chlorides and other plastics, and replace them with recycled materials that can be recycled again. NIB associated agencies recognized their responsibility to the environment, while staying focused on their mission.

NIB received ISO 9001:2000 certification in 2004 for its quality management system by the International Organization for Standardization. Meanwhile, NIB developed new physical training uniforms for the Air Force, and a combat helmet system and an advanced combat uniform for the Army. NIB introduced innovative professional service solutions through GSA's Federal Supply Schedule.

*Continued on page 10*

## Fostering Leadership Development

In 2003, NIB launched the Business Leaders Program to help develop general management and business leadership skills for people who are blind. Fellowships were provided to the first three individuals accepted into the program, and the Fellowship for Leadership Development offered business-focused, on-the-job experience with management training to help fellows land professional management positions.

The following year, NIB introduced Business Management Training, an intensive curriculum facilitated by the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business. Business Management Training was developed to assist high-potential employees in NIB associated agencies to build business acumen with classes in general management, finance, marketing, communications, production and human resources management.

In 2005, NIB launched Leaders At All Levels, an opportunity for employees at NIB associated agencies to develop leadership skills. This onsite training in leadership, communication and team-building skills focused on the fundamentals that enhance workplace effectiveness and morale. Two years later, NIB introduced Business Basics, a distance-learning program available to NIB associated agency employees who are blind. Combining The Hadley School for the Blind's proven excellence in distance learning with NIB's mission, Business Basics teaches entry-level business skills essential in a competitive workforce.

In 2008, NIB Board of Directors appointed Kevin Lynch as president and chief executive officer. Lynch brought to the position extensive experience in developing major channels of distribution for SKILCRAFT products as well as expertise running an associated agency. He expanded the Business Leaders Program by offering a new track, Effective Supervision: The Essentials, to prepare high-potential employees in NIB associated agencies with ever-increasing levels of responsibility. NIB also launched a learning and development initiative to support career development for leaders and employees at NIB and its associated agencies.

## Attracting More College Graduates

As a means of creating more career opportunities for college graduates who are blind, NIB entered into an innovative partnership with the Defense Acquisition University to provide the training courses required to establish a foundation in contract management. Recognizing this opportunity a few years ago when the federal government faced a critical shortage of qualified contracting personnel, NIB developed the Contract Management



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

Support Training Program. It bridged the gap between the government's need to reduce the contracting burden for federal agencies, while simultaneously jump-starting high-growth career opportunities for people who are blind.

In another learning and development effort, NIB recruited associated agencies to implement the AbilityOne Quality Work Environment (QWE) initiative. QWE's continual improvement process helps associated agencies adopt employment best practices that enable people who are blind to achieve their maximum employment potential. The goal of QWE is to improve productivity and quality, increase earnings and provide opportunities for advancement. Agency QWE action items focus on improving communication, employee skill development and career planning, assistive technology and other accommodations, facility access, and employee engagement, including enhanced recognition and benefit programs.

## Improving Productivity and Wages

In 2009, NIB Board of Directors strengthened its previous position on minimum wage by adopting a position of endorsing, promoting and encouraging the payment of at least the federal minimum wage to all employees who are blind and engaged in work on AbilityOne contracts. To support this position, NIB hired two rehabilitation engineers to assist associated agencies in enhancing employee productivity and offering the best possible work environment. The engineers find the right balance between production and rehabilitation by assessing, designing, testing, evaluating and implementing technological solutions to workplace problems. They collaborate with staff from associated agencies to develop and help implement simple practical tools and solutions to improve productivity, comfort, safety and independence. The NIB Board approved a compensation and productivity enhancement



*NIB Rehabilitation Engineer Casimir Usiatynski prepares employees to use a gravity-fed dispensing system in the highlighter department at Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina. The new work station eliminated excessive reaching and material handling, thus improving productivity and wages for employees.*



*Annamarie Parker, Contract Management Support (CMS) specialist at the Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

grant to financially assist associated agencies in implementing the recommendations of NIB's rehabilitation engineers.

### **Solid Achievements**

Today, NIB works with 91 associated nonprofit agencies in 35 states at more than 250 locations across the United States and in the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, offering diverse career opportunities for people who are blind. Nearly 6,000 people who are blind produce more than 3,500 SKILCRAFT products, such as office and cleaning supplies, hardware and paints, and a wide range of uniforms, bedding and protective equipment for the military.

These employees also provide services including contract closeout, supply chain management, contact center operations, document management, and administrative and technology support. They operate 148 Base Supply Centers at military bases and federal government installations nationwide.

Last year, NIB expanded operations by partnering with the New York State Commission for the Blind to manage the New York State Preferred Source Program for People Who Are Blind. This initiative supports NIB's strategic plan of developing opportunities outside of the AbilityOne Program. It also has considerable potential to diversify employment opportunities for people who are blind in New York.

The advances in career opportunities over the years have earned NIB many accolades. The most recent ones include the Summit Award, the highest honor in "The Power to Create a Competitive Workforce" category by ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership and a 2011 Laureate designation by *Computerworld* for NIB's Enterprise

Resource Planning Project. Also for two years in a row, NIB was named one of the Best Places to Work in Virginia by *Virginia Business* magazine and Best Companies Group. NIB also was designated a "LearningElite" organization by *Chief Learning Officer* magazine and named to the "Training Top 125" list by *Training* magazine.

During NIB's 75th anniversary year, *The Nonprofit Times* ranked NIB 15th among the top 50 "Best Nonprofits To Work For" in the nation. This designation is a result of a comprehensive assessment of how employees perceive their jobs, covering topics that range from leadership and compensation, to teamwork and work-life balance.

From the early days of producing brooms and mops, to a diverse line of environmentally-friendly products and knowledge-based services, NIB and its associated agencies devote considerable resources to innovation to continually introduce new products and services to customers. The transition to develop careers for people who are blind in service professions is evidenced by NIB associated agencies now offering positions in call centers, data entry, digital imaging, document management, prescription eyewear, mail operations, medical transcription and recycling.

At the same time, the NIB network has repositioned itself by offering learning and development programs, coupled with assistive technology, to attract bright young women and men with interests in business careers. After 75 years, innovation remains central to the heart of NIB's strategy and the key to future growth of career opportunities for people who are blind. ❖

### NIB partners with Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind to pave the way for commercial business with Section 508 Assurance services.

Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind (DLB), one of NIB's associated nonprofit agencies, has been providing opportunities and assistance to people who are blind or visually impaired for more than 75 years. By enhancing the lives of clients through job training, employment, and community services, DLB employees who are blind lead successful lives in their workplaces, homes and communities.

#### New Commercial Business Contract

In 1998, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was adopted into law. Section 508 mandates that all electronic and information technology systems, including websites, which are developed, procured, maintained or used by the federal government, must be accessible to people with disabilities. NIB offers its own Section 508 Assurance services to address software, systems and website accessibility and usability guidelines.

In the summer of 2012, NIB partnered with DLB to secure its first commercial Section 508 Assurance contract with Buildium Inc., a leading provider of cloud-based property management software, based in Boston. When Buildium learned that NIB and some of its associated agencies provide Section 508 Assurance services, they asked NIB to team up.

“One of Buildium’s core beliefs is that business software should be simple, affordable and accessible to everyone,” said Michael Monteiro, co-founder and co-CEO of Buildium. “Our association with NIB is a natural extension of that, and we’re very excited about what the future holds for our partnership.”

#### Not Happening by Accident

Two years ago, NIB hired Thomas McKeithan as its new accessibility program manager to focus specifically on developing Section 508 Assurance business. NIB and its agencies had already been performing Section 508 work for government agencies, to make their electronic systems and websites accessible to all users.

McKeithan, who is blind, previously worked as a property manager and sought easy, off-the-shelf software online to help with his business. He found and used Buildium software, but encountered accessibility issues. So McKeithan called Buildium and worked with them to adjust their software programs to be accessible to people who are blind.

After McKeithan began working at NIB in 2011, Buildium found him a few years after their initial contact. McKeithan learned that Buildium wanted to make all of their software accessible to people who are blind or severely disabled. That summer, NIB surveyed its agencies to find out which had the capabilities to perform Section 508 Assurance work.

#### Assembling the Team

Erica Gillylen, senior director of Business Services at DLB, not only responded to the survey but called NIB and found McKeithan. They formed a working relationship and wrote the winning contract proposal together for the Buildium business. For the contract with Buildium, DLB proposed a two-person team – one sighted and one blind – to perform accessibility and usability testing and validation for Buildium’s property management software.



Filomon Rosa is working in Business Services at Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind.



Eric Foreman gained new skills by working on the Buildium contract for Section 508 Assurance at Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind and now works for Microsoft.

As the project manager, Gillylen is the individual who is sighted on the contract. She selected Eric Foreman, who is blind and was working on other information technology (IT) projects in Business Services, to join her on the project. Understanding that Section 508 accessibility and usability testing requires specialized knowledge and expertise, with a very high attention to detail, Gillylen knew immediately that “Eric was just the right person for this job.”

### Taking Care of Business

Gillylen and Foreman worked closely with Buildium’s software developers and quality assurance analysts to conduct a comprehensive review of Buildium’s software programs. After the testing was complete, the DLB team developed a report identifying accessibility improvements that could be made, and provided recommendations on how to correct the deficiencies.

With the first phase of the project now complete, the Section 508 testing team is preparing for subsequent phases, which could include conducting remediation activities and developing revised software protocols.

### Opportunity Knocks Twice

Foreman included these skills in his online resume, and after only a few months, Microsoft hired him to increase accessibility to their software programs for people who are blind.

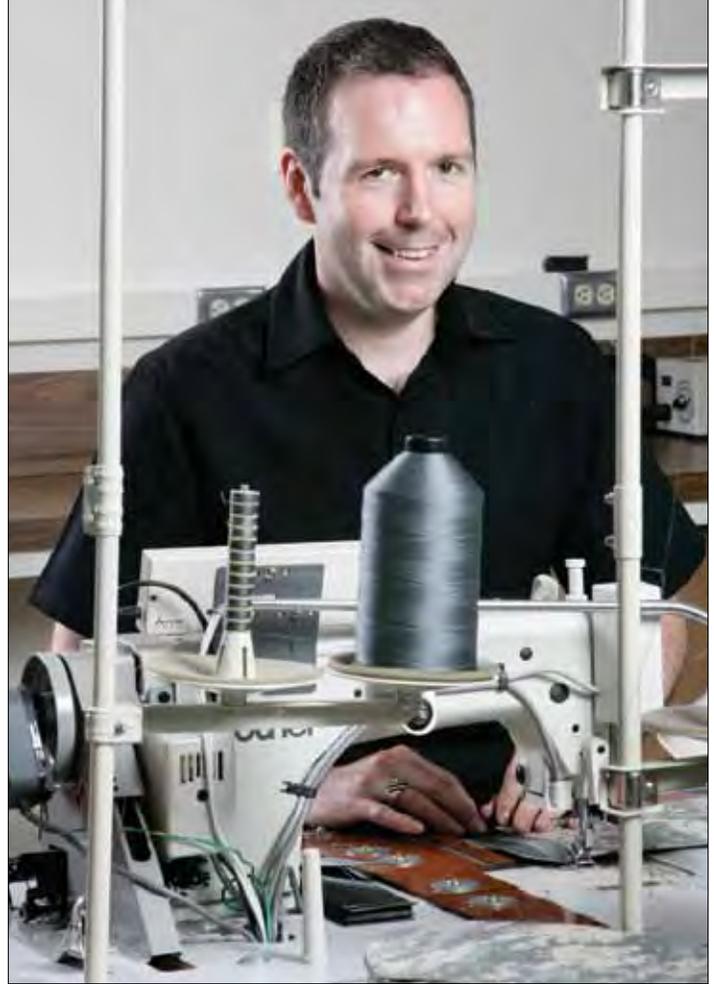
After Foreman left for Microsoft, Gillylen promoted another DLB employee who is blind to work with her on information technology projects. Steven Fontaine started his career at DLB in sewing, and then advanced into Business Services. After developing more accessibility skills, Fontaine also was hired by Microsoft.

Now Gillylen has placed two more DLB employees in training for Section 508 Assurance skills. “But who knows how long I can hold onto them?” she asked. “Both Eric and Steven have demonstrated the power of technology to open up new employment opportunities in the commercial sector.”

Fontaine is enthusiastic about his new job at Microsoft. “This new adventure working at Microsoft is such a thrill. I am so excited to be a part of this team, which is trying to make accessibility a priority here at Microsoft.”

### A Bright Future

Gillylen is hopeful that the Section 508 Assurance work DLB performed for Buildium will lead to other IT professional work, in both commercial and government sectors. She said, “Although commercial firms are not mandated by law to comply with Section 508, many



*Steven Fontaine’s first job was sewing at Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind (DLB). Soon after Fontaine started working in Business Services at DLB, he also landed a position at Microsoft.*

companies understand the benefits of making technology accessible to all of their users and customers.”

“This contract with Buildium really opens doors to other work,” said Nancy Perkins, president and CEO of DLB. “It’s a catalyst for bringing on new opportunities to create jobs for people who are blind. As our employees develop new business skills, they become more marketable in the private sector – a win-win for all concerned.” ❖

## Meet NIB's 2013 National Employee of the Year Award Winners!



Gerald Jones

Each year, the NIB Board of Directors votes to recognize two individuals who are blind for their professional achievements. The two national award winners, along with the other Employee of the Year nominees from NIB associated agencies, will be honored at the 2013 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo, October 9-11 at the Gaylord National in National Harbor, Maryland.

**Gerald Jones**  
**2013 Peter J. Salmon Award**  
**Lions Volunteer Blind Industries, Morristown, Tennessee**

Progressive macular degeneration made it difficult for Gerald Jones to continue his career as an electrician. Since joining Lions Volunteer Blind Industries (VBI) four years ago as a packer, Jones soon became the leader of the mattress department. Today Jones is the lead employee in the paper towels department. He maintains all production records, from order to shipment, and oversees daily timesheet records. His goal is to become a department supervisor at VBI.

"I never expected to be the national winner," Jones said. "I have become one of those people who learned to do things that I never thought I would be doing."

*The Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award honors employees who excel in their positions at NIB associated agencies. Dr. Salmon was instrumental in the passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act in 1938 and the formation of NIB.*

**Christian Gorshing**  
**2013 Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award**  
**NewView Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**

Christian Gorshing wanted to be an accountant ever since she was in high school. She graduated from Southwestern Oklahoma State University in 2001 with a bachelor's degree in accounting and struggled to find work due to her visual disability until she heard of NewView Oklahoma. She landed a job at the agency as a warehouse clerk at Tinker Air Force Base in 2005, then moved up to accounts payable as payroll clerk, then purchasing specialist. When NewView reorganized its accounting department last year, Gorshing was promoted to accounting supervisor. Her goal is to become the chief financial officer of NewView.

Gorshing said, "If I hit doors that I think are closed, but they keep opening, it makes me wonder: 'If I can do this, what else can I do?'"

*The Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award is given to individuals who demonstrate career advancement at an NIB associated agency or in the private sector. Samuelson championed upward mobility and placement programs for people who are blind. ::*



Christian Gorshing

## Public Policy Forum: Strength in Numbers on Capitol Hill

Agency attendees educate legislators on AbilityOne Program and impact of sequestration on employment in their home districts.

Leaders from NIB's associated nonprofit agencies from across the nation came to Washington, D.C., to meet with their elected officials during the 2013 NIB/NAEPB Public Policy Forum, May 14-16. The forum's theme, "Opening Doors to Opportunity Through Employment," was demonstrated by employees who are blind, sharing stories in their own words with members of Congress and Capitol Hill staffers.

### Asking Congress to "Lead by Example"

This year's forum took on a serious tone as employment at NIB associated agencies is challenged by federal budget issues. NIB associated agency leaders educated legislators from 22 states on the current hardships facing agencies across the country as a result of sequestration, and called on Congress to "lead by example" by purchasing SKILCRAFT® and other AbilityOne® products for their offices.

Agency employees found receptive audiences during the more than 125 Capitol Hill meetings on May 15. Other important topics addressed were Social Security Disability Insurance reform and the benefit offset option to remove the "cash cliff" disincentive for individuals to return to work, as well as preservation of the charitable giving deduction.

### Advocates Play Key Role

NIB's Advocates for Leadership and Employment — 13 agency employees who are blind — echoed a message of empowerment, upward mobility and independence, emphasizing the positive impact the AbilityOne Program and NIB have on persons who are blind. Now in its second year, the Advocates program empowers employees with the skills and tools necessary for effective advocacy.

Since last year's Public Policy Forum, the Advocates have engaged policymakers in their communities on a wide range of issues that impact opportunities for persons who are blind. The Advocates have arranged agency visits by congressional and local leaders in their districts, been



The Ohio delegation at the U.S. Capitol, pictured left to right: Betsy Baugh, shared services director, fund development and community relations, Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI); Robin Usalis, CEO, Clovernook Center; Carmelita Harvill, utility employee, Clovernook Center; Richard Huffman, inflight assembler, CABVI; Scott DeHart, human resources specialist, CABVI; and John Mitchell, executive director, CABVI and president, NAEPB.



Advocates for Leadership and Employment with Tony Stephens, NIB public policy and advocacy manager, pictured left to right: Misty Stenberg, Midwest Enterprises for the Blind; Blake Lindsay, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind; Rachel Carver, Outlook Nebraska; Stephens; Nan Magness, Louisiana Association for the Blind; Stephen Comency, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment; Toni Fraser, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind; and Courtney Williams, Lions Volunteer Blind Industries.

interviewed by local and national media, written editorials for local newspapers, and participated in community meetings, raising awareness on the issues that NIB associated agencies encounter daily in the lives of people they serve.

Throughout the afternoon program on May 14, Brian Hurley, NIB workforce relations program director, invited the Advocates to introduce themselves and briefly describe what they learned or accomplished over the past year. The Advocates proved to be able spokespersons.

"All our voices matter," said Jude Lucien of Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, addressing how

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*Pictured left to right: Jim Hughes, retiring executive director, Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB); Luis Narimatsu, advocate for leadership and employment from GIB; Rep. Austin Scott (R-GA8); Tony Stephens, public policy and advocacy manager, NIB; Kevin Lynch, president and CEO, NIB; and Kevin Kelley, incoming executive director, GIB.*

people who are blind can be independent and do their jobs successfully. “We are planting a seed.”

“We are not disabled, but ‘differently-abled,’” said Nan Magness of Louisiana Association for the Blind in Shreveport. “We can do anything that we set our mind to do.”

### **New AbilityOne Champions Recognized**

More than 130 members of Congress are designated AbilityOne Champions – elected federal policymakers who demonstrate support for the AbilityOne Program and for related community-based nonprofit agencies in their districts or states through congressional actions.

During the forum, two members of Congress were honored as new AbilityOne Champions, including Rep. Daniel Webster (R-FL10), who attended the May 15 congressional reception with forum participants to celebrate NIB’s 75th anniversary. Rep. Austin Scott (R-GA8) was recognized as a new AbilityOne Champion while meeting with Georgia Industries for the Blind staff.



*Pictured left to right: Jack Sisson, legislative assistant for Sen. John Boozman (R-AR), with Toni Fraser, advocate for leadership and employment, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, and Bill Johnson, CEO, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind.*

### **Subject Matter Experts Rally the Troops**

Political strategist Donna Brazile kicked off the forum at the opening luncheon May 14, using humor and sharing insights from her experience working on every presidential campaign from 1976 to 2000. She addressed the gridlock in Congress over different approaches to balancing the budget, the role of government in helping people develop job skills to compete in today’s economy, and how a gerrymandered redistricting process has resulted in increased partisanship and a lack of collegiality.

She stressed the importance for NIB agency staff to tell members of Congress and staff “what’s on your mind,” to invite them to visit agency facilities in their districts, and to follow up. “Tell them over and over again,” Brazile said. “Make sure you tell your story in a way that’s compelling.” She noted that members of Congress follow social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, and these are good ways to share information.

A. Gidget Hopf, Ed.D., vice president, NAEPB Public Policy and Communications Committee, and president and CEO, Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired – Goodwill, Rochester, New York, launched the afternoon program, featuring experts from the disability community and former Capitol Hill staffers.



*Pictured left to right: Kevin Lynch, president and CEO, NIB; Lee Nasehi, president and CEO, Lighthouse Central Florida; Rep. Daniel Webster (R-FL10); and Kim Zeich, deputy executive director, U.S. AbilityOne Commission.*

### **Disability Community Policy Priorities**

Jeanne Morin, public policy advisor at the law firm Akerman Senterfitt, and member of the NIB Board of Directors, moderated a panel of leaders from the



*Pictured left to right: John Mitchell, president, NAEPB, and executive director, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired; political strategist Donna Brazile; Tina Ballard, executive director and CEO, U.S. AbilityOne Commission; and Kevin Lynch, president and CEO, NIB.*



*NIB Board members attending the forum reception included (pictured left to right): John Mitchell; Major General Hawthorne Proctor, USA (retired); Jeanne Morin; The Honorable William A. Johnson, Jr.; The Honorable Gary J. Krump (far right), with Kevin Lynch, NIB president and CEO (second from right).*

blindness and disability communities regarding key policy issues, and related challenges and opportunities.

Al Avina, executive director, Blinded Veterans Association (BVA), said his organization was focused on Section 508/504 compliance so all veterans have equal access to Internet sites and technology. Another BVA initiative is beneficiary travel for veterans living in remote locations to be served by rehabilitation centers for the blind.

Mark Richert, director, public policy, American Foundation for the Blind, discussed his focus on the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act and the proposed Anne Sullivan Macy Act of 2013, which would provide services to help students who are blind to be job-ready. Richert said numerous disability groups were talking about bipartisan issues such as information access.

David Morrissey, executive director, United States International Council on Disabilities, spoke about the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the first human rights treaty of this century and the first international treaty to address disability rights globally.

The panelists encouraged forum attendees to make a personal connection with members and staff on Capitol Hill, to do their homework on issues, and to serve as ambassadors, telling their stories consistently.

### **Navigating the Current Legislative Landscape**

A team of former congressional staffers addressed attendees about the most effective ways to conduct meetings on Capitol Hill and communicate about priority issues with congressional offices. Moderator Jeff Markey,

executive vice president and advocacy director, McBee Strategic, said the Capitol Hill meetings are the foundation for building relationships throughout the year.

Hannah Walker, director, government relations, Food Marketing Institute, reminded agency employees that for members of Congress and their staffs, meetings with constituents are the most important. “You have made the effort to be here and they want to hear what’s important to you,” she said.

Said Ricardo Bernal, director, government affairs, URS Corporation, “you are the ‘special interests’ that the media talk about.”

### **Stronger Together than Separately**

Forum attendees were further energized for their day on the Hill by NIB public policy team members Rick Webster, vice president of public policy, and Tony Stephens, public policy and advocacy manager, along with McBee Strategic leaders Charles Cooper, vice president, and Steve McBee, president and CEO.

“You have a winning, non-partisan message,” said Cooper. McBee reminded attendees to tell people about the impact of budget cuts on their communities and on their jobs.

And since “all politics is local,” agency staff members were equipped to take on Congress, bringing from home their personal stories of the successes and challenges of persons who are blind embracing opportunities to participate equally in the American Dream – not only today but throughout the past 75 years of NIB’s history. ❖❖

### Summer Marks Key Anniversary Dates for NIB

On June 25, 1938, President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Wagner-O'Day Act into law, and NIB was incorporated a few weeks later in New York on August 10.

To commemorate these significant milestones, NIB's 75th anniversary celebration activities this summer included a reception June 27 for business partners in the blindness community and elected officials. The special event was held at Lighthouse International, one of NIB's associated agencies in New York City.

NIB is working closely with its associated nonprofit agencies to raise awareness about NIB's mission and the capabilities of people who are blind, actively sharing information with customers, business partners and communities nationwide throughout the year. Some of NIB's communications activities include:

- Issuing a 75th anniversary press release, picked up by dozens of news outlets across the country.
- Launching a targeted social media campaign with anniversary messaging on NIB's Facebook (NatIndBlind) and Twitter (#NIB75Years) pages.
- Developing an advertising campaign to thank federal government customers for their support in purchasing products and services.

NIB provided associated agencies with templates, logos, messaging and other tools to spread the word in their local markets, and is sharing information through a collaborative website for the agency public relations network. ::



### 75th Anniversary Sites Feature Past and Present Successes

To learn more about the events and people that shaped NIB's "history of a limitless future," visit NIB's 75th anniversary microsite at [www.nib75years.org](http://www.nib75years.org).

The U.S. AbilityOne Commission® also launched an anniversary microsite to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Wagner-O'Day Act. The "75 Years, 75 Reasons AbilityOne Works" site includes profiles of several NIB associated agency employees and customer contracts. Visit [www.abilityone.gov/75/](http://www.abilityone.gov/75/). ::

### Coming Soon: NIB/NAEPB Grassroots Forum and National Conference and Expo

NIB and the National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind (NAEPB) are preparing for two special events in the months ahead.

- **2013 NIB/NAEPB Grassroots Forum.**

The second annual Grassroots Forum is planned for **August 5-16** in communities

nationwide, enabling NIB associated agencies to invite members of Congress, staff, and state and local leaders to visit while legislators are on recess in their home districts. NIB's public policy team worked with agencies last year to launch the first NIB/NAEPB Grassroots Forum, a great success with visits and events taking place at nearly 40 locations across the country. This year's Grassroots Forum offers another opportunity for agencies to engage in direct advocacy.



- **2013 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo.** The year-long celebration of NIB's 75th anniversary will culminate with this annual event, scheduled for **October 9-11** at the Gaylord National in National Harbor, Maryland, just across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. The National Conference and Expo includes general sessions featuring government and industry leaders and informative breakout sessions addressing topics to support NIB's mission of creating jobs for people who are blind. Other highlights are 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.



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

## NIB Agencies Network at Commercial Prime Event



Attendees at the AbilityOne and Northrop Grumman networking event in Redondo Beach, California.

The U.S. AbilityOne Commission® and Northrop Grumman Corporation jointly hosted the third in a series of regional networking events in Redondo Beach, California, March 7. The event provided an opportunity for nonprofit agencies associated with NIB and SourceAmerica™ (formerly NISH) to meet directly with corporate partners.

Staff from The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. in Seattle, Washington, participated in the nonprofit agency panel, highlighting the success of their partnership with Boeing.

Other NIB agencies participating were RLCB Inc., Raleigh, North Carolina; Junior Blind of America, Los Angeles, California; Industries for the Blind, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Alphapointe, Kansas City, Missouri.

The networking event provided quality one-on-one time with some of the fastest growing commercial prime contractors in the United States, including Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon and General Dynamics Gulfstream. ❖

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## Northern Outfitters Selects NIB as Sole Product Line Supplier

NIB joined forces in a commercial venture with Northern Outfitters, which specializes in extreme cold weather clothing, such as gear for oilfield workers, research scientists and athletes in arctic climates.

NIB is working with Northern Outfitters to produce arctic parkas with liners, wind pants and pullovers, mittens, sleeping bags and hard hat liners. Three of NIB's associated agencies – Industries of the Blind (IOB), Greensboro, North Carolina; Lions

Volunteer Blind Industries, Morristown, Tennessee; and Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina – are producing 19 products with more in development by other associated agencies. IOB-Greensboro and NIB will also manage the inventory and order fulfillment program for Northern Outfitters products.

This new commercial business opportunity leverages the experience of NIB and its associated agencies to produce high-quality, durable apparel

and other outdoor gear to meet the exacting specifications of the U.S. military, including uniforms, protective equipment and other accessories.

In January in Salt Lake City, Utah, NIB showcased its expertise in apparel manufacturing at the 2013 Outdoor Retailer Winter Market, an event attended by thousands of retailers, manufacturers, industry advocates and the media to learn about the latest trends and products in the outdoor industry. ❖



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