

A Publication of National Industries for the Blind

OPPORTUNITY

A photograph of two men in a warehouse setting. They are both wearing dark blue polo shirts with a logo on the left chest, headsets, and sunglasses. They are standing among large cardboard boxes. The man on the left is leaning on a box, and the man on the right is holding a yellow object. The background shows more boxes and warehouse shelving.

Delivering the Goods

Plus

- New Orleans Lighthouse
- Chicago Lighthouse and Kensington Partnership
- NIB/NAEPB Annual Training Conference

Beyond Products

Many organizations have learned that branching out into services helps them to stay viable in a very competitive global market. Services help them to stand out among competitors. As part of NIB's Strategic Plan, we are implementing a national strategy to enhance the development of career opportunities for people who are blind in the services sector.

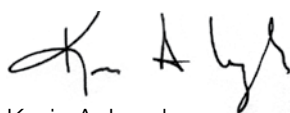
Created in conjunction with our associated agencies, NIB's service development strategy focuses on delivering primary services in teleservices, contract management support, administrative and technology lines of business, document management and supply chain management. It utilizes a national strategic sourcing approach to address our federal customers' needs, to deliver a "single provider" for the customer and to leverage the capabilities of our associated agencies nationwide. Our strategy involves a three-pronged approach. First, we are developing a multi-tiered national engagement strategy with our federal customers to seek out and deliver on global mission requirements. Second, we are equipping people who are blind with business management skills training and enhanced assistive technology. And third, we are working with our associated agencies to improve business development capabilities in the services arena.

This is still relatively new territory for many of our associated agencies. Having immersed ourselves in the development of services only a little more than a decade ago, delivery of services requires a huge culture change among our associated

agencies, which for more than half a century built successful organizations as manufacturers of products. Branching out into the service sector requires a new mindset to oversee the development and delivery of our new service offerings. The results are paying off.

In this issue of *Opportunity*, we are proud to share with you our capabilities in supply chain management. Some of our larger associated agencies operate centralized, multi-customer fulfillment centers and a forward-stocking logistics network to globally support the military's need for uniforms, medical supplies and other products. Others are just getting started with a few contracts to purchase, package, kit and ship to various customers. In any event, order accuracy and on-time delivery are consistently above 99 percent! By leveraging voice-directed, assistive technology with warehouse management and shipping software systems, people who are blind have proven they also can not only perform essential warehouse functions, but also can excel and be promoted into administrative, customer service, supervisory and management roles.

We are proud of the world-class supply chain services offered by our associated agencies. Their capabilities allow the government, military and commercial customers to focus on their core business, while enabling us to diversify career opportunities for people who are blind in the many supply chain positions this particular service has to offer.



Kevin A. Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer



OPPORTUNITY

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Winter 2012

OPPORTUNITY



Ron Frazier, packer, paper plate department, seals packed plates into boxes at The Lighthouse for the Blind, New Orleans, Louisiana.



Annual Training Conference motivational speaker Eric Boles.



ON THE COVER:

James Essary (left) and Dwayne Cunningham (right), warehouse specialists and members of the supply chain services team at the Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, Texas. Both employees are military service veterans; Essary served in the U.S. Army and Cunningham is a former U.S. Marine.

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- October 15 Proclaimed Blind Americans Equality Day

James Brown is guided by a strong sense of community and volunteerism.

Whether he is running a warehouse to help a community with food and disaster relief, coaching little league sports or handling communications during search and rescue operations, James Brown knows that the best things in life come when you reach out to help another human being. And he has logged countless hours volunteering to assist others.

Years ago, Brown was working for a subcontractor of Southern Bell Telephone Company and rose to the position of assistant supervisor when he was diagnosed with glaucoma. Numerous surgeries to repair a retina detachment failed to restore his vision, so Brown lost his job.

He joined Hearts with Hands, a nonprofit organization that provides disaster victims with necessities of life, such as food, water, shelter and clothing. Brown volunteered to manage their warehouse operations for several years. During that time, he participated in the Ground Zero operations in New York City after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Hearts with Hands set up relief systems for search and rescue personnel, and Brown stayed with that operation for 24 days. "Our unity of purpose kept us going," said Brown. "We still had some slim hope that we would find more survivors."

When Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast region on August 29, 2005, Hearts with Hands was there the next day. Brown assisted with relief efforts for 34 days.

He then joined the North Carolina Search and Rescue Dog Association, which has highly trained volunteer teams to search, locate and assist with the rescue or recovery of lost, missing or incapacitated persons. Their response teams locate children, Alzheimer patients, boaters, downed aircraft passengers and crew as well as hikers. They work in urban, rural and wilderness environments, as well as in natural disaster response. At central command, Brown handles the communications network, relaying vital information from search teams, back and forth to the incident commander, and he keeps a log of what transpires during the operation. "The search team's safety depends on timely and accurate communications," said Brown. "We don't want to lose anybody during the operation."

Although Brown was an active volunteer in the community, it was 26 years before he was afforded an opportunity to work again. North Carolina Services for the Blind referred Brown to Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in Asheville. He started in 2006 as a folder and boxer in the kit bag department. As versatile on the job as he is in volunteer activities, he has been cross-trained to help in the poncho, T-shirt and impulse products departments.

"I think the world of the people at Winston-Salem Industries," said Brown. "Without the support of management and my co-workers, I could not have earned the 2011 Employee of the Year Award." Brown claims that management also accommodates



James Brown, 2011 Employee of the Year, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind, Asheville, North Carolina, wearing his North Carolina Search and Rescue Dog Association uniform.

his volunteer activities knowing that when the need arises for him to participate in a search operation, his job will be there when he returns.

Always reaching out to others, Brown firmly believes that there is a volunteer opportunity for everyone. "Whether it is talking to patients in a veterans hospital, reading to special needs children or cooking meals for homeless people," he said, "if you put your heart in it, you can do anything!" ■■

First Civilian Agency Contracts with NIB for Closeout Services

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) signed a contract to pilot contract closeout services for its Washington, D.C., branch, the first civilian agency award for NIB's Contract Management Support (CMS) Program. Under the contract, employees who are blind gather the required data, forms and documentation to present FAA contracting officers "ready-to-close" contracts for final disposition.

NIB is the prime contractor and contract closeout program manager for AbilityOne Program CMS services, which enable government contracting officers to spend less

time on non-inherently governmental closeout functions, focusing instead on more mission-critical functions. CMS services also facilitate the return of unused obligated contract funds to the government.

"This award is a major milestone for NIB. It is the first time our CMS Program is partnering with a civilian agency to provide contract closeout services," said NIB President and CEO Kevin A. Lynch. "We look forward to developing our relationship with the FAA and collaborating on more mutually supportive arrangements like this one." ❧



Jaime Cameron, CMS specialist at the Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

NIB Named One of 2012 Best Places to Work in Virginia

NIB was named to the annual "Best Places to Work in Virginia" list, created by *Virginia Business* magazine and Best Companies Group. The award program was designed to identify, recognize and honor the best places of employment in Virginia, benefiting the state's economy, its work force and businesses.

Organizations from across the state entered the two-part survey process to be considered for the list. The first part evaluated each nominated company's workplace policies, practices, philosophy, systems and demographics. The second part surveyed employees to measure their experience at the company. ❧

NIB Launches Advocates for Leadership Program

NIB's new Advocates for Leadership and Employment Program targets qualified, high-potential employees of NIB associated agencies who are blind, and interested in learning more about the public policy process and communicating NIB's message to legislators.

The new team of Advocates was selected through a competitive process and will serve a two-year term in support

of the NIB Public Policy agenda. By participating in training and public policy events, agency employees are equipped as effective advocates with enhanced communication and relationship-building skills. Their associated agencies will benefit by having trained advocates engaged as champions of NIB's mission to create employment for people who are blind. ❧

Mark Your Calendar



Save the dates for two NIB/NAEPB (National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind) conferences:

2012 Public Policy Forum, February 28-29 at the Gaylord National Resort in National Harbor, Maryland, which enables NIB associated agency employees to network, communicate with their members of Congress, and learn about current legislative initiatives. The forum will include a joint NIB-NISH reception on Capitol Hill.

2012 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo, October 24-28 at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront in Baltimore, Maryland, for NIB and associated agency employees, exhibitors and customers. This year's event combines the sales-focused Opportunity Forum, including the vendor fair, and the Annual Training Conference, which recognizes NIB associated agency Employees of the Year.

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

Delivering the Goods

For many NIB associated agencies looking to diversify career opportunities for people who are blind, services offer strategic opportunities to stay competitive. One particular area — supply chain services — stands out as a growing field due to the outstanding performance of NIB associated agencies.

For manufacturing companies, product quality and design are crucial to building brand identity and a customer base. But with increasing globalization and easier access to alternative products in today's markets, the success of a product is also dependent on effective and efficient supply chain management — overseeing products, information and finances as products move from suppliers to manufacturers to end users.

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Some of the members of the supply chain services team at the Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, Texas.





Although the Travis Association for the Blind (TAB) in Austin, Texas, has manufactured products for the Department of Defense for more than 70 years, it wasn't until 1998 that TAB started to distribute the accessories for its Clothing and Textile Division. These distribution services have grown to a point where TAB is DLA's third party logistics provider for clothing and textiles for the Air Force and Marine Corps. As such, TAB ships to Lackland Air Force Base Recruit Training Center and all Air Force customers worldwide, as well as the Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island in South Carolina; San Diego, California; and all other Marine Corps customers. With an average on-hand inventory value of more than \$160 million that is housed in 366,000 square feet in three locations, TAB's 106 employees in distribution services ship more than 1,600 orders daily. The three warehouses carry 5,385 items in 424 product lines, which are distributed to 4,300 destinations around the world. Last year, TAB sent out 358,000 orders with a 99.89 percent accuracy rate. And more than 84 percent of the direct labor to run these operations is performed by people who are blind or visually impaired. In 2009, the organization earned DLA's Business Alliance Award for Outstanding AbilityOne Program Vendor.

Voice-Directed Work Environments

The key to TAB's success is the use of Manhattan SCALE™ (Supply Chain Architected for Logistics Execution), an industry leading warehouse management software system that integrates Vocollect, a real-time voice interaction system, which makes most of the operations accessible to people who are blind. With Vocollect, warehouse pickers wear devices on their belt and hold scanners. Pickers scan labels on shipping boxes, which direct them to the proper aisle, shelf and item in the warehouse, and tell them the quantity of that specific item. The system prints out like items by zones in the warehouse to maximize efficiency. Currently, TAB has 35 Vocollect units and is planning to purchase another dozen next year. On any given day, there are 35 people who are blind picking stock, which is brought to 10 shipping lines in two different buildings. People who are blind also validate the order to ensure quality through the use of barcode scanners.

Vocollect is used by many businesses because it enables organizations to reduce training time, increase accuracy and enhance productivity and safety. Manhattan SCALE tracks inventory as it moves through the warehouses,



Interior view of one of three warehouses operated by the Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, Texas.

More than a decade ago, many commercial companies chose to outsource supply chain management by partnering with third party logistics providers. As America's combat logistics support agency, the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) has come to rely on NIB associated agencies to keep its supply chain operations running smoothly. DLA is responsible for providing the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and other federal agencies with a variety of logistics support, including procurement, materiel management, warehousing and distribution of food, clothing, medical products, and other supplies, and reutilization of surplus military materiel.



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

increasing visibility and accuracy. According to Rosalie Kelley, senior manager of TAB's distribution services, Manhattan Associates Company brings its customers to TAB regularly to demonstrate how Vocollect works together with Manhattan SCALE. "Just goes to show that seeing is believing," said Kelley. "When I was an Army logistics officer, I was amazed when I saw that people who are blind could sew. Now I know better and say, *why not?*" Kelley added that she and her team are always exploring other distribution operations that can be adapted to enable a person who is blind to perform them.

Nolan Blair is one of those employees who has excelled in a voice-directed work environment by using Vocollect. Born with optic nerve atrophy, Blair has lived with a visual impairment his entire life. He went totally blind in 2009 as a result of unsuccessful laser surgery. When he came to TAB in 1997, he started out by picking orders for TAB's virtual prime vendor accessories contract. The following year, Blair became the head shipping clerk, overseeing orders and training new pickers. Several promotions later, he became the employment services manager, which led him to the position of manager of the training and employment services department for TAB's distribution services. He heads up the mobility technology department, too, and ensures TAB employees' assistive technology needs are met to make their jobs more accessible. Blair has overseen training of more than 100 people through TAB's growth in distribution services.

One of TAB's larger contracts was supplying the Army's new service uniform last year. TAB is currently working with DLA to implement RFID (radio-frequency identification), a technology that uses radio waves to track and manage inventory in the supply chain. This initiative will cover receiving, inventory and shipping operations for Marine Corps and Air Force recruit centers, which issue clothing to recruits.

Mentoring Others

An organization does not have to have warehouse space to create jobs in distribution services for people who are blind. NIB found a way for Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) to do it by partnering with a commercial company that does business with the military.

When Lion Vallen Industries (LVI) opened a new 265,000-square-foot warehouse in February 2011, in



Nolan Blair, manager of training and employment services, Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, Texas.

Pendergrass, Georgia, to distribute U.S. Army uniforms and associated clothing items under a contract with DLA Troop Support, NIB connected LVI with GIB in Bainbridge, Georgia. GIB staff visited TAB in Austin, Texas, to learn more about distribution services and adaptive software used in warehouse operations.

The agreement with LVI stipulated that GIB would provide 10 percent of the personnel to run the warehouse. Job descriptions were altered for GIB employees to eliminate the requirement of driving and operating a fork lift, but GIB employees have been aggressively cross-trained in other job functions. It is a large operation, with LVI and GIB employees receiving, verifying, storing, picking, packing and shipping more than 1,600 orders daily. The Pendergrass facility is the primary location for U.S. Army uniforms and associated clothing items under a contract with DLA Troop Support.

"Our partnership with GIB in our Pendergrass distribution center has been beneficial to both organizations — our staff gets to see first-hand how effective sight-impaired employees can be and the GIB employees are working side-by-side with their fully sighted coworkers in a commercial warehouse operating at world-class standards," said Dennis Dudek, vice president of LVI Military Programs. "We hope to expand our warehouse operations, and when we do, GIB will expand right along with us."

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Ship Shape Supply Services

Several months ago, the Lighthouse for the Blind in St. Louis, Missouri, won two awards to provide procurement, kitting and distribution services to Navy Medical Logistics Command in support of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosives (CBRNE) operations. This service entails the procurement, packaging, kitting and shipment of various types of personal protective equipment, for use at 65 different Naval CBRNE training sites throughout the United States and abroad. Job opportunities are expected to grow with the addition of a strategic, long-term service contract for ongoing annual replenishment of CBRNE supplies as they are consumed in training exercises.

Superior Performance Leads to New Supply Opportunities

A few years ago, the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) in Utica, New York, landed a contract to bottle Deirdre Imus Greening the Cleaning, eco-friendly chemicals formulated by Environmental Solutions, a Canadian-based company. These products were sold to government agencies, such as schools and state prisons, through the State of New York's preferred source program. When CABVI took over commercial distribution of the product line, it reduced shipping times as well as picking and shipping errors. Impressed with CABVI's performance, Environmental Solutions offered CABVI the opportunity to be a third-party distributor for its entire business in the United States. CABVI's expertise grew in this area, while Environmental Solutions reduced costs by sending

large truckloads of goods across the U.S. and Canadian border to one location, rather than many smaller shipments that would be taxed at higher rates. CABVI clearly created value for this commercial customer.

CABVI is converting its manual warehouse system to a fully bar-coded one. Currently, employees use JAWS and Zoomtext assistive technology but CABVI is hoping to install Vocollect and leverage its new expertise to qualify for a distribution service contract in the AbilityOne Program as another way to diversify jobs for people who are blind.

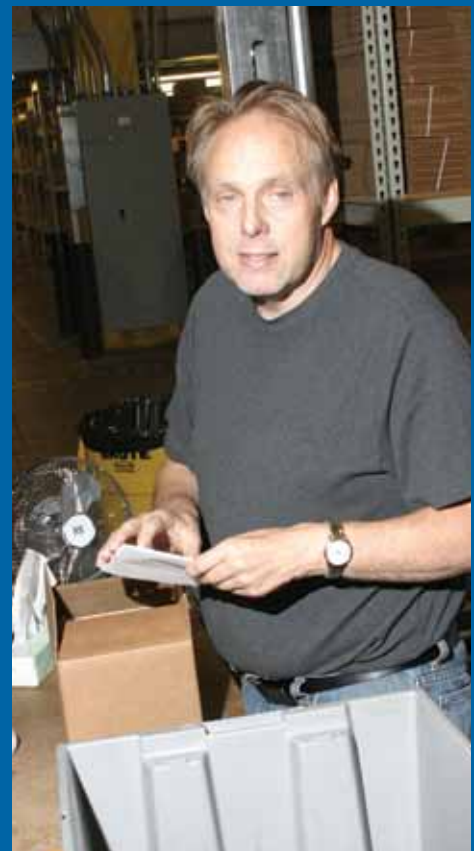
From the Warehouse to the War Zone

LC Industries in Durham, North Carolina, is also a leader among NIB associated agencies in distribution services by operating two distribution centers in Durham and Las Vegas, Nevada. Carrying more than 2,200 items, LC Industries supports a wide array of military and commercial customers and nearly 250,000 square feet of distribution space to enable the organization to rapidly respond to the military's surge requirements.

Two other large distribution functions are run by Arizona Industries for the Blind (AIB) in Phoenix and Industries of the Blind in Greensboro, North Carolina. These organizations receive, store, pack, mark, barcode, tag, perform warehouse material handling, repackage and distribute lighting products for DLA Aviation in Richmond, Virginia, and springs for DLA Troop Support that are shipped to support America's warfighters worldwide. Distribution services at AIB started about 15 years ago in a 60,000-square-



Amy Butterfield, material handler, Arizona Industries for the Blind Distribution Unit, Phoenix, Arizona, picking an order for shipment.



Wayne Edwards, material handler, Arizona Industries for the Blind, Phoenix, Arizona, packing outbound orders.



Ocie Sackrider, material handler, Arizona Industries for the Blind, Phoenix, Arizona, performing a quality check on an outbound order.

foot facility. Today, AIB performs these operations in a 175,000-square-foot state-of-the-art warehouse.

The lighting products range from the size of a pencil eraser, which are used as indicators and instrument lights for aircraft, to fluorescent tubes that are four feet in length; while the springs come as small as those used in a ball-point pen to ones that weigh approximately 400 pounds each. AIB has an additional contract for insignias, which include 2,500 different items ranging from multiple sizes and styles of American flags, to Navy ship signal flags, insignias worn by enlisted personnel as well as awards, such as Silver and Bronze stars and Purple Hearts. AIB carries more than 30 million pieces of inventory for these contracts, with 1,100 orders shipped worldwide each day and 250,000 orders annually. The ISO 9001:2008 certified organization has had a 99.8 percent inventory accuracy rate for 15 years. Their performance earned them the 2010 DLA Outstanding AbilityOne Vendor Award.

Seamless Execution

AIB uses three technology systems — HighJump™ Warehouse Advantage inventory management system, Vocollect and Clippership® shipping system software. When AIB receives products, employees inspect for damage, verify the National Stock Number and quantity and record the shipment into HighJump. Customer orders are received electronically from the DLA database and imported into HighJump, which validates the order and transfers the information to Vocollect to create picking assignments. The picking order and flow is assigned by HighJump based on customer priority. The material handler interacts with Vocollect through verbal communication to

pick the order and quality control verifies items to the order. Packers prepare the order for shipment, and daily shipping and receiving activities are transmitted to the customer. All software is accessible because 80 percent of AIB's 64 employees in the distribution unit are legally blind. In addition, AIB's customer service function is staffed by three legally blind individuals. "We are as committed to working with our customers to improve the DLA supply chain as evidenced by our order accuracy as we are to promoting individuals who are blind to management positions," said Tim Adams, AIB manager of distribution and logistics.

Two examples are Joan Delaney and Jan Shotwell. Delaney started as an entry-level material handler at AIB. Due to her excellent interpersonal skills and technical abilities, AIB promoted Delaney to the position of warehouse supervisor a year ago. Shotwell, who also began her AIB career as a material handler, was promoted recently to production control coordinator.

Proven Service Providers

With increasing globalization and easier access to alternative products, the importance of an efficient supply chain is more important than ever before. From storage, distribution and fulfillment to inventory management and freight consolidation, supply chain services offered by NIB associated agencies consistently post high marks in customer satisfaction. NIB associated agencies have proven over and over again to government and commercial customers that they offer cost-effective solutions, simplified procurement processes, state-of-the-art technology, dependable service and exceptional performance, while creating new career opportunities for a skilled workforce of people who are blind. ■■



Arnell Young, packer, mess tray department, inserts trays into sleeves for sealing.



David Green, packer, paper towel department, displays banded double-fold paper towels for packing.

Energy and resilience are the main ingredients in the recovery and growth of employment and services at The Lighthouse for the Blind in New Orleans.

Six years ago, Hurricane Katrina brought New Orleans to its knees. The storm and the flooding afterwards hobbled the historic city and delivered more than \$100 billion worth of damage to the Gulf Coast region, making it one of the worst disasters in U.S. history. The losses for the Lighthouse for the Blind were minimal compared to other businesses in the area. A satellite photo of the Lighthouse a few days after the storm showed sections of the Lighthouse's roof torn off, and the lack of utilities and impassible roads made it impossible to continue operations and provide services to the community.

More concerning, however, were the Lighthouse employees. It took six months to account for everyone due to lack of communications. Knowing how dire the situation was, NIB collected close to \$100,000 in donations from NIB and associated agency staff. The Lighthouse used these funds to provide weekly money orders to production employees to help them purchase food, medicine and other necessities in the interim.

"It became clear within the first week that the Lighthouse's survival depended on having a place to operate," said Lighthouse President and CEO Bill Price. "That is why we decided to move the paper cup manufacturing operations to Crystal Springs, Mississippi, in order to fill

existing government orders, while at the same time providing assistance to employees with limited resources to relocate." Because it was impossible for the Lighthouse to access its bank accounts, NIB provided an emergency loan, which enabled the Lighthouse to rent manufacturing space in Crystal Springs, move production equipment, write payroll checks and purchase a few laptop computers to set up the temporary operation.

Rejuvenated Industry

Two months later, the Lighthouse re-opened the New Orleans manufacturing facility to continue production of other essential products for the federal government. At that time, the Lighthouse was making just four types of paper cups for the government. Today, it manufactures 30 different types of paper and biodegradable cups. Other production operations have grown, too, including a paper towel line, biodegradable deck swabs, household scrubbers, pillowcases, mess trays and paper plates. "We have moved from a low-tech to a high-tech operation in the last decade, and our employees are very efficient, keeping up with increasing demand and turning out high volumes of products," said Price. The Lighthouse's manufacturing program is designed to create quality jobs for people who are blind, to provide training for acquiring competitive job skills and to educate the community about the capabilities of people who are blind.



Anthony Gonzales, Braille supervisor, reads a print document aloud while Sylvia Gonzales proofs the Braille version of the document to check for transcribed accuracy.

Fueling Continued Success

With a grant from the local Lions Club, the Lighthouse opened a facility in Gulfport in 2007 to move its pillowcase sewing operations from New Orleans to Gulfport. And last year, the Lighthouse purchased a 44,000-square-foot facility in Baton Rouge to double the capacity of paper cup production, from 300 to 600 million cups a year. The Baton Rouge facility is expected to create 40 more jobs for people who are blind and will also offer an impressive menu of support services for that community. Aside from careers in manufacturing, the Lighthouse offers a variety of jobs for people who are blind throughout the state of Louisiana in warehouse services for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Harahan, mailroom operations at the Internal Revenue Service office in New Orleans, and switchboard operations at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Biloxi, Mississippi, and at Barksdale Air Force Base in Bossier City.

The headquarters facility in New Orleans offers a Braille transcription center, a low vision clinic, Braille literacy classes, a senior technology program, white cane mobility training, daily living skills instruction and Magnifiers and More, the only visual aids store in the region, carrying a very large inventory of over 600 items. The senior technology



Nicole May, technology specialist, provides computer software instructions to Pathways to Success Program participant, Cora Virgil.

program provides people who are blind training in common computer applications, internet functions and adaptive technology such as screen-readers, screen-magnification and voice-activated technology. Similar programs are provided to children with low vision, including a six-week summer camp for youths between the ages of 6 and 22. Teens explore opportunities that help to promote their success in college or work sessions. Because vision loss affects so many facets of a person's life, social workers are available to help clients connect with community resources and learn self-advocacy. The Lighthouse's Pathways to Success Work Readiness Program includes training in basic work skills, resume development, career exploration, professional communication, workplace conflict resolution, interview preparation, basic computer uses, the value of teamwork, positive work ethics and confidence building.



Magnifiers and More Store Assistant, Hannah Smith, assists a customer.

Stronger Than Ever

With 195 employees and counting, the Lighthouse's future remains bright with an expanded headquarters, diversified career opportunities, increased community services and geographic growth to reach people who are blind in other parts of the state. "We know we cannot afford the status quo," said Price. "We have tremendous talent in our dedicated staff, and we firmly believe that if we keep creating jobs, the people will come to fill them." ■■

Annual Training Conference Celebrates 2011 Employees of the Year



Conference attendees welcome employees of the year into the meeting hall.



Pictured left to right: Employee of the Year panel moderator Sharon Giovinazzo, RLCB Inc., with panelists Joseph Merlan, Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired; Stephen Heesen, Industries for the Blind – Milwaukee; Nelly Barnett, The Lighthouse for the Blind – Seattle; and James Brown, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind.

Focused on the theme, “Imagining Our Future,” the 2011 NIB/NAEPB Annual Training Conference, held October 5-7 in New Orleans, was attended by more than 450 NIB and NIB associated agency employees, customers and business partners. In addition to being a forum for networking and learning, the conference offered the opportunity to recognize NIB associated agency employees of the year. The conference general session kicked off Thursday morning in true New Orleans fashion with a lively jazz band leading a parade of the 65 agency employee honorees.

One of NIB’s key supporters, Shay Assad, director, defense pricing, U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), stated that in spite of government budget challenges, there was tremendous opportunity for NIB and the AbilityOne Program. DoD is one of the program’s largest customers, and Assad committed to being a relentless advocate for NIB’s mission of providing employment opportunities for people

who are blind. “You change people’s lives in a remarkable and profound way,” he said. “I’m going to break down doors for you.”

Steven Kempf, commissioner, U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) - Federal Acquisition Service, said GSA was one of the biggest partners and advocates for the AbilityOne Program, stating that one-fifth of all products sold by GSA to government agencies in fiscal year 2011 were SKILCRAFT® products. He noted GSA’s increased focus on sustainability and green products, and its interest in new strategic sourcing opportunities.

New leaders of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission (the operating name for the Committee for Purchase for People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled), Chairperson Tony Poleo and Vice Chairperson Jim Kesteloot, said their leadership style would emphasize collaboration, consultation and mutual respect, leveraging their

combined experience. Poleo urged NIB and its associated agencies to communicate the value proposition of the AbilityOne Program.

Commission Executive Director Tina Ballard presented awards to three key supporters of the AbilityOne Program:

- **Thomas J. Bouchard**, deputy chief, Army Contracting Command, Aberdeen Proving Ground (Soldier, Chemical, Research & Test): E.R. “Dick” Alley Career Achievement Award
- **Rear Admiral Mark F. Heinrich**, SC, USN; commander, Naval Supply Systems Command and Chief of Supply Corps: Osborne A. “Oz” Day AbilityOne Awareness Award
- **Susan W. Pollack**, senior procurement analyst, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology and



Shay Assad, director, defense pricing, U.S. Department of Defense.

Logistics)/Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, U.S. Department of Defense: Most Valuable Liaison Award

At a meeting of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission, discussions focused on concepts and processes currently being reviewed to foster collaboration between central nonprofit agencies NIB and NISH that would strengthen the AbilityOne Program.

In his presentation, Kevin A. Lynch, NIB president and CEO, discussed NIB's top priorities in fiscal year 2012, which include marketing to government agencies currently not purchasing products produced through the AbilityOne Program, introducing a new line of business focused on Section 508 compliance services, expanding Contract Management Support (CMS) business, pursuing commercial and state-use opportunities and strengthening business relationships.



Kevin A. Lynch, NIB president and CEO (pictured on right), presented a tactile flag to Congressman Cedric Richmond.

Lynch also noted key successes in fiscal year 2011, including growth of the CMS program. After \$15.5 million in task orders, Lynch said more than 40 job seekers who are blind secured not only employment, but a career as a direct result of NIB's CMS Program.

Billy Parker, CMS training program director, presented awards to recognize two CMS Training Program participants:

- **Andrew B. Thomas**, closeout specialist, San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind
- **Jeremy Reeves**, contract specialist, Defense Contract Management Agency, formerly at Virginia Industries for the Blind

Lynch presented awards to two NIB associated agencies for outstanding efforts in making positive changes in their organizations by embracing the Commission's Quality Work

Environment (QWE) initiative, which enhances the employee work environment and improves customer service. Agency CEOs accepting awards on behalf of their organizations were:

- **Shelly Taylor**, president and CEO, Louisiana Association for the Blind
- **Karen Walls**, president, Midwest Enterprises for the Blind Inc.

Motivational speaker Eric Boles, president, The Game Changers Inc., urged audience members to think about a strategic plan for their life, not just their career, focusing on what they want to do and why. He encouraged the crowd to embrace change, live in each moment, focus on future goals and avoid fear. "Don't confuse what you've done so far with all you can do," said Boles. "Every person you help and job you create can impact people for generations," he said.



U.S. AbilityOne Commission Vice Chairperson Jim Kesteloot and Chairperson Tony Poleo.



Steven Kempf, commissioner, U.S. General Services Administration - Federal Acquisition Service.



Linda Allen, 2011 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year award winner from Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, Texas.



Pictured left to right: NIB President and CEO Kevin A. Lynch; Ramona Samuelson; 2011 Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement award winner Nina Bektic-Marrero from A.V.R.E., Binghamton, New York; and NIB Board Chairman Jim Kutsch.

U.S. Congressman Cedric Richmond (D-2nd-LA) thanked the employees of one of NIB's associated agencies, The Lighthouse for the Blind of New Orleans, for their support following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and stated his commitment to being an advocate for the AbilityOne Program.

A panel of employees of the year, Nelly Barnett, The Lighthouse for the Blind - Seattle; James Brown, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind; Stephen Heesen, Industries for the Blind - Milwaukee; and Joseph Merlan, Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, inspired attendees with their stories of perseverance that enabled them to achieve personal and career success.

Two employees of the year received national awards at the Friday night banquet:

- **Linda Allen**, Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, Texas: Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award
- **Nina Bektic-Marrero**, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment Inc. (AVRE), Binghamton, New York: Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award

Breakout sessions during the conference addressed topics ranging from how to develop an effective media strategy, create new lines of business and communicate a value proposition, to how to manage talent, recruit and hire wounded warriors, and build successful business partnerships. Other sessions covered topics such as service contracts, state use programs, financial risk management and antitrust compliance. ■■

Chicago Lighthouse and Kensington Partner to Supply Ergonomic Products

Employees who spend a significant amount of time at the computer are at risk for repetitive strain injuries ranging from carpal tunnel syndrome and other pain in the wrist and hands, to back and neck pain, foot and leg discomfort, and eyestrain and headaches. Ergonomic products can help to prevent these health issues.

One of NIB's 90 associated nonprofit agencies, The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired, has teamed with Kensington Computer Products Group to offer a line of ergonomic office products to the federal government market. Kensington, the technology division of the office products company, ACCO Brands Corporation, produces computer security accessories, and has expanded its product selection to include ergonomic products that can increase employee productivity and well-being.

"We entered into a co-brand agreement with Kensington," said Jean-Claude Kappler, vice president, Chicago Lighthouse Industries. "We were looking for new products to produce and contacted Kensington. Their ergonomic products were strong sellers in the commercial market, and we thought they'd sell well in the federal market."

The Chicago Lighthouse operates one of the few remaining clock manufacturing facilities in the United States. Employees who are blind or visually impaired produce more than 200,000 clocks annually for federal government and commercial customers. Other high-quality products manufactured by the nonprofit agency include erasable custom wall planners/calendars and wall thermometers. Now employees at The Chicago Lighthouse assemble Kensington-SKILCRAFT® SoleMassage™ and SoleSaver™ Ergonomic Adjustable Foot Rests, and the Column Mount Extended Monitor Arm.

The foot rests are easily adjusted to different heights and angles to relieve foot and back fatigue. The SoleMassage™ has a textured platform that stimulates the nerve endings in the feet and is designed to invigorate and exercise



Leniel Scott, supervisor at The Chicago Lighthouse, assembles a monitor arm.

ankles, improve leg circulation through a gentle rocking mechanism, and improve posture by elevating the legs.

The monitor arm reduces eye and neck strain as it rotates vertically or horizontally and tilts to eliminate glare on the computer screen. It can be attached to cubicle or desktop surfaces and includes a cable management system to eliminate desktop clutter.

Kappler said The Chicago Lighthouse teamed up with Kensington because its brand is well established and known for quality products and overall value. Kensington provides its ergonomic products in component form to The Chicago Lighthouse, then the products are assembled and packaged by people who are legally blind.

Founded in 1906, The Chicago Lighthouse is one of the nation's most comprehensive social service agencies. In addition to employing more than 30 people who are blind through its manufacturing facilities, the agency's resources include a vision care and rehabilitation program, a school for children with multiple disabilities, an employment services program, a Veterans Administration program serving veterans in all 50 states, a radio station, and a retail store offering more than 1,000 products designed to help people with low vision. The Chicago Lighthouse also operates a legal clinic and a national toll-free computer help desk. ■■

U.S. AbilityOne Commission Honors Agency Leader

The U.S. AbilityOne Commission (the operating name for the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled) presented its inaugural Chairperson's Award for Leadership to A. Gidget Hopf, president and CEO, Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI)-Goodwill, Rochester, New York, one of NIB's associated nonprofit agencies. The award also was presented to NISH agency leader, Richard Gilmartin of Lakeview Center, Pensacola, Florida.

The Chairperson's award recognizes leaders who consistently meet or surpass the Commission's statutory and regulatory requirements, fulfill its guiding principles for a Quality Work Environment (QWE), and exhibit business acumen that



Pictured left to right: NISH COO Dennis Fields, Commission COO Kimberly Zeich, Gidget Hopf, former Commission Chairperson Andrew Houghton, Rich Gilmartin, and NIB COO Scottie Knott.

leads to increased employment opportunities for people who are blind or otherwise severely disabled.

During her 25 years at ABVI-Goodwill, Hopf has transformed the organization into an industry leader of vision

rehabilitation services. She has been a strong advocate for the AbilityOne Program through her service on the AbilityOne Enterprise CEO Forum, NIB Board of Directors, and National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind (NAEPB). ■■

First Effective Supervision Class Recognized

The 21 participants who completed the first Effective Supervision class, the newest track in NIB's Business Leaders Program, were recognized October 5 during the opening reception of the 2011 NIB/NAEPB Annual Training Conference in New Orleans. All participants, who are blind, hold supervisory roles at NIB associated agencies across the country.

Effective Supervision includes classroom sessions, pre-class reading, pre-session assignments, and a continuous learning component. The program also includes a session on performance coaching for participants' managers, who support the success of the participants, both in the classroom as well as when they apply their new skills and abilities on the job. ■■

NIB Associated Agencies Support Flood Relief



The A.V.R.E. staff thanks donor agencies for flood relief contributions.

Following the flood in September caused by Tropical Storm Irene, the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (A.V.R.E.) in Binghamton, New York, coordinated donations of relief supplies from other NIB associated agencies. A.V.R.E. received items such as cleaning supplies, protective gloves and masks, plastic bags, and food service paper products, and distributed them to recovery and relief centers in the Binghamton area.

The Lighthouse for the Blind in New Orleans, in honor of the national support it received after Hurricane Katrina, sent supplies and a monetary donation to help A.V.R.E. employees displaced or severely impacted by the flood. ■■

Veterans Remembered by NIB, Agency Employees

To honor the legacy of service and bravery to our country by veterans, both past and present, NIB and its associated agency employees took time to remember, reflect and celebrate Veterans Day, November 11. These activities were part of the “Make it Meaningful” initiative launched by the Library of Congress.

NIB employees in Alexandria, Virginia, gathered to hear remarks by NIB President and CEO Kevin A. Lynch, followed by a moment of silence. Employees wrote notes of gratitude on a “thank you board” used in NIB’s Wounded Warrior program, which provides outreach to veterans who are blind or visually impaired through training opportunities and professional

resources. The team collected food and household items for a local shelter that supports veterans in the community.

Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) in Utica, New York, commemorated the 10th anniversary of its Veterans Memorial and hosted U.S. Congressman Richard Hanna (R-24th-NY) to inform him about the agency’s federal programs and contracts to support the Veterans Administration.

Members of the Veterans Roundtable in Tyler, Texas, a support network for veterans focused on education, housing, and medical care, toured Horizon Industries, a division of East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind,



Veterans Memorial at Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Utica, New York.

and honored 12 veterans currently employed at Horizon’s manufacturing facility. Other agencies hosting special Veterans Day events included Georgia Industries for the Blind in Bainbridge. ::

Boeing Hires Contract Management Support Intern

Boeing recently offered a full-time internship to Ian Elliot, who completed the AbilityOne Contract Management Support (CMS) training program conducted in partnership with Defense Acquisition University, to provide contract management support to its Network and Space Systems and Digital Receiver Technology divisions.

In a ceremony October 26 at Boeing’s office in Crystal City, Virginia, NIB President and CEO Kevin A. Lynch expressed his appreciation



Pictured left to right: Kevin A. Lynch, NIB president and CEO; Elizabeth Huldin, director of human resources (HR), Boeing Network and Space Systems; Rhonda Mower, Boeing HR; Ian Elliot, Boeing Digital Receiver Technology (DRT); Anne Toffey, director of finance, Boeing DRT; Billy Parker, NIB CMS training program director; Lynn Konetschni, NIB vice president of HR.

for the corporation’s support in working with NIB to provide professional contract management employment opportunities through an internship program for talented individuals who are blind.

Lynch presented the NIB Partner in Excellence Award to Boeing executives representing the two divisions. “We look forward to a continued partnership with Boeing to create more professional job opportunities for people who are blind,” said Lynch. ::

October 15 Proclaimed Blind Americans Equality Day

An excerpt from a recent presidential proclamation:

“Generations of blind and visually impaired Americans have dedicated their passion and skills to enhancing our national life – leading as public servants, penning works of literature, lending their voice to music, and inspiring as champions of sport. On Blind Americans Equality Day, we celebrate

the achievements of blind and visually impaired Americans and reaffirm our commitment to advancing their complete social and economic integration. . . .”

“ . . . By joint resolution approved on October 6, 1964 (Public Law 88-628, as amended), the Congress designated October 15 of each year as ‘White Cane Safety Day’ to recognize the contributions of Americans who are blind or have low

vision. Today, let us recommit to forging ahead with the work of perfecting our Union and ensuring we remain a Nation where all our people, including those living with disabilities, have every opportunity to achieve their dreams.”

“Now, therefore, I, Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim October 15, 2011, as Blind Americans Equality Day. . . .” ::



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