

A Publication of National Industries for the Blind

# OPPORTUNITY

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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

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## STRONGER TOGETHER

NIB and its associated nonprofit agencies have a long and successful history of partnering with some of the world's most recognizable brands.

In 1989, discussions began with 3M to bring Post-It brand notes into the AbilityOne® Program. 3M immediately understood the value of a co-branding arrangement: A partnership with NIB and its associated agencies would help create jobs for people who are blind, while at the same time growing 3M's business in the federal market.

The rest, as they say, is history.

What began 25 years ago with three products has turned into a line with more than two dozen offerings. Each year, 3M's partnership with the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI) in Rochester, New York, supports thousands of employment hours for people who are blind. And ABVI's strong performance led 3M to expand the partnership to include many other NIB associated agencies in the production of a wide variety of office supplies and cleaning products for federal customers.

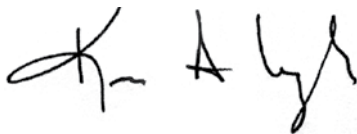
3M, along with Boeing, ZEP and other nationally recognized companies, understands that partnering with NIB makes business sense. These alliances

attract new customers and build existing market share – all while supporting a mission with an incredible social impact.

NIB works with its associated agencies to bring solutions to commercial partners that tap into the full range of capabilities our network delivers. Indeed, co-branding arrangements are attractive propositions in today's competitive marketplace.

In this issue of Opportunity, you'll learn about a new co-brand initiative with Snap-on Industrial, a nationally recognized manufacturer of high-end tools and equipment. Of course no two relationships are alike, and you'll discover what makes our new relationship with Snap-on particularly special.

The Snap-on story is an excellent example of how NIB and our associated agencies are capitalizing on national-level alliances to expand and improve product offerings and grow employment opportunities for people who are blind.



Kevin A. Lynch  
President and  
Chief Executive Officer



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## OPPORTUNITY

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## SKILCRAFT® PRO-GRADE TOOLS FULFILL DUAL MISSIONS

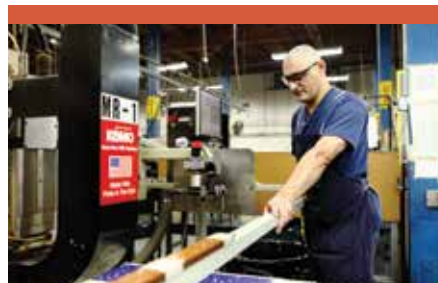
For its entry into the maintenance, repair and operations market, NIB turned to an industry leader for guidance.



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# FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM FORGES AN INTERCONTINENTAL PARTNERSHIP

BY KELLY JAMIESON



▲ IREX fellow Phuc Dang (right) with Billy Parker, NIB CMS Training Program director, at the Community Leadership Institute End of Program Conference in Washington, D.C.

As a boy, Phuc Dang never met a challenge he couldn't overcome. Even after he stepped on an active landmine in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam, losing his sight at age nine, Dang retained that determination.

After graduating from the College of Social Sciences and Humanities in Vietnam and receiving certification and training from the Carroll Center for the Blind in Boston and the Freedom Scientific International Training Department in Hamburg, Germany, Dang found his place at the Sao Mai Vocational and Assistive Technology Center for the Blind. Since 2007, he has served as executive director of the center.

### A Driven Leader Takes Initiative

As part of a new strategic plan to both create more job opportunities for people who are blind and make the Sao Mai Center more sustainable, Dang

applied for an international fellowship through the Community Solutions Program of the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The program is implemented by the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX).

Dang is one of only 60 applicants from around the world accepted as a fellow. After working with him to find a U.S.-based host organization whose mission closely relates to his personal development goals, IREX asked NIB to serve as Dang's international host.

"In Vietnam, we educate and train people who are blind in assistive technology, but there are rarely jobs available once people complete their training," Dang explained. "I'm here to learn from NIB and develop ways to create job opportunities for people who are blind in my country."

For nearly four months, Dang made his rounds through different departments at NIB, taking in information about refining his leadership skills and improving business functions of the Sao Mai Center. "Phuc has had the opportunity to learn and grow here as a fellow at NIB," NIB senior human resources director Kyna Kirkland said. "And the departments he's worked with have been able to grow from their experiences with him as well."

### Recreating a Successful Program

The IREX fellowship required Dang to develop a program supporting the Sao Mai Center's mission that can be implemented upon his return. He found inspiration in NIB's Business Leaders Program, a five-track program designed to prepare individuals who are blind for careers in business by providing educational and employment opportunities through professional development.

Dang plans to create a similar program, called the Young Blind Leadership Development Program, when he returns to Vietnam. He believes a structured training program, coupled with efforts to build partnerships with businesses in and around Ho Chi Minh City, will lead to more opportunities for young professionals who are blind.

### A Growing Partnership

Dang left the U.S. in December, but will continue collaborating with NIB through the Community Solutions Program until the end of June 2015. "We highly encourage host organizations to stay in contact with the fellows," Jessica Lane, program coordinator for IREX, said.

"NIB wants to continue to work with Phuc after he leaves," NIB CMS Training Program director Billy Parker said. "It is an international extension of our mission and would be great to see jobs created abroad as a result of our working together." □

*Kelly Jamieson is a communications specialist at National Industries for the Blind.*



### SENATOR SCHUMER RECOGNIZED AS ABILITYONE CHAMPION



▲ Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY) shakes hands with production supervisor Luigi DiRusso on his visit to AVRE. Also pictured are John Martin, AVRE board chair, and direct labor employees Kenny Long and Jim Hitchcock.

U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer (D) was recognized as an AbilityOne Congressional Champion during a visit to the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (AVRE), in Binghamton, New York, Dec. 8. In presenting the AbilityOne Champion plaque, NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch thanked Sen. Schumer “for taking the time to learn about our issues and concerns ... and for committing to rolling up your sleeves and doing what it takes to maintain and grow employment for people who are blind here in New York.”

Lynch also thanked the Senator for continuing the historic legacy of leadership from the Empire State. “The work begun with Sen. [Robert F.] Wagner and Representative [Caroline] O’Day in 1938, and continued in 1971 with Sen. [Jacob K.] Javits, is carried on today by you, Senator,” Lynch said. ▣

### WALK HELPS SPOKANE OFFICIALS LEARN ABOUT ACCESSIBILITY

Staff and employees of the Inland Northwest Lighthouse in Spokane, Washington, took local government representatives wearing vision loss simulators on a guided walk around the city’s downtown area in observance of White Cane Safety Day. The event, which brought together city officials and planners, was designed to raise awareness of accessibility issues for pedestrians who are blind and the importance of considering those issues when making policy decisions.

Mike Fagan, a member of the Spokane City Council, Kathleen Weinand from the City of Spokane, and Ryan Stewart and Staci Lehman of the Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC), participated in the walk, which highlighted some of the progress made in providing safe and accessible travel for pedestrians, and some of the challenges that remain for people who are blind and visually impaired. After the walk, guests had an opportunity to talk about their experiences. Ryan Stewart, senior planner at SRTC said, “You can’t really understand what it is like to travel as a person who is blind until you actually try to do it yourself.” ▣



▲ Inland Northwest Lighthouse accessibility manager Peggy Martinez accompanies Kathleen Weinand of the City of Spokane Planning Department, while Lighthouse development and public relations director Shawn Dobbs escorts Staci Lehman, public education/information coordinator for the Spokane Regional Transportation Council, on a walk around the city’s downtown area. Weinand and Dobbs wore vision loss simulators to gain a better understanding of the obstacles people who are blind encounter in getting around town.



# PRO-GRADE TOOLS FULFILL DUAL MISSIONS

**A new line of products for professional maintenance, repair and industrial uses provides job opportunities for people who are blind and serves federal customers working in the most challenging environments.**

BY ANDREW BROWNSTEIN

When Jeana Angelini graduated from high school in the late 1970s she wanted to be a military chaplain, but was never able to enlist. The cataracts she's dealt with since birth made it impossible to pass the mandatory eye exam.

Now, more than 30 years later, Angelini has found a different way to support the nation's armed forces: Supervising employees who are blind on a production line manufacturing tools for the U.S. military.

"I'm very thankful for what the U.S. military does for us," Angelini said. "To be able to help assemble the tools that our military uses makes me feel like I'm helping out in my own way."

Angelini is part of a new collaboration between National Industries for the Blind (NIB), Industries for the

Blind-Milwaukee (IB Milwaukee) and Milwaukee-based Beyond Vision. The agencies are receiving technical, marketing and merchandising support for the venture from Snap-on Industrial, widely considered the industry leader in the hand tool market. On January 1, the partnership launched the SKILCRAFT® Pro-Grade line of screwdrivers and socket sets designed primarily to meet the needs of the U.S. military.

Available to federal customers through the AbilityOne® program, SKILCRAFT Pro-Grade tools are expected to bring in \$2 million annually. One official estimated 90 percent of tool purchasers will be military repair shops servicing vehicles like tanks, planes and ships. Federal agencies with motor pools, such as prisons and the U.S. postal service, make up the remaining 10 percent of expected purchasers.

For NIB, the launch represents a major leap into the maintenance, repair and operations (MRO) market. The support of a well-known manufacturer like Snap-on offers an ideal opportunity to demonstrate NIB's commitment to MRO.

"A number of the people working here couldn't tell you the difference between a ratchet, a socket or wrench, but they know the quality of Snap-on products," said Ryan Hoffmann, government products supervisor at Beyond Vision. "It's a very exciting thing when you have an industry leader wanting to support a socially conscious project like this. We think it suits what we do very well. It's something that's going to employ a lot of blind people for a long time."

### Charting New Territory

While some NIB associated agencies had relationships with Snap-on, it wasn't



until roughly three years ago that the idea of support for a large-scale project was broached.

“It was an opportunity to increase employment, because our organization had not really entered into the MRO market in any significant way,” explained Kevin Lynch, NIB President and CEO. “As we identified that as a way to bring new products into the federal marketplace, and we decided on hand tools as a major component of MRO, we wanted the advice and support of a company considered a major player in the industry.”

It took three years to develop the project, not only because of the need to work out specifics of the complex federal procurement process, but also because the arrangement charted new territory for all of the parties involved.

“Snap-on is honored to share NIB’s mission of providing employment opportunities for people who are blind or visually impaired,” said Robert Blake, Jr., senior sales support manager for business development and government at Snap-on Industrial. “We’re excited to partner with SKILCRAFT in launching a line of hand tools to fulfill the exacting requirements of government MRO professionals.”

Snap-on’s advice and expertise were critical to the agencies. “Snap-on is the industry leader,” explained Beyond Vision’s Hoffmann. “We wanted to be sure they were comfortable, that they knew what the program meant and understood the people it was going to employ. They worked very hard with us to make sure it was going to be a winning program for everyone.”

#### **Location! Location! Location!**

Snap-on supplies American-made

*Continued on page 8*

▼ Jeana Angelini, whose vision impairment prevented her from joining the military, is proud of the work she does at IB-Milwaukee on SKILCRAFT’s new line of hand tools designed to meet the needs of the U.S. military.



# PRO-GRADE TOOLS FULFILL DUAL MISSIONS

Continued from page 7

components to the two NIB associated agencies — located roughly 5 miles apart in Milwaukee — and they perform finishing and packaging.

Beyond Vision is producing custom packaging for the nine new Pro-Grade socket sets. IB-Milwaukee presses the screwdriver handles and blades together, stamps them with the SKILCRAFT logo and packages them.

As technical advisors, Snap-on emphasized that the quality of the screwdriver would be critical to mechanics in the military, said Blake, who is also a 21-year veteran mechanic retired from the Air Force.

“The components are all made in the USA,” Blake explained. “It’s a very high-end tool for aircraft mechanics and those who do repair for tank and armor divisions, where you don’t ever want to deploy and have a lower quality tool that breaks on you in the field.”

Quality has been an important consideration since the project’s inception. Rich Weigold, chief operating officer with IB-Milwaukee, noted the agency is the first nonprofit organization in the country to earn ISO 9000

certification, meaning it adheres to rigorous international quality standards. All SKILCRAFT Pro-Grade Tools carry lifetime limited warranties.

## An Untapped Source of Talent

Another important factor in the quality of the SKILCRAFT Pro-Grade line of tools is the workforce producing them. Employees at NIB associated agencies represent an untapped source of skilled labor.

National studies show that individuals with disabilities have equal or higher job performance ratings, higher retention rates and lower absentee rates than employees without disabilities. Yet seven out of 10 working-age Americans who are blind are not employed. Hoffmann calls this statistic “alarming.”

“I can really tell you that 70 percent of the people who are blind are not unemployable. They’re talented men and women who deserve jobs, but unfortunately companies mistakenly view employing them as something that’s difficult, something that’s risky,” Hoffmann explained.

“I’d put our workforce against any workforce in the state,” he said.



SKILCRAFT Pro-Grade screwdrivers feature a solvent-resistant, textured ergonomic handle with thumb stop for ultimate torque with less slippage.



Employees working on the Pro-Grade line come from varied backgrounds. Jackie Ackley, who performs process improvements on the socket line at Beyond Vision, was a zookeeper at the Milwaukee County Zoo for over 22 years. Filling positions that involved everything from designing exhibits to recapturing escaped animals, Ackley eventually worked her way up to head zookeeper.

But her vision rapidly degenerated in 1999 and she lost sight in her right eye. Two years later, the vision in her left eye was also lost, which inevitably affected her job. “They wouldn’t let me count the polar bears anymore,” Ackley said. “I couldn’t see them.” She found her way to Beyond Vision in 2002 and has been with the agency ever since.

Angelini, the production line supervisor at IB-Milwaukee who dreamed of being



▲ Julie Davis worked on a pen packing machine at IB-Milwaukee before moving over to work on SKILCRAFT Pro-Grade screwdrivers.



▲ Matthew Baumeister, whose innate mechanical aptitude has been evident since middle school, works on SKILCRAFT Pro-Grade screwdrivers at IB-Milwaukee.



a military chaplain, said she sent out more than one hundred applications after graduating from high school. "One of the places I went to interview, once we went into my vision difficulty ... the interview was literally done," she recalled. "They said 'We'll call you if we need you.' "

Her experience is echoed by Matthew Baumeister, a colleague at IB-Milwaukee who is now a machine operator on the screwdriver line. Partially blind from birth, his innate mechanical aptitude was evident in middle school, where he repaired bicycles, and in high school, where he worked on motorbikes and go-carts.

Baumeister was employed at a large national retail chain until 2010. "In the past few years, they unceremoniously cut my hours and dumped my insurance, so I was looking for full time work," he said. "I figured I'd check with Industries for the Blind, which is more likely to hire me."

Julie Davis, a machine operator at IB-Milwaukee, has battled glaucoma and cataracts from birth. She's worked on a pen packing machine for a long time and now works on the screwdriver line. Davis believes her hearing is more acute as a result of her vision impairment, something she said was a big factor in operating the pen packer.

"When I'm on the packer, if I hear the littlest thing, I'll stop to make sure it's not jamming," she said. "It's really about accommodating yourself and

making yourself comfortable so you can function. Part of that is paying attention to sounds."

### A Bright Future

Having recognized customers' needs for high quality, professional grade tools, NIB is committed to working closely with its associated agencies to meet that need. The parties involved in the project expect screwdrivers and sockets will be just the beginning of a comprehensive line of products.

"Between us and Industries for the Blind-Milwaukee, we're trying to create a full tool line solution for the government sector," said Hoffmann.

Officials expect IB-Milwaukee will develop additional SKILCRAFT Pro-Grade tool categories in 2015, while Beyond Vision will work on expanding the socket line.

Weigold, of IB-Milwaukee, sees the partnership as a natural progression for the 50-year old agency whose first contract was producing brooms and brushes for the federal government. For many years, IB-Milwaukee was known chiefly for producing SKILCRAFT's most popular item, a retractable pen Weigold calls "the Coca-Cola of the federal government."

"This category with hand tools allows us to diversify," he said. "This really opens a lot of doors to new jobs for people who are blind." □

*Andrew Brownstein is a freelance writer who lives in the Washington, D.C., area.*



## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Jim Fritsch, a shipping and receiving clerk at Beyond Vision, worked with automation linked to the car industry. A 2013 employee of the year nominee, Fritsch now finds himself working what he describes as a "one-man assembly line" packaging the socket sets.

In his U-shaped work area Fritsch performs four functions: producing foam inserts to hold the socket pieces; putting the pieces into the insert; shrink wrapping the product; and loading it onto pallets. "It keeps me moving," he said. "I feel like I get more accomplished as I walk through the process."



Pro-Grade socket sets are made of high-grade chrome nickel steel and carry a lifetime limited warranty.



# MAXIMIZING THE MISSION

**NIB and SourceAmerica's reciprocal purchasing initiative helps associated agencies create and sustain jobs.**

BY SHARON HARRIGAN

There's no denying recent federal budget cuts had an unpleasant ripple effect for many NIB and SourceAmerica associated nonprofit agencies. Some sources estimate 1,000 or more people who are blind or have significant disabilities lost their jobs or had work hours cut as the government scaled back product sales and services with federal contractors.

To counter this, NIB and SourceAmerica announced in August 2014 the launch of a new reciprocal purchasing initiative. The program is designed to supplement the income NIB and SourceAmerica agencies have lost, save jobs and create new business.

But for NIB and SourceAmerica associated agency leaders, including

those who participated in a reciprocal purchasing task force and pilot program that developed and tested the concept, its most lasting – and perhaps most satisfying – effect has been the ability to further each other's missions.

The concept for the initiative is "brilliant in its simplicity," says Judy Szabo, associate product development specialist at NIB. "Mutual sourcing like this initiative makes it easier to increase sales and meet our agencies' missions."

The initiative encourages NIB and SourceAmerica agencies to purchase each other's products such as office supplies and janitorial and sanitation products, and contract with one another to meet needs such as custodial and grounds maintenance

services, as a way to preserve jobs threatened by federal budget cuts. The goal – to have 25 percent of NIB associated agencies participate in the program – could easily create hundreds of new jobs, says Mike Gilliam, president and CEO of the San Antonio Lighthouse and a member of the reciprocal purchasing task force.

Gilliam should know. As part of the initiative's year-long pilot program, the San Antonio Lighthouse outsourced its lawn services to TRDI Inc. and janitorial services for its two locations to Equip Inc. and WTS Facility Solutions, all SourceAmerica agencies. The move, Gilliam says, resulted in more than \$100,000 in new contracts and 10 new jobs. The San Antonio Lighthouse has also benefitted by reaching out to local



▲ Rolando Rios, an employee of SourceAmerica agency WTS Facility Solutions, provides janitorial services at San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind's Eads Avenue building.



▲ An employee from SourceAmerica agency Skills Inc. performs a finishing process on aerospace parts produced as part of a partnership with The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. in Seattle.



SourceAmerica agencies Endeavors Unlimited and WTS Facility Solutions, which now purchase office supplies from the San Antonio Lighthouse.

Szabo and Gilliam acknowledge that the initiative's mutual purchasing concept isn't new – there have been mutual purchasing attempts in the past – but the timing of this effort is critical because agencies are still working to recover from the recent economic downturn. To create employment opportunities, agencies must look for new sources of business. Looking first to other agencies with similar visions and missions just makes sense.

### Success Stories

The San Antonio Lighthouse is not the only NIB associated agency to experience business growth as a result of reciprocal purchasing. Beyond Vision in Milwaukee; Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Utica, New York; the Louisiana Association for the Blind in Shreveport; and MidWest Enterprises for the Blind in Kalamazoo, Michigan were also recognized for

their reciprocal purchasing efforts at the NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo in October. Other agencies are embracing the program as well.

- In Washington, The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. in Seattle is partnering with SourceAmerica agencies Skills Inc. and Chinook Enterprises in support of aerospace finishing and parts manufacturing, a move that has created 20 new jobs.
- Outlook Nebraska now contracts with Goodwill Omaha for grounds maintenance and snow removal, a line item with an annual budget of \$26,000.
- Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) expanded its mutual purchasing activities as a result of the initiative's launch and bought \$50,000 worth of products and services from SourceAmerica agencies in their region. GIB now contracts its lawn maintenance work to Big Ben Goodwill and buys products from Georgia Enterprises.

*Continued on page 12*



▲ Rudy Vallejo, an employee of SourceAmerica agency WTS Facility Solutions, cleans up after a busy day at San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind's Eads Avenue facility.

## MEETING NEEDS, CREATING JOBS

NIB and SourceAmerica agencies in Ohio are also making strides in reciprocal purchasing. As a result of their participation in the year-long pilot program, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) now contracts with Ohio Valley Goodwill Industries for custodial services at its headquarters facility, and with Goodwill Easter Seals Miami Valley for periodic floor care services at its Base Supply Center store at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. In turn, Goodwill Easter Seals Miami Valley purchases from CABVI office supplies such as file folders, pens and binder clips for its facilities across western Ohio, and AbilityOne chemicals and trash liners for use on custodial contracts.

Steve Wessler, vice president of business services at Goodwill Easter Seals Miami admits that in the beginning, such partnerships seemed daunting. "We didn't even know the names of all the AbilityOne and SourceAmerica agencies in our area," said Wessler. The effort to locate them and learn about the products and services they offer, however, has proved mutually beneficial. Both Wessler and John Mitchell, CEO of CABVI, agree reciprocal purchasing is a step all agencies should take to help fulfill their mutual missions.

# RECIPROCAL PURCHASING INITIATIVE

Continued from page 11



▲ Machinist Jorge Aristizabal working in the Machine Shop at The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. in Seattle.

## Small Steps

When Ken Fernald assumed his new role as CEO of the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment Inc. (AVRE) in Binghamton, New York, in January 2014, he wanted to make sure the agency's vision and mission were prominently displayed on plaques in his office. Always a proponent of supporting other AbilityOne® program agencies whenever possible, Fernald contracted with Delaware Industries for the Blind (DIB) to create the plaques. Satisfied with the quality, customer service and cost, Fernald continues to purchase plaques through DIB, and uses other AbilityOne agencies for business products.

Alphapointe, based in Kansas City, Missouri, has made great strides in the program. In 2012, looking to diversify its business offerings and further its mission, Alphapointe purchased one of its suppliers, a small injection molding company that had previously supplied plastic components for SKILCRAFT® pens assembled by the agency. After purchasing the company, Alphapointe began producing and selling the component plastic parts to two sister agencies, Industries for the Blind, Milwaukee and Industries

of the Blind in Greensboro, North Carolina, both of whom had previously purchased their parts from an overseas company. Today, these sister agencies sell 9.2 million pens annually.

The partnership has been beneficial to all three agencies: Alphapointe diversified its business product line, kept itself financially solvent during

turbulent economic times, and most important – according to Reinhard Mabry, Alphapointe's president and CEO – fulfilled its mission of providing meaningful employment for people who are blind. The Milwaukee and Greensboro agencies received the products they needed faster, more reliably and at a lower overall cost, a situation Mabry says makes "mission sense and business sense." The lesson in Alphapointe's example for NIB agencies, says Mabry, is to remember to look for AbilityOne suppliers of component product parts when sourcing new vendors.

## It's About the Mission

The bottom line for Mabry, Fernald, Gilliam, Walls and Wessler however, is not about cost: It's about creating and sustaining employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities. The reciprocal purchasing initiative is a win-win that helps all NIB and SourceAmerica associated agencies further their missions. At the end of the day, participants all agreed reciprocal purchasing is "more than the right thing to do." ■

*Sharon Horrigan is a freelance writer based in Asheville, North Carolina.*



▲ Set-up Specialist Christopher Loomis, a deaf-blind employee at The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. in Seattle, operates an Okuma CNC mill. The Seattle Lighthouse partners with SourceAmerica agencies Skills Inc. and Chinook Enterprises in support of aerospace finishing and parts manufacturing.



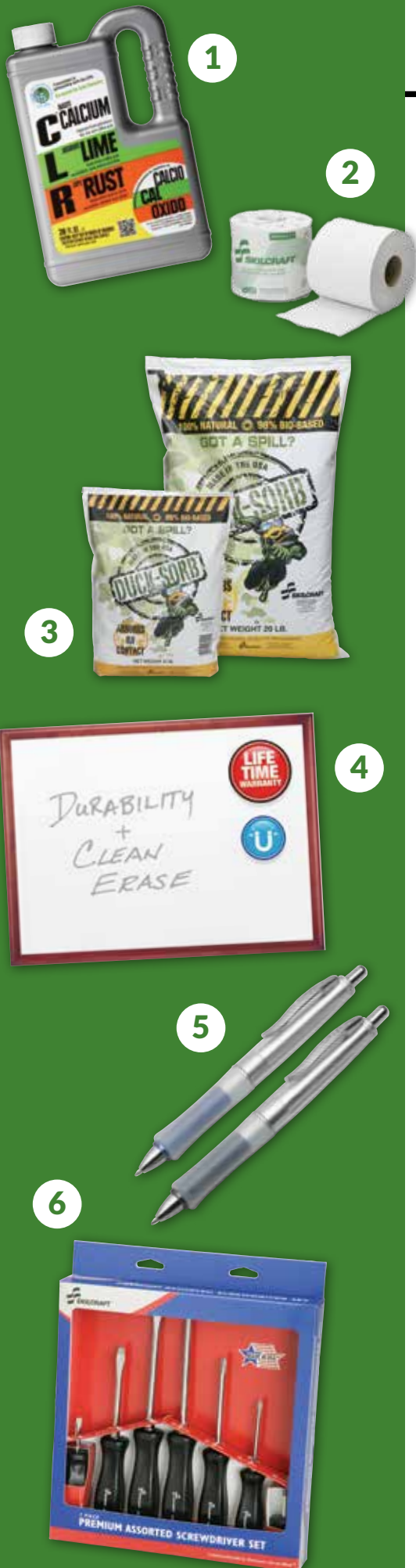
## READY TO LAUNCH

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

NIB and its associated agencies continue to launch new products to meet federal customers' needs, including a variety of SKILCRAFT® office products and cleaning supplies produced by people who are blind.

- SKILCRAFT® Calcium Lime Remover:** The Lighthouse for the Blind in St. Louis, produces this powerful formula that removes calcium, lime and rust without rubbing or scrubbing. Perfect for use on tubs, shower heads, glassware, sinks, fiberglass, humidifiers, dishwashers and more, the phosphate-free formula eliminates built-up mineral deposits and rust stains. Available in 28-ounce or 1-gallon bottles, or in a 5-gallon pail.
- SKILCRAFT® Processed Chlorine-free Toilet Tissue:** Outlook Nebraska produces this toilet tissue made of 100 percent recycled content with 30 percent post-consumer fiber and no processed chlorine, dyes, fragrances or added inks. Each individually wrapped roll has perforated sheets measuring 4 x 3.75 inches. Choose one-ply tissue with 1,000 sheets per roll, or two-ply tissue with 500 sheets per roll.
- SKILCRAFT® DuckSorb Hazardous Material Absorbent:** This USDA BioPreferred® product produced by San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind is a natural absorbent, repurposed from forestry and agricultural industry waste, that outperforms premium clay absorbents by more than 300 percent. DuckSorb's cellular composition allows quick absorption and permanent retention of automotive fluids, hydrocarbon liquids, cooking oils and paints. Available in 4-pound, 20-pound and 40-pound boxes.
- Quartet®/SKILCRAFT® Porcelain Magnetic Dry Erase White Boards:** The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. in Seattle produces these magnetic, porcelain-surface dry erase white boards that carry a 20 year warranty. The smooth, steel backed porcelain surface won't scratch or dent with heavy-use and can be used for writing or as a magnetic bulletin board. Ideal for daily use and areas with frequent traffic, the easy-to-clean writing surface requires minimal use of cleaning solutions. Available in elegant mahogany or oak wood finish frames that complement most office environments; includes a detachable marker tray, one dry erase marker and mounting hardware.
- SKILCRAFT® WriteBalance™ Pen:** Produced by Industries for the Blind, Milwaukee, this wide-body retractable pen features a weight balanced, ergonomic design and latex-free, double layer comfort grip that helps reduce writing fatigue. Smear-proof low viscosity ink delivers smooth lines in bold, vibrant colors. Available in blue or black ink.
- SKILCRAFT® Pro-Grade Socket Sets and Screwdrivers:** The product of collaboration between Beyond Vision and Industries for the Blind, Milwaukee, Pro-Grade socket sets are made of high-grade chrome nickel steel and carry a lifetime limited warranty, while Pro-Grade screwdrivers feature a solvent-resistant, textured ergonomic handle with thumb stop for ultimate torque with less slippage. To learn more about SKILCRAFT Pro Grade tools and the collaboration, see the cover story on page 6. □

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



# GROWING CAREER CHOICES IN CENTRAL NEW YORK

**The Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired builds on its mission of helping people who are blind or visually impaired achieve their highest levels of independence.**

BY MARY JANE SURRAGO



▲ In September 2014, CABVI celebrated the grand opening of its fifth AbilityOne Base Supply Center at Tobyhanna Army Depot in Pennsylvania. Pictured left to right are: Mark Buonomo, Tobyhanna Army Depot contract specialist; Rudy D'Amico, president and CEO of CABVI; Tommy Thomas, director, Base Supply Centers, NIB; Colonel Gerhard P.R. Schröter, Tobyhanna Army Depot commander; Judy Haff, Tobyhanna Army Depot chief of contracting; Toby Pickett, Tobyhanna Office Express manager; and Frank Zardecki, Tobyhanna Army Depot deputy commander.



▲ CABVI's Contact Center provides employment for 28 people who are blind or visually impaired.

In Utica, New York, a small city with a population of approximately 62,000 people, Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) provides an oasis of opportunities for individuals who are blind. After 85 years, the organization remains in a constant state of growth, embracing opportunities to expand its programs.

Serving eight counties in upstate New York, CABVI provides comprehensive vision rehabilitation, employment and technology services to more than 1,500 people who are blind or visually impaired, from newborns to seniors. Assistance ranges from low vision examinations and vision rehabilitation therapy to orientation and mobility, instruction in the use of assistive technology applications, adaptive recreation and social work. Low vision services are offered in Oneida, Jefferson, Madison, and Fulton counties.

The agency's Technology Center helps clients access the latest adaptive technology, so they can succeed in school or at work. CABVI also offers a comprehensive employment program that assists clients not just with training and job placement, but also with resume writing, job searches, interview preparation, employer contacts and workplace adaptations. Career choices exist within the agency too.

One component of CABVI's employment program, Central





▲ Ernesto Acevedo works as a store clerk at Tobyhanna Army Depot in Pennsylvania, operated by CABVI.



▲ Dennis Mahoney, Central Industries production worker, packages latex examination gloves sold to federal and state customers.



▲ Operators Diane Clancy and Daniel Pallis with Tina Mayou, work experience trainee, at the Albany Stratton VA Medical Center information desk operated by CABVI.

Industries, packages and ships more than 500,000 cases of nitrile, latex and synthetic examination gloves annually to the Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration, the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, State University of New York Medical Centers, Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, federal correctional institutions and the United States Postal Service. The gloves are in addition to other products produced by CABVI, which include medical supplies such as isolation gowns, blood pressure cuffs and stethoscopes; linens; food handler aprons; and office products that include more than 16 million manila, pocket and hanging file folders produced annually and 386,000 ballpoint pens assembled and packaged.

A partnership with Alliance Rubber Company, a woman-owned small business producing high-quality rubber bands, has expanded Alliance's distribution network to more than 225 military base stores and 300 office supply dealers, while creating jobs at CABVI for employees who package rubber bands. Work gloves, disposable wipes, garbage bags, pencils and a variety of biodegradable products round out the line of products produced in two facilities with combined production space of 82,000 square feet and 113,000 square feet of warehouse space. A good balance of federal, state and commercial customers provides

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**Rudy D'Amico**  
President and CEO

many opportunities for the growing organization where employees earn prevailing wages and benefits.

#### **Career Opportunities in Services**

About an hour east of Utica, telephone operators and receptionists staff the telecommunications unit and information services desk at the Albany Stratton VA Medical Center. The 24/7 operation employs 11 people who route more than 500,000 calls through the facility each year.

In 2013, CABVI added 18 more customer service representatives to its contact center, doubling the number of customer service representatives who verify, track and report customer compliance with federal regulations. The employees handle more than 140,000 calls annually. As a result of

the project's growth, CABVI in 2013 earned NIB's Employment Achievement Award, which recognizes associated agencies with the highest increase in employment for people who are blind, coupled with excellence in contract performance and compliance issues.

In addition, CABVI's five AbilityOne Base Supply Centers provide retail job opportunities at Naval Submarine Base New London in Connecticut, Westover Air Reserve Base in Massachusetts, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine, and Naval Station Newport in Rhode Island. At the Tobyhanna Army Depot near Scranton, Pennsylvania, employees stock quality office, maintenance and janitorial supplies in the 5,000-square-foot store to support the Army's mission.

Last year, CABVI provided employment to 100 individuals with vision loss.

"We are always working to keep the pipeline of new projects full so that we can continue to expand career choices for the people we serve," said Rudy D'Amico, president and CEO. "I am fortunate to lead a talented team who are extremely dedicated to our mission." ■

*Mary Jane Surrage is former editor of Opportunity magazine and author of "Empowering People: The Story of National Industries for the Blind and its Associated Agencies" published in 2013 to mark the 75th anniversary of NIB and the AbilityOne® Program.*

# NIB/NAEPB NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND EXPO FOCUSES ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The 2014 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo, held in Arlington, Virginia, in October provided networking and learning opportunities for more than 800 attendees. The theme of the conference, "Together, we..." reflected the way NIB and its associated agencies work, and all that they achieve, together. Over the course of the conference, employees, associated agency leaders and government and private sector business partners came together to recognize outstanding performance and learn from one another as they further the mission of enhancing the lives of people who are blind or visually impaired by creating meaningful employment opportunities.

### Expanded Expo and Technology Showcase

A day-long Expo and Technology Showcase provided conference attendees an excellent opportunity to network with more than 100 exhibitors. NIB Networking Zones gave attendees a relaxed, informal atmosphere for talks with representatives from NIB departments about current and future initiatives, and topics from contracts and pricing, to channel management, to compliance.



▲ Hundreds of attendees interacted with exhibitors and customers at the all-day expo.



Keith Tyson, a 2014 employee of the year nominee from Blind Industries and Services of Maryland, sang a beautiful rendition of the Star Spangled Banner to start the General Session.

### Spotlight on Employees of the Year

The general session got off to a rousing start with a grand entrance by agency employee of the year nominees. A special video helped conference attendees get to know these outstanding employees. Later in the morning, five individuals, representing the positions of all of the 2014 employees of the year, addressed attendees, sharing a bit about themselves, their values and what being an employee of the year means to them.

### Valued Partners Provide Insights

The general session was packed with information designed to help NIB associated agencies advance their mission of providing employment opportunities for people who are blind.

Roger Waldron, president of the Coalition for Government Procurement, discussed the current contracting climate for agencies working with the General Services Administration. Judith Garcia Galiana, vice president for change management at 3M, explained the importance of managing change in today's business environment. Brigadier General



▲ Megan Dodd, recipient of the 2014 Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award, addresses attendees at the Awards Banquet.

Steven A. Shapiro, commander of Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support, thanked NIB associated agencies for their support of U.S. troops, noting that the high quality and durability of garments NIB associated agencies manufacture makes them a favorite with warfighters.

### NIB CEO and President Outlines Priorities for 2015

NIB CEO and president Kevin Lynch presented an update outlining priorities for the coming fiscal year: Maximizing sales of existing products, building on outreach success and pursuing new business opportunities outside of the AbilityOne® Program. Lynch challenged conference attendees to break out of their comfort zones, tolerate a degree of risk to grow their businesses, and approach new ventures with confidence.

### Recognizing Agency Successes

NIB associated agencies were recognized throughout the day for outstanding accomplishments. Agency Achievement Awards, recognizing agencies that did the most during the preceding fiscal year to increase employment for people who are blind, and delivered excellence in contract performance and compliance, were presented to three organizations.

In the small agency category, ForSight Vision of York, Pennsylvania, was recognized for an increase of more than 7,000 hours. Central Association



▲ Kathryn Schierloh, of the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, received the CMS Training Program Outstanding Participant Award.

for the Blind and Visually Impaired, a medium-size agency in Utica, New York, increased direct labor by more than 20,000 hours. Travis Association for the Blind, a large agency in Austin, Texas, saw an increase of more than 14,000 hours in total.

MidWest Enterprises for the Blind in Kalamazoo, Michigan, received the Quality Work Environment Outstanding Achievement Award, and Kathryn Schierloh, closeout specialist and employee of the year nominee from Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, received the Contract Management Support Training Program Outstanding Participant Award. Two agencies were recognized for successfully completing the Strategic Market Development Initiative:

VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired in New York City and New England Employment Services for the Blind in Boston.

### Awards Banquet Celebrates Professional Excellence

The National Conference and Expo closed with an awards banquet where NIB's highest honors were presented. Richard "Dick" Ginman, director of Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, received the Spirit of Independence Award for his steadfast support and commitment to NIB, the AbilityOne Program, and increasing employment opportunities for people who are blind.

NIB president and CEO Kevin Lynch and the Honorable Gary Krump, chair of the NIB Board of Directors, presented the Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award, which recognizes an employee who excels in his or her position at an NIB associated agency, to James "JJ" Scott, the lead sales associate in the Hazardous Material Department at the Naval Air Station in Meridian, Mississippi

Megan Dodd, marketing associate at the East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Tyler, received the Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award, presented to an individual who demonstrates career advancement at an NIB associated agency. ▣



▲ 2014 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year award winner JJ Scott speaks at the Awards Banquet.




▲ The Honorable Gary Krump (left) and NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch (right) present the R.B. Irwin Award to Gibson M. DuTerroil (center), president and CEO of The Lighthouse of Houston, in recognition of his dynamic leadership and dedicated service to NIB, its associated agencies and people who are blind throughout the United States.




### CABVI HOSTS NEW YORK STATE OFFICIALS

Officials of the New York State Preferred Source Program (NYSPSP) enjoyed a special event and tour of facilities at the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) in Utica, New York, in October. Chief executive officers from affiliated agencies around the state that serve people who are blind joined CABVI President and CEO Rudy D'Amico in welcoming Sheila Poole, commissioner of the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), Roann Destito, commissioner of the Office of General Services, and Brian Daniels, associate commissioner of the Commission for the Blind. Visitors were impressed with the extensive rehabilitation and employment services offered at CABVI and commented on employment growth and new projects since NIB became administrator of the NYSPSP.

The NYSPSP includes nine affiliated nonprofit agencies in the state that provide products and services to state and local government entities in New York. Together the agencies employ approximately 430 people who are blind. 




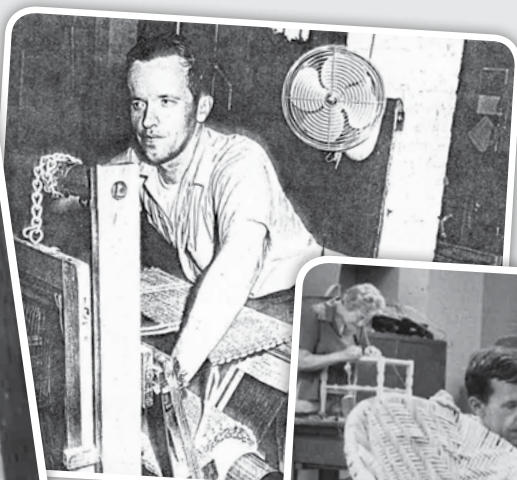
 Commissioner Sheila Poole of the Office of Children and Family Services listens as Dennis Webster, CABVI vice president of manufacturing and business services, explains production processes while Amos Ackerman, CABVI contact center customer service representative, and Sarah Gwiazdowski from the New York State Office of General Services, listen. Carrie Laney, executive director of the NYSPSP, and Ron Tascarella, chairman of the board of Empire State Employment Resources for the Blind, are seen in the background.

### ARTHUR WEDGE RETIRES AFTER SIX DECADES OF SERVICE

Gas was 27 cents a gallon and a loaf of bread cost 16 cents when Arthur Wedge first came to Keystone Blind Association and learned chair caning. On Nov. 18, 2014, friends and co-workers at Keystone wished Art and his wife Janet, the agency's photo ID manager, a bon voyage after his 62 years of dedicated service to the agency.

Art, who was Keystone's 2014 employee of the year nominee, has been something of a Renaissance man at the

agency, filling positions from chair caner and rug weaver to shop foreman. Determined since his teen years to live independently, "Art became a living testimony to the ability of persons with disabilities," CEO Jonathan Fister wrote when nominating Art for the Peter J. Salmon Award. After 62 years with Keystone, Art and Janet plan to travel and enjoy the next chapter in their lives together. 





▲ Kirby Hough, training and quality lead, looks on as Earon Goss, call quality analyst, gets comfortable in the new contact services center while investigators Randy Becker and George "Tony" Kemper answer calls.

## ALPHAPOINTE CELEBRATES GRAND OPENING OF NEW CONTACT SERVICES CENTER

Alphapointe celebrated the opening of a new, state-of-the-art contact services call center in Kansas City, Missouri in October. The new accessible call center will provide jobs for up to 60 people who are blind or visually impaired on the organization's Kansas City campus. Alphapointe employees already provide telephone switchboard and contact services to a variety of business, government, nonprofit and academic organizations, including about 30 colleges and universities. The new call center will allow Alphapointe to expand its call center services and create more jobs for people who are blind or visually impaired. ▣

## CHICAGO LIGHTHOUSE EXPANDS INBRAILLE™ LINE OF GREETING CARDS

The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired has expanded its inBraille™ line of greeting cards to include more holidays and a six-card package of all-occasion cards. Packaged by participants in The Lighthouse's adult programs, the cards celebrate the unique beauty and compelling nature of braille as both a language and an art form. The cover of each card is a contemporary art design in a pattern that corresponds to the embossed braille message inside the card.

Cards, which can be customized for organizations, can be purchased at the Lighthouse's Tools for Living retail store in Chicago or online through the agency's website. All proceeds from the sale of inBraille™ greeting cards support the Chicago Lighthouse's services to people who are blind or visually impaired. ▣



▲ Customizable inBraille™ greeting cards from the Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired celebrate the beauty of braille as a language and an art form.

## REAR ADMIRAL RAYMOND E. BERUBE JOINS NIB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rear Admiral Raymond E. Berube, SC USN (retired), joined NIB's Board of Directors in October. Rear Admiral Berube enjoyed a 20-year Naval career, managing the Navy's end-to-end supply chain and weapon systems and sustainment operations, and executing annual budgets in excess of \$5 billion. He has extensive expertise in supply chain, financial management, purchasing and acquisition, global logistics, leadership and strategic planning.



▲ Rear Admiral Raymond E. Berube, SC USN (Retired)

Upon his retirement from the Navy in 2011, Admiral Berube joined IBM Operations and Supply Chain, Global Business Services, where he developed strategy for Department of Defense, federal and commercial supply chain optimization. Today, he is involved in Strategy and Transformational Logistics Growth for IBM Global Business Services, where his responsibilities include logistics growth supporting DOD and government activities.

Admiral Berube holds a master's degree in business administration from New Hampshire College, a Master of Science degree in Financial Management from the Naval Postgraduate School, and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Boston College. ▣





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