

National Industries for the Blind

It's business as usual at a 156,000 square-foot manufacturing facility on the outskirts of Baltimore, Md. Shaun, in his gloves, goggles and apron, handles the jugs of soap as they travel down the conveyor belt. Kenny, the 56-year-old water division supervisor, lifts 50-pound jugs with the ease of someone much younger. Anthony, who has worked at the facility for 24 years, operates the guillotine shear, a machine that cuts paper for various products—easel pads, tablets, loose leaf and more. The facility can produce 1,500 pads per hour and 12,000 pads per day. It's a model of manufacturing quality and productivity.

There is just one major difference that distinguishes this manufacturing facility from its counterparts. Shaun, Kenny, Anthony and the other men and women on the shop floor are legally blind.

Last month, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) traveled to **Blind Industries and Services of Maryland** (BISM), one of the 93 nonprofit agencies associated with **National Industries for the Blind** (NIB). NIB, a Council of Manufacturing Associations member of the NAM, and its associated agencies provide career training and employment opportunities for people who are blind through the production and distribution of nearly 7,000 quality products and services, such as safety helmets and vests, hardware and tools, cleaning chemicals, contact centers and supply chain management, for federal, military and commercial customers.


NIB and its nationwide network of associated agencies employ more than 5,500 people who are blind, all right here in the United States. Partnerships with NAM member companies, such as Boeing, 3M and Harley-Davidson,

help keep the production lines running, as do **partnerships with small businesses** across the country.

Without such opportunities, most working-age Americans who are blind would not be employed—nearly 70 percent are without a job. That's because misperceptions and a lack of awareness hinder employment through traditional channels, said NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch. "For more than 75 years, National Industries for the Blind has led the nation in creating employment opportunities for people who are blind," he said. "Advancements in assistive technology have leveled the playing field for people who are blind in the workplace."

At a time when 80 percent of manufacturers are unable to find the qualified labor they need, tapping into the workforce of people who are blind can help close the skills gap. With NIB's more than 75-year history of making products in the United States, a manufacturing partnership is a win-win solution for large and small manufacturers. Currently, NIB's associated agencies produce more than 25 different 3M products for federal customers, including 242 million self-stick notes, and accounting for more than 620,000 hours of employment and \$5.8 million in wages. An NIB-associated agency in Seattle delivers more than 50,000 parts to Boeing each month. Harley-Davidson relies on an NIB-associated agency in Wisconsin to manufacture customized handlebars. These companies, and many others, have discovered that partnering with NIB and its associated nonprofit agencies makes business sense.

For more information, contact Paul Hartgen, executive director of the Council of Manufacturing Associations, at phartgen@nam.org.



“ We marvel at the work ethic and performance levels that NIB is able to achieve. Its ability to overcome extreme challenges is unmatched for any manufacturing facility and is reflected in the quality of products it produces daily.”

– Bill Fagert, President, The Wooster Brush Company

Anthony's job is to operate the guillotine shear, which cuts large stacks of paper used for a variety of notepads and stationery. He is legally blind and has worked at the facility for 24 years. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.

More Than Manufacturing

People who are blind working with NIB-associated agencies deliver a variety of knowledge-based services to federal and commercial customers, including contact center support, supply chain management, Section 508 assurance and contract management support services.

From rehabilitation to independent living, college preparation to computer classes, NIB-associated agencies are also making an impact in local communities across America—just ask Andrea, who had not worked in 12 years due to her retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative eye disease. A former daycare center operator, Andrea enrolled in a trade school with a focus on technology and received further on-the-job training. “When I found out that I could work again, I was so excited,” she said as she stood at her station at BISM. “There’s nothing like independence.”



Blind Industries and Services of Maryland, just outside of Baltimore, is one of the 93 nonprofit agencies associated with National Industries for the Blind. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.



LEFT Kenny loads 50-pound jugs of water into the back of a truck prior to delivery. Route assistants who are blind accompany sighted drivers on routes that deliver and replenish bottled water. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.



RIGHT An employee who is blind operates a machine that binds stacks of loose paper in order to form a completed notepad. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.



LEFT Pads are labeled, then wrapped in plastic for shipping. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.

RIGHT Bundles of pads are readied for distribution. The facility can produce 1,500 pads per hour and 12,000 pads per day. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.





ABOVE A sighted employee (at right) oversees the programming and cutting of camouflage fabric, and an employee who is blind moves the multiple pieces to another area for shipping. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.



LEFT Following the fabric being cut into shapes that will make up the final garment, an employee who is blind moves the pieces to another station in the facility. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.

BELOW Using their heightened sense of touch, employees sort cut fabric pieces that will eventually become U.S. Army combat jackets and uniforms. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.

NIB by the Numbers

93 associated nonprofits operating in 250 locations nationwide

75+ years of experience

42 ISO-certified associated agencies

5,500+ employees who are blind

Nearly **7,000 products and services**





ABOVE Brian (at left) became a woodshop instructor after he lost his sight. His student (at right) works on what will become a cherrywood table with a jointed top. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.

BELOW The student measures the table's legs with a device that clicks into place every one-sixteenth of an inch. Although he is legally blind, he wears an eye covering that blocks any remaining sight and puts all woodshop students on par with each other, regardless of the extent of their vision loss. Photo by David Bohrer/NAM.



Extensive Manufacturing Capabilities

NIB's nationwide network of associated nonprofit agencies delivers a range of manufacturing solutions, including the following:

Machining and Fabrication: Prototyping, welding, stamping, milling and lathing

Packaging and Assembly: Expert production, assembly and packaging of finished goods

Textiles and Apparel: Designing, redesigning, intricate cutting, sewing, embroidery and silk screening

Chemical Blending and Filling: Specialized handling and packaging of liquid and aerosol products

Paper Conversion: High-quality cutting, binding and converting

Plastics: Injection and blow molding

For more information about partnering with NIB, visit www.nib.org/partner.