

A Publication of National Industries for the Blind

OPPORTUNITY

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a black pinstriped blazer and a headset, sitting at a desk. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. Her hands are on a keyboard. In the background, there is a computer monitor displaying a software interface, a mouse, and some papers.

Win-Win Partnerships

Plus

- Up for Any Challenge
- Big Opportunities in Little Rock
- The Winners Circle

The Importance of the Company You Keep

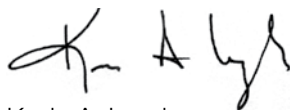
It seems that co-branding is everywhere. Since the 1990s, it has permeated such broad categories of products and services that it has become pervasive in the consumer retail market. Because co-branding can bring tremendous benefits to both organizations, it is also popular in the government marketplace.

There are a number of large commercial companies that have created strategic alliances with NIB associated agencies through co-branding agreements. In most cases, the commercial firm supplies the raw materials and employees who are blind within NIB associated agencies complete the conversion process into the final product. Each organization gains from the partnership with the other by combining the best of two highly desired brand benefits. The result is usually greater market share and a new level of interest and excitement around products that bear both the SKILCRAFT® and commercial brand names. We proudly feature a number of these mutually beneficial strategic partnerships in this issue of *Opportunity*.

Starting with a formal co-branding agreement between The Lighthouse of Houston and SC Johnson in the 1990s, co-brand alliances have become very popular with cleaning and janitorial products sold by NIB associated agencies. These relationships involve commercial businesses that have entered into partnerships with NIB associated agencies, which provide the labor to make mopping equipment, cleaning chemicals, sprayers, sponges, tapes and treads.

An early co-branding agreement was also developed between 3M Corporation and the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill Industries (ABVI) in Rochester, New York, to produce self-stick note pads for the government. ABVI's performance on this project led to 3M partnering with 20 other NIB associated agencies on various office and cleaning products for the federal market. But what also sets 3M apart is its commitment to collaborate with NIB on new concepts. A recent example is offering an internship for one of the participants in the NIB Fellowship for Leadership Development. 3M is the first private-sector organization to host a fellow for NIB.

These innovative partnerships serve several strategic purposes. Brands that are trusted by consumers often become beacons of quality. The solid reputation of two well-respected brands helps each organization to achieve its aim – more sales and a much wider scope due to joint marketing efforts. Carefully crafted alliances can enhance the images of each brand, attract new customers, lower marketing costs and keep both brands foremost in the customer's mind. And the resources that both brands bring to the market usually result in a “win-win” for both organizations. Best of all, strategic partnerships with NIB create more career opportunities for people who are blind.



Kevin A. Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer



OPPORTUNITY

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OPPORTUNITY



Kurt Lantz, production employee, Inland Northwest Lighthouse, Spokane, Washington, with a Quartet®/SKILCRAFT® corkboard.

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Eric Wilson folds U.S. Navy t-shirts at Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind in Little Rock.



Kevin Burton, human resources recruiter, Envision, Wichita, Kansas, is named the 2012 Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award winner.

ON THE COVER:

Joanna Richardson, call center supervisor, Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill Industries of Greater Rochester in New York.



From an early age, Blake Lindsay displayed an independent streak and an eagerness to embrace new opportunities.

Blake Lindsay is not one to back down from a challenge. At just nine months old, he was diagnosed with retinoblastoma and lost all his vision. As a young child, he faced any new opportunity presented to him with ease — learning Braille, playing piano and riding a bicycle. He went swimming, water and snow skiing, bowling and hiking and participated in other sports. As an adult, Lindsay has raft surfed in the ocean, announced a live baseball game and even tried skydiving.

Eager to support himself with a good job, Lindsay started his career on the Texas radio airwaves. He had a good broadcast voice and loved radio, so it was a great fit. Lindsay relocated from Indianapolis to Austin and San Antonio for various positions, until he landed a broadcasting opportunity in a large radio market — Dallas-Fort Worth. However, radio stations frequently changed formats, management and ownership, making job stability very difficult.

“In 1994, I decided to leave my comfort zone in radio broadcasting for more stable employment,” said Lindsay, who started a new career path as a customer service representative with Bank of America. “I was so determined to be the best I could be, that eventually I was training new customer service representatives to do the job.” When Bank of America closed its call center in Dallas, Lindsay worked in customer sales positions with the Dallas Area Rapid Transit and Zig Ziglar Corporation.

Today, Lindsay is the manager of communications at the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind (DLB), an NIB associated agency that provides employment and rehabilitation services to people who are blind. In this role, he gives motivational speeches, within DLB and to outside organizations, and is a member of the United Way’s Speakers Bureau. Blake writes articles for DLB’s quarterly newsletter, *The Beacon*, and is a regular speaker at Rotary



Blake Lindsay, manager of communications, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind.

International, Kiwanis and Lions clubs in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, as well as schools, to raise awareness about DLB’s services and the capabilities of people who are blind. Lindsay is also a regular emcee for DLB’s special events. Recently, he has lended his experience to the DLB’s Business Services unit by instructing new recruits on how to manage customer service accounts.

Lindsay inspires, energizes and motivates people. “I believe in meeting new challenges head on — like jumping out of a plane,” he said. “When you embrace a new goal, there will be victory.” He has shared his life lessons, principles and mindset in two books, *Out of Sight Living* and *Turning Life Challenges into Purpose in Life*.

Last year, Lindsay was accepted into NIB’s first class of Advocates for Leadership and Employment to work with NIB’s Public Policy team in educating national, state and local officials about the efforts of NIB and its associated agencies to increase employment opportunities for people who are blind. ❖



Blake Lindsay during a skydiving experience.

NIB Services Lands First 508 Assurance Service Contract

NIB Services secured its first commercial Section 508 Assurance Service contract with Buildium, a cloud-based property management software company based in Boston, Massachusetts. NIB Services provided accessibility and usability testing and validation of Buildium's online property and association management application. The agreement includes providing recommendations to improve

testing for accessibility in future software development activities. Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind in Texas will provide services under the contract.

This new service was created by NIB to address software, systems and website accessibility and usability conformance with Section 508, an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ❖

Defense Commissary Agency Honored by NIB

The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) was honored by NIB on March 30 with the Government in Excellence Award in recognition of the agency's superb efforts to support the AbilityOne® Program mission to create employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

NIB Chief Operating Officer Scottie Knott presented the award to Joseph H. Jeu, DeCA director and CEO, in appreciation of the DeCA team's outstanding support, which created 37 jobs for people who are blind through the Military Resale program for the FY 2009-2011 period. Jobs are created through the sale of products to the defense commissary system. ❖

Pictured left to right: Chris Burns, DeCA director of sales; Charlie Dowlen, Jr., DeCA chief, promotions branch; Joyce Chandler, DeCA chief, semi-perishables; Scottie Knott, NIB COO; Joseph Jeu, DeCA director and CEO; Michael Dowling, DeCA deputy director and COO (acting); Richard Ray, president and CEO, S&K Sales Co. (NIB Broker); Anne-Marie Wallace, NIB military resale program director; and Pete Murphy, national sales manager, S&K Sales Co.



NIB President and CEO Selected for LEAD VIRGINIA

Kevin Lynch, president and CEO of NIB, was selected as a member of the 2012 Class of LEAD VIRGINIA, a statewide leadership program that educates leaders about regional differences, opportunities and challenges across the Commonwealth of Virginia. He is one of 54 senior-level executives drawn from nonprofit, education, private, financial and government agencies across the state.



LEAD VIRGINIA participants will explore major issues and opportunities in the areas of health, economy and education. ❖

Register Today for 2012 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo



Don't miss the 2012 NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo, planned for Wednesday, October 24 through Sunday morning, October 28 at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront in Baltimore, Maryland!

With the theme "One Flag, One Mission," the conference includes general sessions featuring government and industry leaders, informative breakout sessions addressing a wide range of topics to support NIB's mission of creating jobs for

people who are blind, an exciting vendor fair to exchange ideas and build business relationships, and recognition of NIB associated agency Employee of the Year nominees and national award winners. The National Conference and Expo combines the best aspects of the NIB/NAEPB Opportunity Forum and Annual Training Conference.

For more information, visit the "Events" page on the NIB website or contact conferences@nib.org.



Win-Win Partnerships

NIB associated agencies and commercial companies combine the strengths of their brands to create mutually advantageous alliances.



It's one thing to have an amazing product, strong brand presence in the marketplace and outstanding employees. It's quite another for two organizations to combine them together in a meaningful and mutually beneficial manner. That's exactly what happened more than 20 years ago when NIB brought the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill Industries of Greater Rochester (ABVI) together with 3M Corporation to make self-stick notes for the General Services Administration (GSA).

"The partnership started on a very cautious note and it was a very long development process," said Gidget Hopf, president and chief executive officer of ABVI, which is headquartered in Rochester, New York. "We had to demonstrate our capabilities to a world-class organization, which had the product patent and a very strong brand identity with self-stick notes." NIB and ABVI also had to convince GSA that ABVI employees were capable of making the same product, using 3M™ materials, that met 3M's

Some of the many co-branded products provided to government customers by NIB associated agencies.



quality standards. There were a lot of hurdles, including special adaptations to the manufacturing equipment. The mill cutter, which is a guillotine-type, computer-controlled machine, had to be adapted for voice output on a digital display. The measurements had to be very precise, so gauges were created for every size pad. After the cutting operation, employees packed, boxed and shipped the product.

During the first year of operations, ABVI made three different sizes of yellow SKILCRAFT® self-stick notes for GSA — 3 by 5 inch, 3 by 3 inch and 1-1/2 by 2 inch note pads, all marketed under the SKILCRAFT® and 3M™ brand names. ABVI developed a quality lab to test the paper's quality, including tensile and acidity tests. All of this was necessary to assure the customer of product quality and craftsmanship.

With consistency in ABVI's manufacturing processes and product quality for more than a year, the tests were no longer required by GSA. Along the way, ABVI's partnership with 3M flourished. Today, ABVI manufactures 36 different types of SKILCRAFT self-stick pads for 3M, including assorted pastels, assorted neon colors, telephone message, fan-fold, self-stick flags and easel pads. According to Hopf, each one of these new opportunities created production challenges, but 3M worked with ABVI every step of the way to keep adding more products. "The partnership enabled us to become a world-class manufacturing operation, working with a global, world-class company," said

Hopf. "We can show our capabilities to many more potential customers and create more employment opportunities for people who are blind."

More Alliances with 3M

Creating strategic alliances by engaging in co-branding has many benefits. It enables two organizations to combine resources, leverage individual core competencies, gain more marketplace exposure, enjoy back-up manufacturing capabilities for emergencies, share promotion costs, strengthen both brands, build customer loyalty, increase product revenues and make a lasting impression on the customer. For ABVI, the partnership was an opportunity to develop new capabilities, leverage the strength of 3M's brand and create new career opportunities for people who are blind. It allowed 3M to fully establish self-stick notes in the government marketplace, with steady and consistent sales. The alliance has proven to be a win-win for both companies and has paved the way for other NIB associated agencies to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with 3M.

Another early partnership with 3M came about with the Louisiana Association for the Blind (LAB) in Shreveport, which produces 6 by 24 inch general purpose safety-walk strips for passageways on U.S. Navy ships. The relationship with the Navy has expanded to include all non-critical areas of every ship. Co-branded SKILCRAFT/3M Peel-and-Stick Nonskid products are now included in military specifications, and LAB

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Louisiana Association for the Blind employees, Jackie Arvie, cutter operator (left) and Willie Marie Chapman, laser operator (right), work with 3M Safety Walk material, which is used to make Peel-and-Stick Nonskid tapes and treads.



Ed Sanderson, die-press operator at the Louisiana Association for the Blind in Shreveport, holding 3M Safety Walk material, which is used in land, water and air military transport vehicles.



is the only organization that passed military quality product development to become the sole provider.

Six employees who are blind manufactured more than 74,000 linear yards of Peel-and-Stick Nonskid kits in fiscal year 2011. LAB employees use computer-aided design software to design the Peel-and-Stick Nonskid products, which are then downloaded to the laser cutting machine for production. Employees then take bulk rolls of 3M nonskid materials to convert to customized Peel-and-Stick Nonskid kits for land, water and air vehicles in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard. A kit design for a single vessel can include thousands of individually labeled and numbered pieces, and it is common for one kit to require an 18-wheeler to ship it to the end user.

LAB's partnership with 3M expanded through the years, and in 2008, the two organizations developed a co-branding agreement. "We now produce more in a week than we did in a year, 10 years ago," said Bruce Petty, LAB's abrasives manager. "We are growing this business at about 30 percent each year." LAB President and CEO Shelly Taylor added, "We are exploring new applications for the existing product and expansion into other safety items on which we can partner with 3M."

Ed Sanderson, an 18-year employee at LAB, is proud of the role LAB played in the USS *New York*, USS *Arlington* and USS *Somerset*, the three ships manufactured from steel salvaged from the 9/11 World Trade Center site. LAB designed and produced Peel-and-Stick Nonskid kits for the three sister ships, and employees were honored to participate in these memorials to



Cheryl Young, gadget assembler and labeler, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Ohio.



Anthony Dansby, tape packer, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Ohio.

those who died on September 11, 2001. "It's a source of pride for all of us to be able to point to almost any military land, sea or air vessel and know we had a role in the making of those vehicles," said Sanderson.

The Beacon Lighthouse in Wichita Falls, Texas, started making griddle screens and pads in 1995 and then added various scrubbing, stripping, buffing and polishing floor pads for use on tile, marble, ceramic and wood floors. Using 3M materials, the products are all die cut from jumbo rolls and packaged for the customer. Success with those products led to 3M and Beacon working together to

offer a Quick Clean Griddle System, which is made with 3M Scotch-Brite® materials. Each kit contains 10 packets of Quick Clean Liquid, one multi-purpose pad holder, 10 griddle polishing pads and one squeegee.

Co-branding is also popular with NIB associated agencies that produce cleaning chemical products. Beacon's newest 3M product is the Twist-N-Fill Cleaning Chemical Management System that features a single, compact dispenser designed to accurately mix and dispense a wide range of cleaning chemicals. Lighthouse employees fill glass, bathroom, multi-surface, sanitizer, general purpose, disinfectant, floor and aircraft cleaners, as well as floor strippers, food service degreasers, floor polish and deodorizers into two-liter bottles from 55-gallon drums. Beacon's partnership with 3M has created jobs for 25 people who are blind.

When the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was looking for a microfiber flat mop several years ago, the VA National Acquisition Center tested several flat mops and chose SKILCRAFT® mops made at New York City Industries for the Blind (NYCIB). Using 3M microfiber materials, employees sew the mops, and label and package them for shipment.

Later, NYCIB and 3M developed another alliance to provide the Easy Scrub Flat Mop System to the VA. These microfiber flat mops are lightweight mopping tools, with easy maneuverability and push-button dispensing of cleaning fluid. And recently, the organization has introduced the SKILCRAFT/3M Easy Trap Duster System. Designed with 3M proprietary fibers, the

cloth traps and holds more dust and dirt than traditional mops and other disposable dust systems.

The Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) in Ohio has been using 3M materials to make masking and filament tapes since 1996. Ten employees who are blind cut, rewind, inspect, label, shrink wrap, package, palletize and ship these co-branded SKILCRAFT®/3M tapes to government customers.

Several other NIB associated agencies have formed partnerships with 3M to make desktop cellophane, double-sided and electrical tapes; privacy filters; sponges and microfiber cloths, all using 3M materials and marketed under both the SKILCRAFT and 3M trade names.

“3M has always strived to be a good citizen in the communities we serve. We believe in NIB and want to share in its mission of employing people who are blind. Starting years ago with ABVI, we have partnered with many NIB associated agencies that have created more than 100 jobs for people who are blind,” said George Foley, 3M government business development manager. “The partnership has grown over the years to include 3M branded products in base supply centers operated by NIB associated agencies. These stores provide jobs for people who are blind, as well as the convenience of one-stop shopping for SKILCRAFT and commercial branded products. Recently, we found another way to partner by hosting a fellow from NIB’s Business Leaders Program. We hope that this is just the start of a relationship that will help connect people who are blind with employment opportunities at 3M.”

In addition to co-branded products with 3M, CABVI enjoys another mutually beneficial partnership with OXO, a manufacturer of kitchen utensils and housewares. NIB connected OXO with CABVI, which was already making kitchen gadgets, when OXO wanted to sell their gadgets in military commissaries and exchanges. About a dozen CABVI employees assemble, label, card, package and ship 27 different OXO kitchen utensils under the SKILCRAFT/OXO trade names for the Defense Commissary Agency.

Houston Lighthouse Paved the Way

Another early instance of co-branding came about in 1995 when SC Johnson, one of the world’s leading makers of household products, approached The Lighthouse of Houston. The Lighthouse had been in the chemical filling business since 1973 and already established in the government marketplace with a line of disinfectants, detergents and glass cleaners. It took two years for NIB, The Lighthouse and SC Johnson to complete the negotiations with the federal government and establish a process within the AbilityOne® Program for a commercial company to partner with an AbilityOne participating nonprofit agency. The first products were launched under SC Johnson’s brand name and generic product names. In 1999, these generic names were substituted with SC Johnson product names such as Bravo® for the floor stripper, Showplace® for the floor finishers and Complete® for the floor polish. The agreement called for The Lighthouse to purchase SC Johnson chemicals in bulk and fill them into one-gallon bottles, five-gallon pails or 55-gallon drums.

According to Lighthouse President and CEO Gib DuTerroil, “When there is heavy order volume, we run two or three lines at the same time. Although many of the operations are automated, it takes a lot of labor to prepare and feed the bottles onto the line, monitor the filling process, label the containers, and package and palletize the finished products. And all of these operations are completed by people who are blind.”

By 1999, four more products were added to the co-branding agreement, and all of the Johnson floor care products produced at the Lighthouse were changed over to the Johnson brand name. When SC Johnson spun off its floor care line to a separate entity in 2010, these products were co-branded as SKILCRAFT - Diversey floor care products.

“Our partnership with SC Johnson really opened the door for NIB associated agencies to develop formal co-branding partnerships with commercial companies,” said DuTerroil. “As a result of it, the AbilityOne Program benefitted because new procedures were established that enabled more associated agencies to pursue similar alliances.”

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Keeping Jobs in the USA

For many years, The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc. in Seattle, Washington, wanted to expand to offer employment services to people in eastern Washington. “We were aware there were many blind and deaf-blind residents in Spokane who wanted to work, but couldn’t relocate to our facility in Seattle,” said Kirk Adams, president and CEO of the Lighthouse. The opportunity to do so came when NIB connected the Lighthouse with representatives from ACCO Brands, one of the world’s largest manufacturers of branded office products. ACCO was making their Quartet® dry erase and cork wallboards in Mexico, and then for cost reasons, decided to move production to China, which meant ACCO would no longer be providing wallboards in compliance with the Trade Agreements Act. Instead of losing their wallboard business with the federal government, they could grow it by partnering with the Lighthouse. The partnership also brought jobs back to the United States and the Lighthouse was able to support a satellite facility, Inland Northwest Lighthouse, in Spokane with this work.



Anita Ployman, material handler, skin care department, Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, Texas.



Inland Northwest Lighthouse production employee Teri Jensen with a Quartet®/SKILCRAFT corkboard.



Beulah Taylor, material handler, skin care department, Travis Association for the Blind, Austin, Texas.

According to Melanie Wimmenauer, senior director of communications at the Lighthouse, “ACCO has been a tremendous partner, donating about \$800,000 worth of its equipment to the Lighthouse to support our operations.” At the time the Lighthouse opened the Spokane facility in 2008, six people who were blind were hired. Sales have grown to a point where 58 employees, 42 of whom are blind, deaf-blind, or blind with other disabilities are working at the Spokane satellite making co-branded Quartet®/SKILCRAFT® dry-erase and cork wallboards, monthly planners and other products.

In similar partnerships, Alphapointe in Kansas City, Missouri, makes Kensington notebook locks for ACCO, and The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired has a co-branding agreement with ACCO to make Kensington ergonomic adjustable footrests, as well as articulating computer monitor arms.

State Contract Led to Federal Business

Another long-time, mutually beneficial alliance exists between GOJO® and Travis Association for the Blind (TAB) in Austin, Texas. In 1987, TAB started a skin care product line using raw materials, such as pouches, nozzles, bottles and dispenser covers from GOJO. At that time, the bulk soap was supplied by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, which provided soap in 55-gallon drums and one-gallon jugs to the state of Texas. Employees at TAB completed the required operations for contracts with Texas Industries for the Blind and Handicapped, using a generic brand “DermataB.” TAB approached GOJO about co-branding their products with SKILCRAFT, but GOJO would not allow it at that time. A few years later, GOJO realized the benefit of co-branding their products with SKILCRAFT, which had a strong presence in the federal market. It resulted in co-branding agreements with TAB using the SKILCRAFT brand name and the GOJO®, PURELL® and MICRELL® brand names. Later, TAB’s products sold through the state of Texas were also converted to co-branded products, and the bulk soap was supplied by GOJO, for both the state and federal contracts.

Depending on the workload, anywhere from 12 to 22 TAB employees fill lotion hand soap and shampoo into dispenser

pouches and bottles of various sizes. The products are packed into inner-pack boxes, labeled, printed, placed into the shipper boxes, palletized and placed in stock. Wall dispensers are assembled by hand and packed into cartons. TAB also processes foaming soap formulas, pumice based hand cleaners and hand sanitizers. TAB's major customers are the State of Texas, the Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals, and other federal customers through AbilityOne.com and other authorized distributors.

Mutually beneficial partnerships also exist between LC Industries, Durham, North Carolina; North Central Sight Services, Williamsport, Pennsylvania; and the South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Corpus Christi, which collaborate with Avery® on several office product items. Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind partners with Accentra to make SKILCRAFT®/PaperPro® staplers. The Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, formed a co-branding agreement with Spartan to provide SKILCRAFT/Spartan BioRenewables® cleaning products to the government. NIB associated agencies have formed many other partnerships with brands, such as HSM®, Canberra, Jiffy Mailer®, Lysol®, Ecolab®, Zep®, Kimberly-Clark Professional®, Rochester Midland and more.

There is no doubt that bringing together highly successful brand names is an increasingly popular technique used by large and small companies to combine the strength of two brands into one product. Over time, developing these win-win partnerships with commercial businesses has proven to be just another way that NIB associated agencies create and sustain employment opportunities for people who are blind. ❧

High Achiever

From milling machine operator to call center supervisor, ABVI's Joanna Richardson sets lofty goals for herself.



Joanna Richardson making self-stick notes 20 years ago. She is pictured on the cover of Opportunity as the supervisor of ABVI's call center.

Joanna Richardson began her career at the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill Industries of Greater Rochester (ABVI) in 1986, when her second child was just a few months old. At that time, she intended to stay only a year. Today, 25 years later, Richardson is still at ABVI. When asked why, Richardson replied, "ABVI has given me perfect opportunities to succeed!"

In the beginning, Richardson moved around in various manufacturing operations, folding, taping and boxing products. When ABVI entered into a partnership with 3M Corporation to make self-stick notes for the federal government, Richardson set her sights on running the milling cutter, also referred to as "the guillotine," which cuts the notes into different sizes. At the time, the guillotine was being operated by employees with some residual vision, but Richardson, who is totally blind, wasn't going to let that stand in the way of her goal to move up in the organization.

ABVI management adapted the milling cutter so that Richardson could operate it safely and independently. Eventually, she trained other totally blind employees to run the machine. And over time, Richardson broke every production record at ABVI for every size notepad!

In 2003, Richardson stepped up to her next challenge by entering a training program for ABVI's new call center. Having been in manufacturing for her entire career, Richardson made the transition by learning call center operations using adaptive computer technology. "I set high goals for myself," said Richardson. "I taught my children that hard work leads to better opportunities, and I want to be a prime example for them."

For the next eight years, Richardson was an information specialist at ABVI's call center, which is the hub for the United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) lead hotline as well as the preferred source for New York State telecommunications contracts. Two years ago, Richardson became a shift supervisor in the center, overseeing the work of 11 employees in the day-to-day operation of the EPA contract. And when NIB developed the Effective Supervision track of the Business Leaders Program, ABVI nominated Richardson for the program. "I am learning so much," said Richardson. "This program has taken my communication skills to a much higher level."

Who knows what's next for Richardson? But for a woman who feels the sky is the limit, she is off to a great start! ❧

The Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind has made great strides in diversifying products and services for its customers, while expanding career options for people who are blind.



Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind's family of employees with President and CEO Bill Johnson seated in the front center row.



One of the new environmentally friendly notebooks produced by ALB.

Helen Keller would have been proud of a seed she planted in Little Rock, Arkansas, many decades ago. It was there that she dedicated a small manufacturing facility on the east side of Little Rock that became the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind's (ALB) home for the next 20 years.

Today, ALB employs more than 80 people who are blind or visually impaired. Located in the industrial district of southwest Little Rock, ALB offers diverse career opportunities and a living wage for people who are blind, employed among their "family" of co-workers. The agency manufactures a variety of sewn products for the military including more than 70,000 t-shirts a month for the U.S. Army, the Navy and the Coast Guard; military utility belts; low cost containers; load lift straps and bandoleer pouches, which are part of the Modular Lightweight Load-Carrying Equipment (MOLLE) system used by Army personnel.

It's Easy Being Green

Since 1976, ALB has been making steno books for the General Services Administration (GSA). The organization produces more than 1.6 million notebooks annually in the paper department, which employs 19 people who are blind. Earlier this year, ALB introduced 17 new environmentally friendly notebooks for the GSA and other office product distributors. The new products are expected to double sales and the number of employees in the department within three years. "Our new environmentally friendly products will be the 'greenest' offering available to federal offices," said ALB CEO Bill Johnson. Consumers can choose numerous spiral books made from either bagasse, a biobased, compostable sugar cane-based paper, or 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper. Both high-quality, white papers are made without adding harmful chlorine to the environment. All books use soy-based rulings,

recycled wire and 100 percent recycled covers. ALB is proud to reduce landfill waste and carbon emissions; save trees; and reduce the use of oil, water and electricity.

Just as ALB manufactures "green" notebooks, the organization has a strong commitment to environmentally friendly business practices by recycling wire, plastic, paper, fabric and cardboard waste from all manufacturing lines to a local commercial recycling company. And to reduce its carbon footprint, ALB moved to a four-day work week, which consumes fewer resources in the plant and for employee travel.

In 2009, the Lighthouse received ISO certification and completed a major plant expansion with the construction of a new 20,000-square-foot warehouse. The existing warehouse was converted into 17,000 square feet of manufacturing and production

space. The old production areas were renovated to accommodate new products and services, such as the “green” notebook line, as well as a break room and gallery, which houses awards, historical photos and artwork by employees and others who are blind and visually impaired.

Expanding Career Options

Recently, ALB added a contact center that is fully staffed and supervised by employees who are blind who help businesses generate sales leads, set appointments, perform market research, create surveys, compile databases or mailing list information, provide contact center fulfillment services, process account inquiries, handle overflow teleservices work, act as a first-level help desk and handle internal customer service and messaging services. The center also has the capability to assist with point-of-sale product promotions and seminar and conference invitations. ALB employees have conducted satisfaction surveys for the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Nursing Department, membership renewal calls for the

University of Arkansas at Little Rock Alumni Association, appointment setting for Natural State Window Cleaning and mass mailings for the Arkansas Wildlife Commission. Mainstream Technologies has contracted with ALB’s contact center for marketing surveys.

A Family of Coworkers

ALB’s family atmosphere is evident throughout the organization. Employee ideas are considered very carefully by management. At the request of employees, a 401(k) plan was implemented 10 years ago and more recently, perfect attendance incentives were established. An attractive medical insurance program, birthday lunches and mental health assistance are some of the many benefits offered to employees. “I don’t think you’ll find a better work group anywhere,” said Nelson Davis, ALB’s 2010 employee of the year. “I’ve worked all over the world for the military and for Fortune 500 companies, and I haven’t seen an atmosphere of closeness among employees and supervisors anywhere that matches the Lighthouse.” ❖



Heather Hoffman, a textile employee at Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, runs a sleeve machine.



Director of Services Nathan Cook assists employee Rob Fagan in ALB's contact center.

Top Choice

From production employee to production supervisor, Margaret Ruffin oversees ALB’s highest grossing department.

With a reputation for hard work and a quick wit, Margaret Ruffin has worked in every department and excelled in every operation she undertook at the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind (ALB). So when the position of production supervisor in the paper department opened up, Ruffin became the first employee who is totally blind to be promoted to a supervisory position. The transition from peer to supervisor of people she worked with side-by-side for 25 years was a challenge for Ruffin, but she and her department are thriving and excited by the new “green” products being produced at ALB.

To assist Ruffin with the transition, ALB nominated her for NIB’s Effective Supervision training, a 10-month program that teaches supervisory concepts and skills for those who lead projects or teams. “I loved the program,” said Ruffin. “I learned so much about different styles of management and leadership, and the participants shared experiences in managing people.”

Twice named as ALB’s employee of the year, she has served on ALB Employee Ambassadors and 70th Anniversary committees. ALB’s four-day work week has enabled the energetic mother



Margaret Ruffin, paper products production supervisor, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind.

and grandmother to volunteer in her community. She is chairperson of the Women of Grace Ministry, which helps young, single, inner-city mothers; and is a member of the Unity Club, a diversity awareness organization. She and her husband founded the Living Hope Ministries, a disability awareness ministry, and are raising their grandchild. ❖

The Winners Circle

Meet the winners and top nominees for NIB's 2012 national employee of the year awards. The Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year award honors the achievements of employees who excel in their positions at NIB associated agencies. The Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award is given to individuals who demonstrate career advancement at an NIB associated agency or in the private sector.

2012 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award Winner
Wiscraft's Frenchie Randolph wants to help children who need it most.

At the age of one, Frenchie Randolph experienced moderate vision loss due to optic nerve damage. Her vision continued to deteriorate during her school years. By the time Randolph enrolled in college, she was diagnosed with glaucoma, which left her with just light and color perception. She reached out to the low-vision rehabilitation resources at the Milwaukee Area Technical College and the Badger Association for the Blind (now Vision Forward Association) and conquered everything from computer classes, to orientation and mobility, to skills of daily living, and earned a certificate in medical transcription. Unable to find a position in this field, she set her sights on another career and received an associate degree in teaching in 2011. Her next step is to attend Cardinal Stritch University to pursue a bachelor's degree in education, with a certificate in special education. Randolph's goal is to "help the children who need it most."

Throughout her journey, Randolph raised six children – three of her young cousins, as well as her own three children. Although her job as an assembler and packer at Wiscraft in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is just a "stepping stone," Randolph is determined to support her family while working toward her longer-term career goal of becoming a special education teacher.

She has helped Wiscraft's engineer to evaluate several pilot projects and assisted with process improvements that allow totally blind employees to work on all jobs in the plant. Randolph has also worked closely with NIB's rehabilitation engineers to develop the Briggs and Stratton shroud label application fixture and tooling, which resulted in substantial increases in productivity and quality.



Frenchie Randolph, Wiscraft, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Already Making Their Mark

Start with a dedicated employee. Add diverse training and mix in a promotion or two. Sprinkle on other learning opportunities. There's no secret ingredient to successful careers at NIB associated agencies, but these other outstanding nominees for the 2012 Peter J. Salmon Award have tasted success and cooked up some amazing opportunities for the future.

A Shining Example

At age 15, a fireworks accident left Larry York with permanent optical nerve damage. He owned and operated a concession business through the Randolph Sheppard Program at a government facility in Gulfport for more than 12 years. His business enabled him to purchase a home and put his children



Larry York, Lighthouse for the Blind in New Orleans, Gulfport, Mississippi.



Jesus Hernandez, San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind in Texas.



Gilbert Thomas, RLCB Inc., Raleigh, North Carolina.



Gloria Bradler, Envision Xpress, Fort Carson, Colorado.

through private school and college. Government downsizing caused him to dissolve his business. When the Lighthouse for the Blind of New Orleans opened a facility in Gulfport after Hurricane Katrina hit, York rejoined the workforce as a mop winder in the deck swab department.

Overcoming the Odds

Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, Jesus Hernandez lost his eyesight at age three. He worked on his father's small ranch until his older brother, who lived in Texas, sent for him. Hernandez then moved to San Antonio when he learned of job openings at the San Antonio Lighthouse. Starting on the pencil line, within four weeks, Hernandez moved up to learn every aspect of chin-strap sewing for helmets worn by Army soldiers. During this time, Hernandez learned to read, write and speak English; became a U.S. citizen; started a family and bought a home – a dream of his, which he attributes to the opportunities he was given at the Lighthouse.

Finding His Own Path

Gilbert Thomas brought his dazzling smile from war-torn Sierra Leone, Africa. Born with a spinal disability and cataracts, eye surgery further damaged his eyesight. After he came to the United States, Thomas attended the Governor Morehead School in Alabama. He moved to Raleigh to undergo spinal surgery at Duke University Hospital. Although he has been at RLCB Inc. in Raleigh, North Carolina, for just seven years, he has already worked on a variety of military products, including equipment suspenders, sling arms, kit bags and the Army Battle Dress Uniform.

Dream Job

When Envision opened an Xpress store at Fort Carson Army Post in 2001, Gloria Bradler was hired as a stocker and cashier. Three years ago, she was promoted to customer service representative and, as part of her responsibilities, she makes monthly presentations to the base purchasing committee. "I didn't like public speaking," admitted Bradler, "but love these meetings because I tell them about NIB, the AbilityOne® Program and how important their purchases are to people who are blind." With her knowledge of JAWS screen reading software and the Counterpoint point-of-sale system, Bradler trains employees at Envision's 16 Xpress stores located throughout the United States. Bradler is a volunteer Braille teacher at the Colorado School for the Blind.



Kevin Burton, Envision, Wichita, Kansas.

2012 Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award Winner

Dedicated to eliminating employment barriers, Kevin Burton inspires others toward their career goals.

When Kevin Burton graduated from McPherson College with a bachelor's degree in journalism, he received a large stack of job rejection letters. At that time, his vision loss was considered an issue by newspaper editors. Undeterred, he moved to Mexico and taught English for a year. Then, figuring there would be little competition for a job in Alaska, he applied for and landed a newspaper reporter's position at *The Frontiersman*. That led to a position at a daily newspaper covering northern Illinois and eastern Iowa. His father's fading health brought Kevin back home to Ohio, where he worked as an office assistant until his father passed away.

Kevin later moved to Wichita and joined the customer service team at Envision. Three years later, he was promoted to his current position as "recruitment specialist" in the organization's human resources department.

Because he knows firsthand what it is like to be passed over for a job, Kevin is dedicated to eliminating those barriers for others with his work at Envision. He makes presentations at community organizations to promote career opportunities at Envision, including its tuition reimbursement program. And he credits NIB's Business Management Training program for preparing him for his current position at Envision.

As a volunteer, Kevin has managed the Wichita Beep Ball Association and the Wichita Sonics beep ball team since 2009.



Linda Elliott, The Lighthouse for the Blind, Seattle, Washington.

He is active in fundraising for the association and uses this role to help others develop career goals.

People to Watch

A production manager. A graphics supervisor. Rehabilitation professionals. These are just a few of the outstanding candidates for the 2012 Milton J. Samuelson Award. They, along with all the nominees for NIB's employee of the year awards, will attend the NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo in October 2012. They are a positive reflection of NIB associated agencies, where the ambition to make a difference plays out every day.

High Aspirations

When Linda Elliott lost her vision in 1974 as a result of histoplasmosis, she also lost her job. For almost a decade she received Social Security Disability Insurance, until she learned about The Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle, Washington. "Because of the Lighthouse's mission, I have

worked myself up from production employee, to set-up specialist, to lead employee, to supervisor and now production manager, where I supervise more than 100 production employees,” said Elliott. “Now it is my turn to pass those opportunities forward.” Outside of the Lighthouse, Elliott’s life revolves around her family, and she is a volunteer for her children’s and grandchildren’s school plays and science fairs.

Determined to Help

Serving just one year as director of rehabilitation at the Louisiana Association for the Blind (LAB), Nan Magness has restructured LAB’s orientation and adjustment to blindness program, organized its first “National Night Out With A Vision,” initiated an art program and organized a support group for seniors. She is an asset to LAB’s Quality Work Environment Team and an NIB Advocate for Leadership and Employment. Her goals are to make LAB’s low vision center the best one-stop-shop in North Louisiana and increase public awareness of LAB’s services. Magness is one of the founders of The Heart of Hope Maternity Home and a board member of the Ark-La-Tex Crisis Pregnancy Center.

Onward and Upward

Courtney Williams was only 6 years old when a gunshot wound took his eyesight. After a long recovery, he attended the Arkansas School for the Blind and graduated in 1994. Williams worked at Citigroup as a customer service representative while attending college to pursue a degree in finance. While at Citigroup, he volunteered at Lions Volunteer Blind Industries and helped the organization get the call center off the ground by testing systems for compatibility as well as assistive technology. When the position of rehabilitation instructor opened, Williams accepted it. He received the Pyramid of Excellence award at Citigroup and serves as an NIB Advocate for Leadership and Employment.

When Image Counts

Charles Coleman has accomplished a lot during his short time at East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Tyler. Hired in 2010 as a darkroom technician, he moved up quickly to team leader and now supervises Lighthouse Graphics, a division of the Lighthouse. During that time, he received certificates of achievement for participating in NIB’s Business Basics and Effective Supervision programs. The father of three is an active volunteer with his church and other local organizations, as well as a member of the Red Cross, aiding in the care of residents after Hurricane Katrina. As part of the U.S. Marines Toys for Tots Campaign, he helped Lighthouse employees beat last year’s donations of 180 toys to nearly 500. ❖



Nan Magness, Louisiana Association for the Blind in Shreveport.



Pictured on right: Courtney Williams, Lions Volunteer Blind Industries, Morristown, Tennessee.



Charles Coleman, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Tyler, with one of his sons.

Air Force Leadership Supports AbilityOne Program

U.S. Air Force leaders advocated for the AbilityOne® Program through recent memorandums down their chains of command.

Steven F. Butler, executive director, Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC), Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, encouraged AFMC personnel to purchase items on the AbilityOne Program Procurement List and at local Base Supply Centers, and promoted Contract Management Support (CMS) services.

Major General Wendy M. Masiello, deputy assistant secretary for contracting and assistant secretary for acquisition, endorsed the AbilityOne Program and promoted the purchase of office supplies and CMS services. ❧

Safety Vest Products Launched at Lackland AFB

New products on the AbilityOne® Program Procurement List include the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) safety vest line, introduced at a customer appreciation event May 15 at the Lackland Air Force Base (AFB) AbilityOne BSC™ Base Supply Center™ near San Antonio, Texas. The BSC is operated by San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind.

The ANSI vest manufacturers, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind of Texas and Bestwork Industries for the Blind from Runnemede, New Jersey, partnered with 3M on this new product line. The vests are designed for use by airport ground, roadway construction, survey, utility and emergency response personnel, as well as gate guards and equipment and motorcycle drivers.



One of the new ANSI safety vests.

The event drew customers from Lackland and other area bases, Randolph AFB and Fort Sam Houston. Other customers and vendors attending the safety vest launch event were in the area attending the GSA Training and Expo May 15-17 in San Antonio. ❧

CABVI Named Prime Vendor for Foreign Military Sales

The United States Army Security Assistance Command named the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) in Utica, New York, a prime vendor for Foreign Military Sales programs. CABVI will provide troop support equipment and clothing items in support of the Aberdeen Contracting Center at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland.

“Our agency will supply U.S. allies with individual troop requirements such as uniforms, mess kits and field packs, just to name a few items,” said CABVI President and CEO Rudy D’Amico. “These products will be produced by agencies that employ people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. This contract helps CABVI continue its mission to help people who are blind or visually impaired find meaningful employment with competitive pay and benefits.”

CABVI plans to hire additional employees who are blind to work on the contract. ❧



Pictured left to right: Rep. Richard Hanna (R-NY24); Terry McBee, contracting officer for Aberdeen Proving Grounds (signing the Foreign Military Sales contract); Ed Welsh, chairman of CABVI; and Rudy D’Amico, president and CEO of CABVI.

Customer Visits in Alabama Build Relationships

Two dozen procurement staff members from Redstone Arsenal, near Huntsville, Alabama, visited the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) and Alabama Industries for the Blind (AIB) in Talladega on May 10. The visit was directed by Dr. Carol E. Lowman, deputy to the commanding general, U.S. Army Contracting Command, and member of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission™. The group toured AIB's manufacturing facilities and met employees who produce products sold to the Army through the AbilityOne® Program.

AIB employees staff the AbilityOne BSC™ Base Supply Center™ at Redstone Arsenal, which provides supplies for Army personnel.

Lowman and Tina Ballard, executive director, U.S. AbilityOne Commission, visited the Redstone Arsenal BSC on February 23 after Ballard addressed a session of the 2012 Defense Acquisition University Alumni Association South Region Symposium in Huntsville. ❖



Pictured left to right: Brig. Gen. John F. Wharton, chief of staff, U.S. Army Materiel Command; Dr. Carol E. Lowman, deputy to the commanding general, U.S. Army Contracting Command, and member of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission; and Tina Ballard, executive director, U.S. AbilityOne Commission.

U.S. AbilityOne Commission Chairman Visits DLA Land and Maritime Base Supply Center

Tony Poleo, chief financial officer of the Defense Logistics Agency and chairperson of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission™, toured the AbilityOne® BSC™ Base Supply Center™ at DLA Land and Maritime in Columbus, Ohio, on March 12. The BSC is one of nine operated by Associated Industries for the Blind (AIB), based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Poleo was hosted by John Baumgart, AIB president; Melinda Rupp, BSC store manager; and Perry Ling, AIB's employee of the year. Ling told Poleo he lost his job with a previous employer after his vision diminished, and he appreciated the employment opportunity offered by AIB.

Poleo took note of the large quantity and variety of SKILCRAFT® products produced by people who are blind on the store shelves, the merchandising signage and displays, the excellent facility, and the professional and dedicated staff. He



Pictured left to right: Perry Ling, AIB Employee of the Year; Melinda Rupp, BSC store manager; Sergeants First Class Joshua Gebhart and Donald Grey, Army Reserve Careers Division; and Commission Chairperson Tony Poleo.

presented AbilityOne commemorative coins to Perry and Rupp, accepting on behalf of her team, for their dedicated support of military customers through the AbilityOne Program. ❖

Travis Association for the Blind Honored by Customer



Colonel Jeanne Hardrath, USAF, director of Clothing and Textiles Customer Operations, Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support, presented an American flag to Jerry Mayfield, executive director, Travis Association for the Blind (TAB), Austin, Texas, for outstanding work by TAB's Distribution Service toward the warfighter's mission. ❖

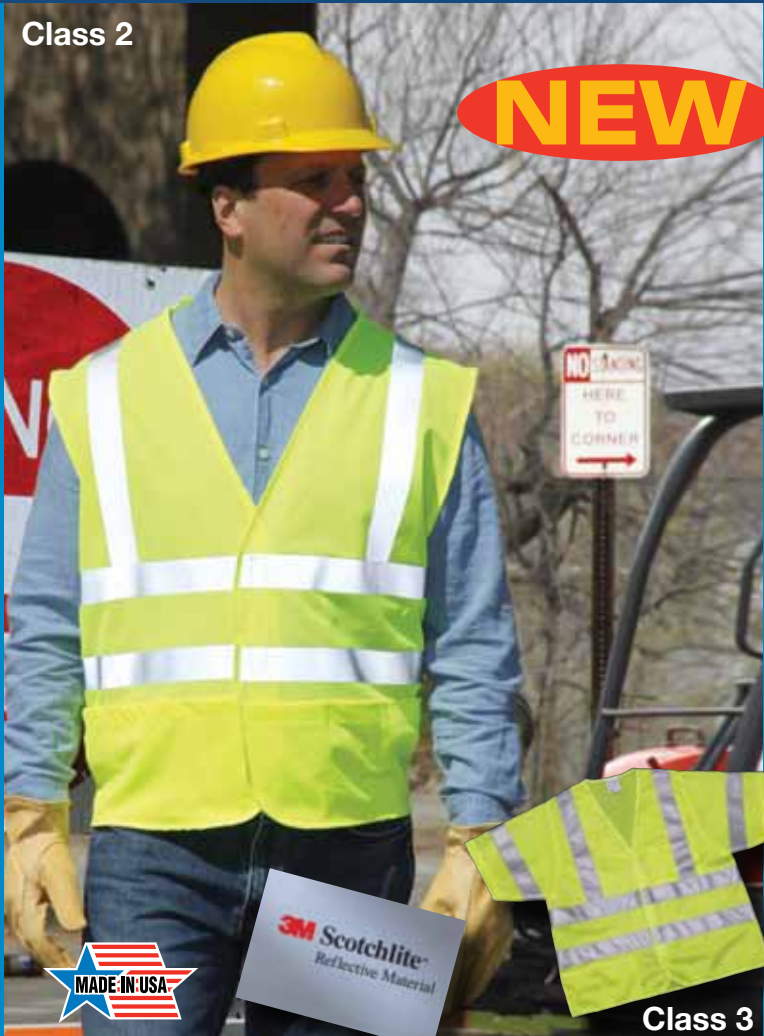


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