An American Classic

The SKILCRAFT® U.S. Government Pen transformed an industry and the lives of hundreds of people who are blind.
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Opportunity welcomes news and stories about the careers and capabilities of people who are blind. Contact communications@nib.org.

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Since 1938, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) has focused on enhancing the opportunities for economic and personal independence of people who are blind, primarily through creating, sustaining, and improving employment. NIB and its network of associated nonprofit agencies are the nation’s largest employer of people who are blind through the manufacture and provision of SKILCRAFT® and other products and services of the AbilityOne® Program. For more information about NIB, visit NIB.org.
OUR NATIONAL TREASURE

Every SKILCRAFT® product has a story. This year NIB is telling the story of one of our most beloved and iconic products: the SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen.

Fifty years ago, NIB and its associated nonprofit agencies met the government’s challenge of producing a jaw-dropping 70 million retractable ballpoint pens according to rigorous specifications. The project’s success paved the way for many other SKILCRAFT office products produced by NIB associated agencies today, and helped create thousands of jobs for people who are blind.

Today, the U.S. Government Pen sustains employment for more than 100 people who are blind at NIB associated nonprofit agencies in Kansas City, Milwaukee, and Greensboro.
Members of the military and the federal workforce trust the SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen to get the job done, whether they’re in the cockpit or the office. The pen has seen action in every conflict since the Vietnam War and has been used by presidents, privates, and everyone in between.

Most of us have a connection with the pen, or know someone who does. In this issue of Opportunity, learn how the legendary pen came to be and how it has profoundly influenced the course of our program’s history.

The SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen is more than a writing instrument. It symbolizes the strength of American manufacturing and the limitless capabilities of people who are blind. Join us in celebrating this true national treasure as it turns 50 this year.

Kevin A. Lynch
President and
Chief Executive Officer
AN AMERICAN CLASSIC

Over the past 50 years, the SKILCRAFT® U.S. Government Pen has provided careers for hundreds of people who are blind, shattered stereotypes, and given rise to a cult-like following of dedicated fans.

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Lynn Larsen, a machine operator at Industries of the Blind Greensboro, has been making SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pens for nearly 40 years.
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From the iconic plaid packaging of its Scotch™ Tape products, to the ubiquitous Post-it® Notes present in nearly every office and home in the country, people recognize 3M products as tools they can rely on to get the job done and make their lives better.

But few people know about the important role 3M plays in empowering people who are blind. The business alliance between 3M, NIB, and NIB associated nonprofit agencies has led to the creation of hundreds of employment opportunities for people who are blind. Because of this impact, NIB is presenting 3M its highest honor, the R.B. Irwin Award, in recognition of its exceptional and longstanding commitment to the mission of NIB.

A History of Innovation
Founded in 1902 as the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, 3M originally intended to mine the mineral corundum for use in grinding wheels. But the mineral the company discovered was not the same, and not as strong.

To stay afloat, management encouraged employees to innovate and develop new products, paving the way to the thriving business 3M is today. Now a global company with $32 billion in sales, 3M employs 91,000 people producing tens of thousands of products.

Alliance Creates Opportunities
In 1990, 3M partnered with the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI), in Rochester, New York, to offer self-stick notes to the federal government. The mutually
beneficial partnership not only created jobs for people who are blind, it helped 3M establish self-stick notes in the government marketplace and strengthened both brands. In the beginning, ABVI produced three self-stick notepad products with 3M. Today, the agency produces more than 30 products using 3M materials.

“Over the last 27 years, no other single partnership has provided such an opportunity to empower people who have significant vision loss like our partnership with 3M,” said Gidget Hopf, ABVI president and CEO.

This alliance paved the way for other NIB associated agencies to develop partnerships with 3M. Today, products marketed under the SKILCRAFT® and 3M name range from peel-and-stick nonskid tapes and treads,
produced by the Louisiana Association for the Blind, to masking and filament tapes produced by the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

In addition, the success of the 3M partnership led NIB to form new branding alliances with companies such as Avery, Diversey, GOJO, Snap-on, Quartet, Wooster brush, Zebra Pen, and others. Such alliances help agencies expand their product and business lines and create new employment opportunities that empower people who are blind to achieve economic and personal independence.

This year’s Irwin Award honors the decades-long partnership and recognizes 3M’s significant impact on the employment of people who are blind. Presented to those who have made outstanding contributions to creating and improving employment opportunities for people who are blind, the award is named for Dr. Robert B. Irwin, executive director of the American Foundation for the Blind in the 1930s and a member of the team that worked toward the passage of the Wagner-O’Day Act and the formation of NIB. 3M is the second organization, and the first corporation, to receive the Irwin Award.

“At 3M, we are committed to providing opportunities for people of all abilities and backgrounds to thrive, both professionally and personally,” said Ann Anaya, Chief Diversity Officer at 3M. “We’re honored to receive the Robert B. Irwin Award, which affirms our ongoing commitment and celebrates the powerful impact of our long-standing partnership with the NIB.”

Amy Gray is communications project manager at National Industries for the Blind.
Connect to what matters

Employing Americans Who Are Blind

By procuring quality products and services through National Industries for the Blind, an AbilityOne® Authorized Enterprise, you create and sustain U.S.-based jobs for people who are blind—including our nation’s veterans.

Get connected at NIB.org/Connect.

SKILCRAFT® is a registered trademark owned and licensed by National Industries for the Blind.
The year was 1967, and the General Services Administration (GSA) had a problem: It was saddled with 13 million defective ballpoint pens. The pen used by the federal government had been redesigned two years earlier with more stringent specifications that the private company contracted to manufacture it couldn’t meet. GSA Commissioner Heinz Abersfeller decided to look for a new supplier and asked National Industries for the Blind if its associated nonprofit agencies would be able to make a few pens – 70 million to be exact. Then-NIB President Robert Goodpasture accepted the daunting challenge. On April 20, 1968, the SKILCRAFT® U.S. Government Pen was added to the
SKILCRAFT® U.S. Government Pens are produced and tested according to requirements outlined in a 16-page federal specifications document written by the General Services Administration in 1965.

- Corrosion-resistant metal parts
- Barrel legibly stamped or marked with "U.S. Government"
- Tungsten carbide ball
- Writing dries within 5 seconds and will not smear
- Writing remains after two applications of chemical bleach
- Brass ink tube
- 5 1/8 inches long
- Barrel withstands temperatures from -40°F to +160°F
- Sufficient ink to write a line not less than 5,000 feet
AbilityOne® Procurement List and a legendary writing instrument was born.

**New Specs, New Player**

The 1965 redesign of the standard-issue U.S. government pen – led by Paul Fisher of Fisher Space Pen fame – resulted in new specifications. The 16-page document – which details nearly everything about how the retractable pen should be made, from its size, to the composition of the plastic and metal components, to the ink and quality assurance tests that should be performed – has stood the test of time.

Because the pen is used extensively by U.S. military personnel, it must be slightly smaller than average to fit unseen into military uniform pockets. That size makes it safer for soldiers in war zones, where the metal components could reflect in the sun and expose a soldier’s position to the enemy, explains Richard Oliver, director of community outreach and government relations at Industries of the Blind in Greensboro, North Carolina (IOB Greensboro), one of three NIB associated agencies involved in production of the SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen.

The pen is also designed for durability. Plastic components must “be of good quality, suitable hardness, and have low moisture absorption under wide humidity and temperature conditions” and cannot warp, craze, crack, or discolor. The metal components, including the pocket clip and spring, must be made of spring steel and the writing ball must be made of tungsten carbide rather than the industry-norm stainless steel, according to Dan Boucher, who served as vice president of marketing at NIB from 1969 to 1996.

The ink must write smoothly and easily without excessive

**COVER STORY Continued from page 12**
Employees perform final inspection and packaging of ball point pens on an assembly line in 1969.

Sue Kasten, who has been making the U.S. Government Pen at ibMilwaukee for 23 years, is proud that the work she does supports the U.S. military.

Han Hach, an employee in the pen department at IOB Greensboro for 10 years, places the silver clips on the U.S. Government Pen.

Four employees produced 20,000 pens daily with this pen assembly machine at Alphapointe in Kansas City, Missouri, in the 1960s.
Quite a few stories have been told over the years about use of the 50-year-old globetrotting pen for tasks other than writing. It’s popular with Navy pilots, says Oliver, because it measures 150 nautical miles from end to end on flight maps. The bottom barrel is also the exact length of a two-minute fuse and Oliver says a major told him long ago that the pen barrel’s diameter is the same as the ammunition used to qualify on shooting ranges – a soldier who missed the target, could (theoretically, of course) qualify by poking a hole in it with the pen.

Steven Gray, LCDR USN (Ret.), confirmed stories of the pen’s barrel being used for emergency tracheotomies. During his time in the U.S. Navy, Gray spent three years at the Naval Safety Center in Norfolk, Virginia, where he maintained accident reports, many accompanied by photographic evidence.
“I saw at least a half-dozen pictures of sailors with those pens sticking out of their throats,” he recalls.

Responding to a 2010 Stars & Stripes article about the pen, Senior Chief Petty Officer Terrie L. Pickard contributed a few other uses. The pen, she wrote, has been used to measure female sailors’ nail length because the tip is the regulation length required (about a quarter of an inch from the tip of the finger); Pickard has also used the pen to straighten a bent pin connector.

A number of online blogs extoll the pen’s virtues. A Pinterest board features a wide array of SKILCRAFT pen images, and several sites include customer reviews:

“What all pens should aspire to be, should pens evolve the ability to aspire to greatness.”

“Ye verily, though thou art cast into the valley of Literacy, ye shall fear no paper, for I have bepenned thee with a SKILCRAFT.”

“I found one when I was cleaning out a desk I used 40 years ago in DC. It still works, even the ink hadn’t dried or clogged.”

There are even YouTube videos dedicated to the pen, including one that dissects it, and a U.S. Government Public Service Announcement, circa 1987, that pleads with sailors to stop taking the pens home with them at the end of the day.
pressure; must not blot, skip, feather, or spread; must dry within five seconds (to the joy of lefties everywhere); and must be resistant to water, bleach, and light. The pen must be capable of writing continuously for nearly one mile (5,000 feet) in extreme temperatures (from 40 degrees below zero to more than 160 degrees Fahrenheit), according to C.J. Lange, president and CEO of Industries of the Blind in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (ibMilwaukee), another NIB associated agency that makes the pen.

To ensure all pens meet the standards, batches must be tested for their ability to write continuously in extreme temperatures without blotting or skipping excessively. When the contract was first awarded, NIB constructed a state-of-the-art testing facility in St. Louis to conduct all 28 quality assurance tests outlined in the specs. Although the facility eventually closed after the agencies making the pens took over their own testing, Boucher recalls that government inspectors “were impressed with the sophistication of the facility. It gave us credibility because it showed them we could meet their specifications.”

The pen is so well-designed that it really hasn’t changed much over the years, although a blue-ink variant was added in the 1990s. Dustin Altic, national sales manager of manufacturing at Alphapointe in Kansas City, Missouri, says the original plastic tip of the pen is now metal, Oliver notes the type of plastic has also changed over the years, and Lange adds that the ink has been improved.

The center band changed later, recalls Boucher, when Harold Murrell, of GSA’s Federal Supply Service,
NIB constructed a state-of-the-art facility to conduct the 28 quality assurance tests required in the specs for the U.S. Government Pen.

Clifford Alexander Sr., supervisor of the pen department at IOB Greensboro since 1993, says production of the U.S. Government Pen made it possible for him to buy a home and put his children through school. “It has made my life totally different in a really good way.”

Helen Jones at work at the IOB Greensboro pen assembly machine. Jones retired from the agency in January 2018 after 30 years of service.
The SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen holds a special place in the heart of Steven Gray, LCDR USN (Ret.), who served on five different ships over the course of 14 years on sea duty in the U.S. Navy.

“I served on these ships before the computer age,” he recalls. “The U.S. Navy was a pen-and-paper organization, and this pen was our only choice. Everyone had one. A typical ship would have between 300 and 600 sailors on board and I’d bet that at any given time, half of them would have one of these pens in their pockets.”

Shipboard history was recorded with the SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen, says Gray. “There were four or five log books on a ship, all of which were written with a SKILCRAFT pen.”

Personal history has been recorded with the pen as well. “Thirty years ago, a SKILCRAFT pen and a 15-cent stamp kept sailors in touch with loved ones,” Gray recalls. His wife, Pam, still has all the letters he sent to her during his deployments – written with a SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen.
asked if the solid metal could be “jazzed up a bit.” NIB asked the supplier for some options, and the band with three black stripes was born.

**Three Agencies, More than a Billion Pens**

Three NIB associated agencies have a hand in producing the SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen. Alphapointe makes the plastic components that IOB Greensboro and ibMilwaukee use to produce the pens. While Alphapointe never made the U.S. Government Pen, the agency did produce its close cousin, the SKILCRAFT chain pen, at one point. About four years ago, the three agencies worked together to purchase micro-molds for the plastic components, Oliver said, so Alphapointe now makes the upper and lower barrel, cap, and plunger.

It’s a unique partnership, explains Altic. “Most office products are made by the agency that produces them, but they often must buy parts from outside vendors.” An agency producing binders, for example, may make certain components, like the vinyl cover, but buy the metal rings from another vendor. “The SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen is special,” he says, “because we are able to get components from another NIB agency, which is quite rare.”

In its heyday, the agencies produced 70 million SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pens per year. While sales have declined with the introduction of other SKILCRAFT writing instruments, the U.S. Government Pen remains a best seller: 8-12 million are produced annually with IOB Greensboro and ibMilwaukee each making 4-6 million. Both agencies have expanded their pen lines over the years. At IOB Greensboro, for example, 38 people make 46 different types of pens. All of the employees in the
pen division are blind or have low vision, including supervisor Clifford Alexander Sr., who is totally blind.

Lynn Larsen, a machine operator at IOB Greensboro, has been making the SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen for nearly 40 years. “We call them our bread-and-butter pens,” she explains, because when business is flat, the agency always has the pen to fall back on to keep people employed. For Larsen, though, it’s more than a job. “I think about all the soldiers who use them and what they are doing in service to our country. It makes me feel honored and proud to make these pens.”

ibMilwaukee is rightfully proud of its roots when it comes to the U.S. Government Pen. “We were the first agency to get the contract for the pen,” says Lange. “We were also the first agency employing people who are blind to win the GSA Quality Assurance Award for mass production and assembly of the pens.” Today at ibMilwaukee, 69 full- and part-time employees produce 48 different types of pens.

“We are so proud of the role these pens – and our agency – have played in the military and military history,” says Lange. Sue Kasten, who has been making the U.S. Government Pen at ibMilwaukee for 23 years, shares that pride. “These pens go all over the world with our military,” she says. “I am so proud to be able to serve my country by supporting the military.”

The Transformation of an Industry

The SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen, says Boucher, changed the way people thought about people who are blind. Its success proved to GSA and other government customers that they were capable not only
of making a durable pen, but of making other superior quality products. The success of the U.S. Government Pen prompted NIB associated agencies to venture into the writing instrument and office products industries to create and sustain jobs, says Boucher. Soon, associated agencies in Dallas, Houston, and other cities across the country started making markers, file folders, and other office supplies under the SKILCRAFT brand. Most importantly, Boucher says, the pens changed the perceptions of everyone who used one and realized that there are few limits to what people who are blind can do. “As I like to say, there’s nothing like that little black pen.”

At IOB Greensboro, Jeff Chandler works on the machine that places the silver tip and prints the iconic “SKILCRAFT - U.S. Government” on the barrel.
Boucher credits GSA’s Murrell with helping NIB expand the SKILCRAFT line and build its familiarity among government employees. “Harold was responsible for accepting all stationery products for GSA and he was NIB’s contact. We would meet with him each month,” Boucher recalls, “and he would always ask, ‘What else do you have?’” Additional SKILCRAFT stationery products were steadily added to the AbilityOne Procurement List, including sticky notes, writing tablets, and mechanical pencils. Boucher estimates tens of thousands of NIB associated agency employees have had their lives changed for the better over the past 50 years. And it all started with the SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen.

Lange agrees. “The impact of these pens on all of the people who are blind who have made them over the past 50 years is almost incalculable,” he says.

For Kasten, working on the pen has given her the opportunity to pay her bills and support her family, and Larsen says her job producing the pen at IOB helped keep her family going after her father passed away. “I was able to contribute. I was really proud of that.”

Once people find out that Kasten and Larsen make the pens, they often gain a sort of celebrity status. “When I tell people I make the pen, they think it’s really cool,” says Larsen. “I have a nephew in the Army. He is really proud to tell his friends that I make the pen.”

Alexander, who has seven children and 13 grandchildren, believes the pens have changed lives. “We are a family here, and we take great
pride in the work we do. That pen has given all of us so much. It has given us steady employment, and that means the chance to own a home and raise our children. At the same time, it allows us to serve the military,” he says. “For me, I bought a home and put my kids through school. It has made my life totally different in a really good way.”

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

“U.S. GOVERNMENT PROPERTY”

Much like Newton’s first law of physics, a pen that’s cleverly designed to fit unseen into a military pocket tends to stay in said pocket, often winding up outside military bases and government offices and in the hands of family members.

For children of military personnel who moved frequently, the pen was an identifier of sorts: They found other military kids at a new school because they were the ones using SKILCRAFT pens. “You would go to a meeting of military wives and all of them would be taking notes with the SKILCRAFT pen,” Steven Gray, LCDR USN (Ret.), recalls with a laugh.

A long-standing joke about the pens inspired a haiku by Washington Post reader Susan Fannon:

SKILCRAFT ballpoint pen “For official use only” Lives at my house now.
Outlook Nebraska

Headquarters: Omaha, Nebraska  
Executive Director: Eric Stueckrath  
Founded: 2000

Capabilities at-a-glance: Produces tissue and paper towel products, provides technology training on computers and smartphones, brings cultural and recreational opportunities to people who are blind or visually impaired through audio description of live theater performances and activities like tandem biking and goalball.

Did you know? Each year, Outlook Nebraska produces enough toilet paper to wrap around the earth 54 times.

More info: outlookne.org
Valley Center for the Blind

Headquarters: Fresno, California
Executive Director: Ken Warkentin
Founded: 1972

Capabilities at-a-glance: Employment and rehabilitation services including assistive technology, independent living skills, situational assessments, low vision exams and services, and the Students Conquering Obstacles for the Realization of Employment (SCORE) program for youth transitioning from high school to college or the workforce.

Did you know? Valley Center for the Blind, the only blind center in California’s San Joaquin Valley, plans to develop a job center and skilled workforce to aid financial development in the region and empower people experiencing vision loss.

More info: valleycenterfortheblind.org
Aurora of Central New York

Headquarters: Syracuse, New York
Executive Director: Debra Chaiken
Founded: 1917

Capabilities at-a-glance: Manages switchboard operations for Veterans Affairs Medical Centers in Syracuse, Rome, and Watertown, as well as satellite locations in central and upstate New York.

Did you know? Aurora switchboard operators handle more than 50,000 calls per month serving veterans, their families, and the people who care for them.

More info: auroraofcny.org
Lighthouse Works

Headquarters: Orlando, Florida
President/CEO: Lee Nasehi
Founded: 2012

Capabilities at-a-glance: Technology services, full-service contact center, sourcing solutions, and fulfillment.

Did you know? Lighthouse Works was recently highlighted in Walt Disney World’s Supplier Diversity Program.

More info: lighthouseworks.org

Post Supply Center, Fort Hood, Texas

Location: Fort Hood, Texas
Operated by: San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Year opened: 2006
More info: salighthouse.org/military-support
Throughout her life, Virginia Gay Young, known to her friends as Gay, has persevered to overcome significant hurdles. Diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa while working on a master’s degree in industrial and organizational psychology, she completed the course of study and earned her degree despite declining vision. After several years of being intricately involved in the operations of her family’s business, she returned to college and earned a second master’s degree in general counseling.

In 2004, Gay moved to New Orleans to take a position with the Exceptional Entrepreneurs of Louisiana program that
combined her love of business, passion for learning, and compassion for others. There, she guided and encouraged clients in realizing their dreams of self-employment – until Hurricane Katrina made landfall, devastating the city and flooding both her office and home. Over the course of three long years she persevered through significant challenges to rebuild her home and workplace, and maintain relationships with friends and clients scattered throughout the region after the disaster.

Aiming to increase her level of independence, Gay came to Lighthouse Louisiana for orientation and mobility training and learned of an opening at the agency for a product development manager. Since landing the position in January 2016, Gay has dedicated herself to growing professionally, completing NIB’s Effective Supervision program and expanding her knowledge in areas ranging from plastics manufacturing to pet products to cost documents.

“Gay is an incredible asset to Lighthouse Louisiana. As our first product development manager who is blind, she helped add three new projects to the Procurement List. Gay speaks on behalf of the Lighthouse, telling her personal story to impact the lives of people with disabilities across our entire state.”

- Renee Vidrine, President & CEO, Lighthouse Louisiana
Gay’s passion for learning and love of business fuel her quest to positively impact the lives of people who are blind or have low vision by growing demand for Lighthouse Louisiana products in the government and commercial markets. She is committed to enhancing state purchasing policy to increase the procurement of products manufactured by people who are blind or visually impaired in Louisiana and opening pathways to financial independence.

Away from the agency, Gay is equally passionate about improving the lives of women in the correctional system, volunteering for 15 years in the prison ministry program at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) sponsored by Kairos Prison Ministries International. She currently holds the position of vice chairperson for the LCIW Kairos Advisory Council and in 2016 served as chairperson for the Christmas Relief Bag program, which raised $15,000 to provide bags to 700 LCIW residents to replace possessions lost when the prison was flooded in late 2016.

Gay is a member of the local chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, and was appointed to the Louisiana Rehabilitation Council in 2017 by Governor John Bel Edwards.
Legally blind since birth, Everett “EJ” Ford was never one to let blindness prevent him from doing what he wanted. EJ grew up in Kansas riding bikes, skateboarding, speed skating, and working odd jobs. In school, he ran track, wrestled, competed on the swim team, and learned to play the drums.

EJ first joined NIB’s network of associated nonprofit agencies in 2008, at Envision in Wichita, Kansas. Together with his wife Betty, he relocated to the IFB Solutions facility in Asheville, North Carolina, in 2011 to help convert a sighted job, sewing bar tacks on ponchos, into a job that can be performed by people who are blind.
“EJ is incredibly hard working and will tackle any challenge without hesitation,” says IFB Executive Director David Horton. At IFB, EJ has performed contract cutting, packaging, and recycling; operated the die machine; sewn Army combat shirts, flyers kit bags, ponchos, and Army extreme weather outer layer (EWOL) components. With his extensive knowledge and experience with sewing operations, he helped the agency convert another sighted position in contract cutting to a position that can be performed by people who are blind. In addition, he can easily pitch in as an assembler, packager, bar coder, and sealer in the Impulse Merchandizing Program when needed.

EJ feels very strongly about his work. With many members of his family having worn the uniform, he is especially proud to be sewing and packaging items for men and women serving

- David Horton, Executive Director, IFB Solutions
in the military. He has fond memories of growing up near an Army National Guard training facility, where his father was a member for 22 years, and EJ was able to take part in some training exercises as a young boy.

EJ is an advocate for people who are blind, both at IFB and in the community. At the agency, in addition to converting sighted positions to jobs for employees who are blind, EJ has served as chair of the plant’s Safety Team, and represented the agency at the Fort Jackson commissary, where he educated shoppers about IFB and the AbilityOne® Program. He also volunteers with the Student Enrichment Experience (SEE) camp for children who are blind, a part of IFB Solutions’ A Brighter Path Program, and is a regular panelist for The Blind Side, a sensitivity to blindness program provided through local schools that educates students about guide dog etiquette, braille, and more.

Away from the agency, EJ is an avid bowler and past president of the Asheville Blind Bowling League, where he organized local leagues and multi-state tournaments. His YouTube account, “EveryThing Blind,” hosts videos ranging from travel advice – including his zip lining and white water rafting adventures – to car repair and reviews of new technology. EJ also sells two “EveryThing Blind” t-shirts that he designed, donating a portion of the proceeds to the Brighter Path Foundation.
2018 Employees of the Year

Henry Allen
Lighthouse for the Blind St. Louis

Deborah Ambro-Crandell
Industries for the Blind Milwaukee

Steve Britton
North Central Sight Services

Rim Brooks
Blind Industries and Services of Maryland

Rodney Dulin
MidWest Enterprises for the Blind

Calvin Echevarria
Lighthouse Works!

Blake Lindsay
Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind

Todd McGough
Georgia Industries for the Blind

Jose Nerio
South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind

Daniel Phillips
Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Matthew Spofford
San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind and Vision Impaired

David Steinmetz
Arizona Industries for the Blind
Nikki Bare
RLCB

Rushie Cochran
Alabama Industries for the Blind

Robert Hayworth
Lions Volunteer Blind Industries

Elsa Moore
Travis Association for the Blind

Spero Pipakis
Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

Dennis Tay
The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc.

Christy Blaes
Envision

Charles Coleman
East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind

Robert Hilton
LC Industries

Michael Mote
IFB Solutions

Cheryl Rayburn
Alphapointe

Daryl Wells
Industries of the Blind Greensboro
2018 Employees of the Year

Virginia Gay Young
Lighthouse Louisiana

Manuel Zavala
West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind

Lance Ayers
Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

Alvin Barber
Mississippi Industries for the Blind

Dustin Bradford
The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc.

David Brown
Alphapointe

Jeffery Durham
Georgia Industries for the Blind

Dana Easterwood
Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

EJ Ford
IFB Solutions

Tammy Fuson
West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind

David Green
Lighthouse Louisiana

Lisa Hall
Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Ernest Arce
San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind and Vision Impaired

Brian Blevins
Blind Industries and Services of Maryland

Sarah Buckner
Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment

Nicole Eberhardt
Lions Services

Esther Gonzalez
Olmsted Center for Sight

Toby Hite
LC Industries

Randy Ashcroft
Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany

Robert Boggs
Lions Volunteer Blind Industries

David Burkette
Lions Industries for the Blind

Shannon Fayle
Arizona Industries for the Blind

Brian Grams
Outlook Nebraska

Adam King
Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired
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<td>Arlene Still</td>
<td>Bestwork Industries for the Blind</td>
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<td>Betsy Wilkinson</td>
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<td>Tamika Polk</td>
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<td>Jared Sebren</td>
<td>East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind</td>
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David Marshall
Alabama Industries for the Blind

Deborah Rodriguez
Chicago Lighthouse Industries

Michelle Ann Shaw
Beacon Lighthouse Industries

Ira Smith
Lighthouse for the Blind Fort Worth

Eddie Torres
Lighthouse Works

Paul Williams
Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind

Shawn Mathes
Lighthouse for the Blind St. Louis

John Rowland
Bosma Enterprises

Travis Sherrill
South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind

Gary Smith
Louisiana Association for the Blind

Melony Weiser
Keystone Vocational Services

Nikki Wolf
Industries for the Blind Milwaukee
What do a marathon runner, a professional dog breeder, and a case manager for at-risk youth have in common? Each completed the NIB Fellowship for Leadership Development in January 2018 and secured an upwardly mobile professional position.

Launched in 2003 as the first track in NIB’s Business Leaders Program, the Fellowship for Leadership Development seeks out people with leadership potential who are blind and nurtures and develops their talents.

“The fellowship expanded my skillset and allowed me to compete on the same level as sighted peers,” says marathon runner Irwin Ramirez. “Above all, it demonstrated to me that people who are blind or visually impaired are fully capable and fully qualified to perform in a professional position and have a career in business.”

Similar to an apprenticeship, the salaried, 16-month Fellowship combines business-focused, on-the-job experience with professional development activities. Fellows generally complete three work rotations: an initial placement at NIB headquarters, a placement at an NIB associated nonprofit agency, and final placement at a private-sector company. Assignments are designed to build business acumen as well as management and leadership skills.

Growing Confidence and Independence
The Fellowship also
Launched in 2003, NIB’s Business Leaders program is dedicated to helping individuals who are blind or visually impaired develop business and leadership skills to enhance their opportunities for economic and personal independence. In addition to the Fellowship, the Business Leaders Program, which has provided training and work experiences to more than 8,000 participants over the past 15 years, includes Business Basics, Leaders at All Levels, Effective Supervision, Emerging Professionals, and Business Management Training.

After their first rotation at NIB Headquarters, Irwin Ramirez (left) Joe Conway, and April Havey moved to NIB associated agencies and then to private sector employers as part of the Fellowship for Leadership Development.
fosters personal growth, independence, and self-confidence. Participants relocate for each position and are responsible for their own travel, moving, and living arrangements. Business Leaders Program Director Karen Pal explained that exposing the fellows to such challenges helps them gain greater self-assurance.

Fellow April Havey was enthusiastic about gaining more experience with independent travel and mastering the logistics of relocation through the program. “Learning how to live in a bigger city, having the chance to compare living in large, small, and medium-size cities has been so helpful,” she said. “I’ve become more adventurous, more willing to just give things a try.” Fellow Joe Conway said arranging his moves and living situations boosted his confidence and spurred personal growth.

The program’s end goal is for the Fellows to land professional, upwardly mobile managerial positions either within NIB’s network of associated nonprofit agencies or the broader business community. “We consider the program a success if our fellows are economically independent at the conclusion and we’ve increased the number of people who are blind filling management positions within our own agencies,” Pal said.

“We’re focused on getting new blood into our program. NIB’s goal is to bring in talented unemployed or under-employed people who are blind from outside of our network, train them, and improve their opportunities for advancement in business,” Pal explained. “The Fellowship program broadens their horizons; professional development is the key. We give them flight lessons, so they can soar.”
MEET THE NIB FELLOWS

Joe Conway

Joe Conway holds a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and History from the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill and a master’s degree in Public Administration from Westfield State University, in Westfield, Massachusetts. His work history includes providing translation services at the Salvation Army and the UNC Library, counseling at-risk youth to deter gang involvement, and helping low-income residents find employment and housing in New York City.

April Havey

April Havey earned a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. After several years working for a mobile pet grooming company in Ohio, with duties that ran the gamut from appointment scheduling and database management to animal training and care, she established her own pet care and Shetland Sheepdog breeding business in Michigan.
Irwin Ramirez

Irwin Ramirez holds a bachelor’s degree in Information Systems from the City University of New York’s Baruch College and a master’s degree in Computer and Information Science from the State University of New York Polytechnic Institute in Utica. Ramirez, who is fluent in Spanish, has tutored people with visual impairments in Microsoft Excel, Word, and PowerPoint. He worked as an intern at the American Foundation for the Blind in New York City, where he updated webpages to improve accessibility for assistive technology users and analyzed website usage data. He has completed the New York City Marathon (twice), the Boston Marathon, and the Twin Cities Marathon.
program with a four-month stint at NIB headquarters, where they learned NIB operations, participated in training, and worked on projects in various departments based on their individual interests. The Fellowship included participation in NIB’s Effective Supervision training program, which develops participants’ ability to perform supervisory jobs more efficiently and keep business operations running smoothly.

All three fellows said the Effective Supervision program was one of the high points of their Fellowship experience. “It was a great experience and exposed me to a whole network of people and agencies I would never have known about,” Conway said, noting that 17 people who are blind from NIB and 14 associated agencies participated in the course. Havey found it “highly beneficial to network with other people who are blind and hear about the work they were doing.”

The introductory rotation, which ran through January 2017, allowed the fellows to learn more about the inner workings of NIB and its mission. Conway helped update a training manual for new customer care representatives and performed a comparative analysis of call center services at large companies versus those at NIB agencies; Havey conducted market research and analysis to identify products for inclusion on the AbilityOne Program® Procurement List; Ramirez worked with the Military Resale program to review NIB associated agency sales through military commissaries and provide monthly sales and distribution reports.

Taking on New Challenges
Following initial placement at NIB, the fellows completed two additional six-month rotations.
In selecting onsite experiences, NIB tries to match individual and program goals with host agency interests and capabilities. For the second rotation (February through July 2017), Conway worked at host agency Envision in Wichita, Kansas, as part of a team focused on creating innovative upward mobility tools and developing career coaching for people who are blind or visually impaired. Havey worked at LC Industries, in Durham, North Carolina, conducting business line analyses to identify products for focused improvement efforts.

For his second rotation, Ramirez continued at NIB, helping to develop ISO 9000 documentation and drafting processes for managing AbilityOne products submitted for the Procurement List.

Two private-sector companies – 3M Company in St. Paul, For their final rotation in the program, Fellows April Havey (left) and Joe Conway, shown here with Havey’s guide dog Joba, worked at BJC Healthcare’s Center for Clinical Excellence in St. Louis, Missouri.
Minnesota, and St. Louis, Missouri-based nonprofit BJC Healthcare, which operates 15 hospitals – hosted the fellows from August 2017 through January 2018.

Ramirez worked in 3M’s IT Digital Customer Solutions Department, focusing on search engine optimization and web marketing technology. He also performed accessibility audits and ensured compliance on 3M websites. The work experience “opened my eyes to different things and has given me a broader knowledge of business – applying the skills I learned in school is different and rewarding,” Ramirez said.

Havey and Conway worked with BJC Healthcare’s Center for Clinical Excellence. Havey helped hospitals improve functions in finance and human resources (HR) and developed a protocol for analysts to use in reviewing applications and verifying physician credentials. Conway worked on projects related to developing an onboarding process for new employees, cost analysis, ensuring a timely supply chain, and finding ways to tap into local talent to recruit BJC employees.

Launching Professional Careers
Since completing the program at the end of January, the Fellows have settled into professional positions: Conway as a transitional employment specialist in the HR department at The Chicago Lighthouse, Havey as customer service operations manager at ibMilwaukee, and Ramirez in product development support at NIB. “It’s been a great program and has really opened doors for me,” Conway said. “It’s put me on an HR career path, which is what I’ve wanted. I wouldn’t be in the position I’m in without it.”
The fellows agreed that beyond securing a professional position, the program has spurred personal development.

“It’s been a journey,” Havey said. “I wasn’t used to moving in a professional environment, rubbing shoulders with CEOs and executives, but now I’ve upped my game. I don’t want to be put in a corner somewhere; I want to work alongside sighted people because I have done it all my life and because I can.”

“I would definitely recommend the Fellowship to others,” Ramirez said, noting that he had gained confidence, learned how to motivate people, and improved his “soft skills” through the experience. “You must be open-minded to travel and relocation, be flexible, be willing to invest time and effort and get out of your comfort zone” he said. “But if you do, the program is very much worth it. I am a totally different person compared to when I started.”

Rosemarie Lally, J.D., is a freelance writer and editor based in Washington, D.C.
This year marks the 110th anniversary of the first production vehicle designed for the commuting and errand-running masses – the Model T Ford.

Since 1908, car ownership has been the de facto symbol of American freedom – along with baseball, hot dogs, and apple pie, according to the TV commercials of yesteryear.

For those of us who drove before our vision loss, as well as those who never slid behind the wheel, independently finding one’s way through today’s high speed and chaotic world can be a daunting task when you have poor, little, or no usable vision.

That’s where the Nearby Explorer smartphone app, developed by the American Printing House for the Blind, steps in to assist. A feature-rich wayfinding app, Nearby
Explorer merges the best parts of Google Android’s classic wayfinding apps WalkyTalky and Intersection Explorer, with Apple iOS’s Siri assistance and Apple Maps.

Available for both Android and iOS, Nearby Explorer comes in two versions: the free Nearby Explorer Online, and the full version Nearby Explorer, available for $79, that provides full access to 4.2 gigabytes of expensive MAPTEQ maps, giving users tremendous granular detail of addresses and intersections, and turn-by-turn guidance that can be accessed while offline in data-saving mode.

Calling it the Swiss Army knife of wayfinding apps is no self-indulgent escape into hyperbole – Nearby Explorer literally has a tool for every wayfinding need, even those rarely used, such as detecting current altitude.

After installation, an intuitive home screen lists a series of on/off toggle switches that control the amount of nearby information spoken through Nearby Explorer’s built in (and changeable) voices. The voices are independent of Android’s TalkBack and iOS’s Voice Over screen readers, making them very easy to distinguish from smartphone operations.

The long list of vocal feedback toggle switch options includes, Country, State, City, County, Neighborhood, ZIP Code, Heading (compass direction), Street Number, Street Name, Approaching (such as intersections), Guidance (turn-by-turn only available in paid version), Nearby, Nearby Position, Beacon (indoor navigation), Watch (allows the app to “watch” for a specific pre-selected location, such as a bus bay), Speed,
Altitude, Accuracy (of GPS) and Vertical Accuracy.

With a 25 page user manual, Nearby Explorer has too many features to cover in this column. Like GeoBeam, you can point the end of your phone in space 360 degrees and hear business locations, points of interest, and other details. A public transit feature reports bus/train colors, numbers, and – in cities that offer free transit tracking feeds – distances.

One unique and really cool feature worth highlighting is Virtual Tour. Using this feature, users can enter an address and virtually teleport themselves to locations across the country, allowing them to “look around” at streets, businesses, and multiple points of interest identified by Google Places. It’s a great feature for anyone traveling to an unfamiliar city or neighborhood.

Both the free Nearby Explorer Online and the full $79 Nearby Explorer can be downloaded through the iOS App Store and Google Play.

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Doug Goist is program manager for IT services projects at National Industries for the Blind. A recognized leader in the field of technology accessibility, Doug has worked with the U.S. Department of Defense, the military services, federal agencies and private sector partners. In 2013, he served as the technical steering committee representative for the U.S. Agency for International Development on a study of mobile money transfer and handset accessibility in Africa.
NEW PRODUCTS

READY TO LAUNCH

These new SKILCRAFT® products produced by NIB associated nonprofit agencies are now available to federal government customers through the AbilityOne® Program.

Office Products
1. Dymo®/SKILCRAFT® LabelManager 3600
Print up to 10 copies of one label with the easy-to-use Dymo®/SKILCRAFT® LabelManager 3600. Powered by a rechargeable lithium-ion battery, the label maker features a computer-style keyboard, nine-label memory, and “save” function. Choose from three fonts in seven sizes, plus seven text styles, eight boxes, and an underline feature to create custom labels for almost any job. Kit includes starter label cassette, dust cover, cleaning cloth, storage bag, and quick reference guide. Additional easy-peel labels are available in five colors and two widths. Produced by the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired – Goodwill in Rochester, New York.

2. Dymo®/SKILCRAFT® All-Purpose Labeling Tool with Rhino™ 4200 Case Kit
Complete industrial labeling jobs quickly and correctly with the Dymo®/SKILCRAFT® All-Purpose Labeling Tool with Rhino™ 4200 Case Kit. Easily create and format wire/cable wraps, flags,
fixed-length labels, and more with “hot key” shortcuts and store most commonly used labels, symbols, and terms in “favorites.” Print labels up to ¾ inch wide on flexible nylon, permanent polyester, or durable vinyl materials or directly onto heat-shrink tubes. Produced by the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired – Goodwill in Rochester, New York.

3. Dymo®/SKILCRAFT®
LabelWriter 450
Complete labeling, filing, and mailing tasks quickly and efficiently with the Dymo®/SKILCRAFT® LabelWriter 450. Connect to laptop or computer to print up to 51 labels per minute from Microsoft® Word and other popular programs. Thermal printing technology eliminates the need for costly ink or toner with a compact design that’s an easy and attractive addition to any modern workspace. Select from more than 60 label layouts. Produced by the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired – Goodwill in Rochester, New York.

4. Kensington®/SKILCRAFT®
Ergonomic Footrest
Avoid leg, back, and foot strain and fatigue with the Kensington®/SKILCRAFT® Ergonomic Footrest featuring the patented SmartFit™ system that adjusts footrest heights from 3.5 inches to 5 inches using a color-coded personal comfort system. Eliminate pressure points and tired feet with the non-skid, shock-absorbing memory foam surface. Adjust and lock the footrest tilt and angle with a simple push of the convenient, foot-operated front pedal for all-day comfort without leaving your chair. Produced by Chicago Lighthouse Industries.
5. SKILCRAFT® Branded Attribute Media Disks
Ideal for archiving or backing up data or video, SKILCRAFT® Branded Attribute Media Disks with large storage capacity and superior recording quality provide superior archival stability. Choose re-recordable or write-once formatting in a variety of recording speeds with a silver thermal-printable surface on the center hub. Read-compatible with most DVD-ROM drives. Produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

JanSan Products
6. SKILCRAFT® Erase ‘n’ Go All Purpose Cleaning Pads
Erase stains and set-in dirt and grime quickly and easily without the use of harsh chemicals with SKILCRAFT® Erase ‘n’ Go All-Purpose Cleaning Pads. Just add water to remove tough dirt, scuff marks, and crayon marks from walls, floors, doors, and other surfaces. Produced by West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in San Angelo, Texas.

7. SKILCRAFT® Hard Roll Paper Towels
Ideal for restroom use, SKILCRAFT® Hard Roll Paper Towels provide a highly absorbent, all-
purpose single-ply continuous roll paper towel at an economical price. Made of 100 percent recycled content with a minimum 30 percent post-consumer fibers, the 2-inch core fits most dispensers. Available in four lengths and two colors, choose six or 12 rolls per box. TAA compliant, produced by Outlook Nebraska in Omaha.

8. SKILCRAFT® Pearl 3D Urinal Screen Deodorizer
Prevent splash back and cross contamination to areas outside of restrooms with SKILCRAFT® Pearl 3D Urinal Screens. With 40 percent more fragrance than traditional screens to provide continuous scent for up to 45 days, these extremely flexible screens with anti-splash texture provide greater surface area coverage and fit nearly any urinal contour. Specially engineered copolymer is 200 percent stronger than traditional vinyl urinal screens. Translucent screens keep drains visible while collecting debris to prevent clogs. VOC compliant in all 50 states; safe for use in waterless urinals. Choose Melon Mist or Mango Bay scent; produced by VisionCorps in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Maintenance, Repair, and Operations
9. SKILCRAFT® Locking Key Cabinet
Easily manage 30, 70, or 90 keys with the numbered tag system in the all-steel SKILCRAFT® Locking Key Cabinet. This durable cabinet is made of heavy
gauge, rolled, formed welded steel using 20 percent recycled material and features a door-length hinge design, secure cylinder key lock, and a baked enamel scratch-resistant finish that meets government specifications and protects from corrosion. Includes plastic key tags, log sheets, and mounting hardware. Manufactured and assembled in the U.S.A.; produced by LC Industries in Durham, North Carolina.

10. SKILCRAFT® Plastic Storage Cabinets
Durable SKILCRAFT® Blow-Molded Plastic Storage Cabinets offer generous storage capacity and locking cabinet doors. Cabinets made of high-density polyethylene plastic with double-wall construction are lighter than steel cabinets, yet more durable. Steel-reinforced internal shelves can be adjusted or removed and hold 75-125 pounds each. Recommended for use in enclosed or covered areas, cabinets resist chemicals, corrosion, dents, scratches, peeling, warping, stains, rust, and weather. Easy assembly with just a screwdriver. TAA and Berry Amendment compliant, meets or exceeds ANSI/BIFMA standards. Made in the U.S.A. with 5-year limited warranty. Produced by MidWest Enterprises for the Blind in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

11. SKILCRAFT® Plastic Open Storage Shelving Units
Lighter weight than steel shelving, yet more durable, SKILCRAFT® Plastic Open Storage Shelving Units feature heavy-duty,
commercial grade uprights for increased stability. Choose the four-shelf model made with durable injection-molded polypropylene that holds up to 75 pounds per shelf, or the five-shelf model made of blow-molded, high-density polyethylene and steel-reinforced shelves that can hold up to 180 pounds per shelf and comes complete with wall anchors. Units snap together for fast assembly; easy-to-clean, resists scratches, dents, impact, rust, and stains. TAA and Berry Amendment compliant, meets or exceeds ANSI/BIFMA standards. Made in the U.S.A. with 5-year limited warranty. Produced by MidWest Enterprises for the Blind in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

12. SKILCRAFT® Peel-and-Stick Nonskid Tapes and Treads – Fine textured
Create a safe walking surface to prevent slips and falls with SKILCRAFT® Peel-and-Stick Nonskid Tapes and Treads. These slip-resistant fine-textured tapes and treads provide traction in wet areas such as locker rooms, pools, and showers without irritating bare feet. Easy-to-apply pressure sensitive adhesive adheres to clean, dry surfaces without wrinkling, curling, tearing, shrinking, or lifting. Choose pre-cut treads or rolls in a variety of widths. Produced by Louisiana Association for the Blind in Shreveport, Louisiana.

These and thousands of other products are available for purchase at AbilityOne.com, GSAAAdvantage.gov, your local AbilityOne 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 NIB.org/products.
AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

BUILDING COMMUNITY

From its beginnings as an organization to provide a place for people who are blind and their families to come together, The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc. has grown to provide a wide range of opportunities to live independently and contribute to Seattle’s vibrant community.

BY ROBERT HANNA

Founded in 1918, The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc., primarily located on the West Coast, is a private, not-for-profit social enterprise that provides employment, support, and training opportunities for people who are blind, DeafBlind, and blind with other disabilities. The agency’s forerunner, the Seattle Association of the Blind, was established in 1910 as a social organization for people who are blind and their friends and family members. The organization soon attracted the attention of local officials as it raised awareness of issues from education to transportation, employment, and economic matters affecting people who are blind.

Originally formed to support veterans blinded in World War I, The Lighthouse for the Blind incorporated in 1918. Today, it is among the largest employers of people who are blind west of the Mississippi River and the largest employer of individuals who are DeafBlind in the United States.
As World War I wore on, a number of veterans returning home to the Pacific Northwest had been blinded by gas attacks or head injuries. But prejudices and misunderstandings about the capabilities of people who are blind meant these veterans had virtually no opportunities for employment. A group of socially prominent women in the community helped establish a workshop in 1916, where people who were blind made jigsaw puzzles and baskets by hand. In 1918, The Lighthouse incorporated and began its long journey
of creating and innovating employment opportunities for people who are blind.

Today, The Lighthouse is among the largest employers of people who are blind west of the Mississippi River and the largest employer of individuals who are DeafBlind in the United States. More than 260 people who are blind, DeafBlind, or blind with other disabilities are employed at 13 Lighthouse locations nationwide. Jobs at all of The Lighthouse locations pay competitive wages and offer a full benefits package including medical and dental coverage, life insurance, and paid sick and vacation leave.

**Innovating Employment Opportunities**

Lighthouse employees have access to a wide range of career opportunities and comprehensive training programs. People who are blind and DeafBlind work

 brasile

☐ Machinist Jorge Aristizabal operates an Okuma computer numerically controlled (CNC) mill, part of the machining and fabrication services The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc. provides.
in a range of jobs, from machinists and production employees to computer instructors, information technology specialists, accountants, customer service representatives, administrative assistants, and management staff.

In 1951, the Lighthouse entered into a relationship with The Boeing Company for the manufacture of aircraft parts. It’s a relationship that endures to today. As an ISO9001 and AS9100 accredited manufacturer, the agency employs more than 70 machinists who are blind or DeafBlind, providing advanced, one-stop-shop machining and fabrication services, including conventional and computer numerically controlled (CNC) machining, shearing, and turning; injection molding; radio frequency sealing and welding; hydroform manufacturing; water-jet cutting; metal fabrication and riveting; non-metallic machining; and sub-and final assembly.

The Lighthouse hired its first employee who is DeafBlind in 1972, the initial step in building what is now one of the most comprehensive DeafBlind programs in the United States. In addition to employment, the Lighthouse held its first DeafBlind Retreat – a week-long event balancing community building, self-discovery, and experience of DeafBlind culture – with DeafBlind participants and qualified volunteer interpreters. As the foremost employer of DeafBlind individuals in the U.S., the Lighthouse has American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters on staff to facilitate communication between employees who are DeafBlind and their coworkers.

In 1999 the Lighthouse opened its first AbilityOne Base Supply Center™ (BSC)
at Fallon Naval Air Station in Nevada. The Lighthouse BSC program, which has grown to include seven retail locations on the West Coast, offers a wide range of SKILCRAFT® and other products provided through the AbilityOne Program that meet government and military specifications for mission requirements. The Lighthouse AbilityOne BSC program partners with leadership at each store location to satisfy the specific needs of base and installation personnel. In addition to manufacturing positions and retail jobs in
the BSCs, The Lighthouse provides managed services such as appointment setting, quality assurance, and account reconciliation in its contact center and other administrative services; contract close out through the AbilityOne Contract Management Support program; and Section 508 compliance and accessibility testing to ensure electronic and information technology systems are accessible to people with disabilities.

The Lighthouse provides more than just employment opportunities, it offers a wide range of programs and services to employees who are blind, DeafBlind or blind with other disabilities. Computer training classes, braille courses, the acclaimed DeafBlind Retreat, and DeafBlind Community classes, as well as a program to educate elementary school students about blindness, are just a few of the employee and community services offered.

**Looking to the Future**

As The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc. celebrates 100 years, the organization has ambitious plans for growth: In the next few years it aims to employ more than 500 people who are blind. Its Centennial Celebration event, scheduled for September at The Museum of Flight in Seattle, will celebrate not only the important role The Lighthouse has played in the community, but the important role members of the Seattle community, like The Boeing Company and the aerospace industry, have played in supporting the Lighthouse mission of empowering people who are blind and DeafBlind to live independently in the community.

Robert Hanna is marketing and communications manager at The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc.
On February 8, Alabama Industries for the Blind (AIB) celebrated the grand opening of a new AbilityOne Base Supply Center (BSC) store at Robins Air Force Base in Georgia. The BSC will take over uniform issuance at Robins and is expected to improve the way Airmen get their uniforms.

“The changeover represents a great day for Team Robins,” said David Burton, 78th Logistics Readiness Squadron Commander.
Materiel Management Flight Chief, who said the BSC will provide better overall support for the warfighter and Team Robins. “The AbilityOne-run Base Supply Center will not only support the installation with uniforms, it will also be a source for administrative supplies.”

AIB also operates BSCs at Fort Rucker and at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, as well as at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia.

SAVE THE DATE: NIB/NAEPB TRAINING CONFERENCE AND EXPO

Mark your calendars for the 2018 NIB/NAEPB Training Conference and Expo, scheduled for November 14-16, in Arlington, Virginia. The Training Conference and Expo focuses on business development and comprehensive training on the AbilityOne Program and other topics relevant to growing sales and employment. It will include the Expo and NIB Marketplace, deep-dive breakout sessions, customer/partner speakers, and recognition of outstanding customers and partners.
NIB MARKS MILESTONE IN CONSTRUCTION OF NEW HEADQUARTERS

Alexandria, Virginia, Mayor Allison Silberberg joined NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch, architect Chris Downey, an expert in universal design, and other members of NIB leadership on February 23 for a topping off ceremony to mark a major milestone in construction of the new NIB headquarters: completion of the structural phase of building.

NIB Product Development Support Manager Quan Leysath; NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch; Mayor Allison Silberberg; NIB Executive Vice President and Chief Program Officer Angela Hartley; architect Chris Downey; and NIB Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Steve Brice in hard hats made by Keystone Vocational Services and reflective safety vests made by Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany, at the topping off ceremony for NIB’s new headquarters building.
The week before the ceremony, the final 6-foot steel beam was painted white and signed by NIB employees.

NIB associated nonprofit agencies were well represented at the ceremony: the beam was laid on a tarp from Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (Binghamton) and white paint from Lighthouse for the Blind of St. Louis was applied using brushes and rollers from ibMilwaukee. Employees signed the beam using SKILCRAFT® permanent markers in various colors from IFB Solutions (Winston-Salem). An NIB flag and a U.S. flag produced by Olmsted Center for Sight in Buffalo, New York, unfurled from the beam as a construction crane hoisted it to the top of the building.

NIB’s new headquarters building, featuring an expanded training facility with advanced technology to train employees of NIB and its associated agencies, and a spacious conference center to host training, networking, and industry events, is scheduled to open in fall 2018.
NIB WELCOMES NEVADA BLIND CHILDREN’S FOUNDATION

NIB is pleased to welcome the Nevada Blind Children’s Foundation (NBCF) to its nationwide network of associated nonprofit agencies. NBCF provides the essential building blocks – including an extended educational curriculum, extracurricular activities, social opportunities, and transitional skills – to children who are visually impaired.

Because Nevada has no school for people who are blind, NBCF provides “gap” services children need to become successful in life free of charge, including educational tutoring, technology specifically for people who are blind, special events, recreational activities, education for parents, support services, referrals, assessments, electronic resources, and a braille library.

The Nevada Blind Children’s Foundation’s comprehensive approach removes obstacles to success by ensuring each child who is blind or visually impaired – and his or her family – have access to basic necessities. The agency provides a single point of contact who works with families and the community to ensure each child has access to the resources needed to thrive, and creates a continuum of care that allows education professionals, parents, and health care professionals to work together.
APPLICATIONS NOW AVAILABLE FOR 2018 ROEDER SCHOLARSHIP

Applications for the 2018 Joseph Roeder Scholarship are now available on the NIB website. The scholarship provides a one-time award of $2,500 for an undergraduate or graduate student who is legally blind to pursue a college degree in a business-related field.

The scholarship is named for Joe Roeder, senior accessible technology specialist at NIB from 1997 until his death in 2010. Roeder was instrumental in the development of the Section 508 electronic and information technology accessibility standards of the Rehabilitation Act, which require all federal government agencies to provide accessible data and information for employees with disabilities.

Applications are available at http://NIB.org/roeder. Materials, including proof of legal blindness, must be submitted online no later than Friday, May 11, 2018. The winner will be announced in June.
AN AMERICAN CLASSIC
SKILCRAFT U.S. GOVERNMENT PEN

50 YEARS ★ 1968-2018

Crafted with pride and precision in the United States by Americans who are blind.

EXPERIENCE THE LEGACY AT NIB.ORG/PEN.