As interest in reshoring U.S. jobs grows, NIB and its associated agencies have a trained and experienced American workforce already in place.
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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.
A GREAT AMERICAN JOBS STORY

As more industries recognize the benefits of local production and sourcing, there’s a movement afoot to bring jobs back to the United States. It’s a movement NIB heartily endorses, but can’t join in for one simple reason: Our jobs never left.

Each year, NIB creates hundreds of U.S.-based jobs for people who are blind in nearly every sector of the economy—from cutting-edge manufacturing to professional and technology services. These jobs help people who are blind achieve greater independence and reduce their reliance on government benefits, while strengthening our national economic base along the way.

NIB recognizes that in today’s job market, the ability to hit the ground running is a key part of securing and maintaining
employment. NIB training programs equip people who are blind with the skills needed to pursue a wide range of career options that suit their interests and professional goals. Our programs also do something more: They help people who are blind build the confidence needed to live more independent lives.

For nearly 80 years, thousands of talented and capable people who are blind have chosen to be a part of this great American jobs story. NIB is proud to provide them with the training and tools to help them achieve their own versions of the American Dream, right here at home.

Kevin A. Lynch
President and
Chief Executive Officer
A GREAT AMERICAN WORKFORCE

As interest in reshoring U.S. jobs grows, NIB and its associated agencies have a trained and experienced American workforce already in place.

ON THE COVER

Tamra Foley, shown here with her guide dog Mason, is a shift supervisor in the contact center at the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Utica, New York.
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PROFILE

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Advocating for fair wages and employment opportunities hits close to home for Congressman Gregg Harper.

BY JENNIFER CLICK

A reliable advocate for people with disabilities, Congressman Gregg Harper (R-MS3) knows plenty about the challenges they face on a daily basis. His only son, Livingston, was diagnosed at age 4 with Fragile X syndrome, an inherited genetic condition that causes difficulties ranging from learning disabilities to autism-like disorders to mental retardation.

Harper remembers the prognosis for Livingston was “very negative.” The literature he and his wife Sidney read was so discouraging they threw it out. Together the couple decided that rather than place limitations on their son, they would work to help him reach his full potential. The journey wasn’t easy – Livingston had to work harder and longer to master even basic skills. But the persistence paid off – he recently graduated from Mississippi State University.

Harper’s experience with Livingston helped shape him into a powerful advocate not just for people with Fragile X syndrome, but for all Americans with disabilities, including people who are blind. In 2010, Mississippi Industries for the Blind (MIB) named Harper an AbilityOne Champion in recognition of his efforts to “create good paying jobs with excellent benefits for people who are blind.”

In presenting the award, MIB Executive Director Mike Chew called Harper “a
steadfast supporter” who “clearly understands that the high unemployment rate among people who are blind is not acceptable, and that action is needed now.”

In Congress, Harper is a tireless advocate for helping people with disabilities become members of the workforce and reduce their reliance on Social Security Disability Insurance. Since 2013, he has been introducing legislation in Congress to address subminimum wages authorized under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Earlier this year Harper introduced the Transitioning to Integrated and Meaningful Employment (TIME) Act of 2017, which seeks to limit the use of subminimum wage certificates and eventually phase out the program.

“Section 14(c) of the FLSA, enacted out of a false understanding regarding the true capacity of people with disabilities, currently prevents nearly 200,000 people with disabilities from gaining access to the work and training environments that build their capacity and allow them to acquire meaningful skills and better employment opportunities,” Harper said in introducing the legislation. He called Section 14(c) “an expression of low
expectations” that doesn’t reflect the capabilities of people with disabilities.

NIB quickly committed its strong support for the TIME Act. The organization and its board of directors have long promoted and encouraged payment of at least the federal minimum wage for all employees who are blind. In fiscal year 2016, NIB and its associated agencies paid employees an average hourly rate of $11.22.

The TIME Act of 2017 represents Harper’s continuing effort to address the issue of subminimum wages under Section 14(c). Although previous efforts have not made it to a vote in the House, he has recast the legislation as a jobs bill intended to remove barriers to employment opportunities for people with disabilities and is optimistic about its chances.

If the legislation isn’t passed in this session of Congress Harper will likely introduce it again. Life has shown him first-hand that persistence pays off.

Jennifer Click is editor-in-chief of Opportunity magazine.
SAVING BENEFITS
BUILDING INDEPENDENCE

The Military Resale program not only provides an important non-cash benefit to military families, it creates a path to personal independence for hundreds of people who are blind.

BY RICK WEBSTER

In more than 245 military commissaries worldwide, members of the active duty military and guard, reservists, retirees, and their eligible family members, shop for groceries and thousands of other products at deeply discounted prices. Commissary shopping is a non-cash benefit critical for military families – especially enlisted members with young families – who save thousands
of dollars annually by shopping at the stores and purchasing SKILCRAFT® and other products.

Seventeen NIB associated nonprofit agencies participate in the Military Resale (MR) program providing products to the commissaries. More than 400 people who are blind work at these agencies in jobs that depend on the MR program. They produce nearly 800 different items at 19 manufacturing locations.

The MR program offers people who are blind an opportunity to support our military men and women and their families, as well as veterans, by providing quality products for use at home while they build personal and economic independence for themselves and their families. Employees at NIB associated agencies take great pride in the fact that military members and their families recognize the SKILCRAFT name and count on it to deliver quality and value.

Change on the Horizon
Congress appropriates more than $1 billion annually to support the MR program and store operations through the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA). As far back as the 1960s, Congress has debated whether to continue the commissary program as is, or make significant reforms aimed at saving taxpayer dollars. Although the MR program has strong allies in Congress, in the current fiscal climate it is likely to be scrutinized for cost savings along with other federal programs.

For more than five years, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) has participated in the Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits, a national group of organizations supporting the MR program and this important non-cash benefit.
for military members. The Coalition vigorously advocates for continued appropriations and a thoughtful examination of reform options that maintain this important benefit promised to members of the military.

Over the years, DeCA has found areas for cost savings in the MR program. Congress has authorized some changes, such as introducing private label products in the commissaries and a limited pilot program allowing variable pricing of some products. In recent years, discussion has focused on creating a pilot program that would privatize a limited number of stores, but an effort last year to partially privatize the program was rejected. Further reform efforts are expected to continue and the program will likely look different in the near future.

NIB supports continued congressional appropriations for the military commissary program to maintain the benefits promised to military members and their families. NIB believes well-considered reform efforts should include input from commissary customers, and result in clear savings to taxpayers at no additional expense to military patrons.

The MR program does more than provide military constituents with quality products at substantial savings. It also provides a pathway to economic and personal independence for hundreds people who are blind, giving them an opportunity to serve not only those who serve, but the families who make sacrifices daily to protect our nation.

Rick Webster is vice president, public policy, at National Industries for the Blind.
As interest in reshoring U.S. jobs grows, NIB and its associated agencies have a trained and experienced American workforce already in place.

BY SHARON HORRIGAN LEONARD

There’s an eagerness these days to bring jobs back to America and provide consumers with the quality products and services long associated with the phrase “Made in the U.S.A.” For more than 5,800 employees who are blind working in NIB’s nationwide network of associated nonprofit agencies the movement is of little consequence: The products they produce and services they provide have always been made and delivered right here in the United States. That’s because since 1938, NIB’s mission has always been to create job opportunities for Americans who are blind or visually impaired in their own
communities, helping them become valued contributors to the U.S. economy and reducing reliance on government benefits.

NIB associated agencies make more than 7,000 different products in the U.S. each year – many of which support the U.S. military – and offer high-demand professional services like contact center staffing and contract close-out services, while providing training, competitive pay, benefits, career growth, and upward mobility to Americans who are blind or visually impaired.

**Supporting the Troops**

The San Antonio Lighthouse

Lesia Evans, who joined the San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind and Vision Impaired in February 2015 as a Sewing Machine Operator, works on the Army Combat Jacket. The agency produces about 4500 Army Combat Jackets per month.
for the Blind and Vision Impaired produces about 30,000 items daily, mostly for the U.S. military and federal government, says Nancy Lipton, director of public relations and events at the agency. Those items include military supplies such as helmet systems, combat shirts, and extreme and inclement weather pants. More than 75 percent of the 125 employees working in the sewing area are blind or visually impaired and the Lighthouse has a dedicated training area where employees can learn to sew complex garments. “We want to offer upward mobility, so if someone on our assembly line shows interest, we offer training on how to use the sewing machines to assemble our products,” says Lipton.

All employees are paid a prevailing wage and are offered a comprehensive benefits package that includes health care and retirement, but for Lipton, the jobs at the Lighthouse mean so much more. “It’s about empowerment for people who are blind or visually impaired. We take great pride in the quality of our products. Our military are wearing them as they protect us, and they deserve our very best. Everyone here takes that mission very seriously – it’s our way of supporting our country and our troops,” she says.

Partnering with the Aerospace Industry
In Washington state, The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. contracted with Boeing in 1951 to produce parts for airplanes. The partnership has been going strong ever since. Today, The Lighthouse, which is the largest employer of people who are DeafBlind in the nation, employs 90 people who are blind or visually impaired in its aerospace
Senior Machine Operator Cindy Dow works in the phenolics department at the Seattle facility of The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. Phenolics are used for molding, insulating, and in coatings and adhesives.

The machining area to produce 2.4 million airplane parts each year using injection molding and other complex manufacturing methods – all with a 99.9 percent quality rating. The Lighthouse – which operates 11 facilities – opened a new bolt assembly facility in South Carolina in 2016 that currently employs seven people, six of whom are blind. Still in the process of staffing the location, the agency’s goal is to employ 20 people at the facility by the end of the year.

Like many other NIB associated agencies, The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. has diversified its operations over the years to include
contract management services, contact center services, and manufacture of a variety of office products such as hanging file folders, wallboards, and standing easels. The agency also makes canteens and entrenching tools for the military. In addition to Boeing, Lighthouse customers include federal agencies, the Department of Defense, and commercial firms including Triumph Composite Systems Inc. and BAE Systems.

“We always have and always will provide U.S.-based jobs,” says Mike May, The Lighthouse’s president and CEO. “We are proud to offer superior products and services to our customers because it allows us to offer high-quality training and job opportunities for more than 260 people who are blind, DeafBlind, and blind with other disabilities.”

Improving Sight
At IFB Solutions in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a strategic business decision in 2000 to enter the optical field has been a win-win
for the agency and U.S. veterans, says Seth Anderson, director of marketing and communications for the agency. Several factors supported the agency’s entry into the optical industry, Anderson said. First, IFB leadership realized that as the U.S. population continues to age, the demand for corrective glasses and contact lenses will continue to increase. Second, Americans have become accustomed to receiving their eyeglasses quickly – within as little as 24 hours and no longer seven days – and this quick turnaround time, combined the unique qualities of each prescription, has kept the optical industry in the United States.

Another advantage of getting into the optical field for IFB Solutions was the machinery. “People who are blind can operate the machines to make the lenses with few if any changes,” notes Anderson. “Our lab is literally the same as any other optical lab.” IFB Solutions offers extensive job training to optical services staff, providing a mix of classroom instruction and hands-on training in using the equipment. The employees are so highly skilled, they could work at any optical manufacturing facility in the country.

The computerized process to transform what is essentially a clear plastic hockey puck to a customized lens is a highly technical one that the agency’s optical services division employees have mastered. The lab makes nearly 2,000 pairs of lenses each day – about 263,000 pairs each year – mostly for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) hospital system and U.S Navy Exchange Command (NEXCOM) centers. The agency is looking to expand
that customer base to the commercial market and recently entered into a partnership with Walmart Vision Centers. With pricing that’s competitive with – if not better than – other commercial entities, IFB must be doing something right: Business is brisk enough to warrant adding a second shift to accommodate demand.

In addition to the central lab that makes the lenses for glasses and contacts, IFB Solutions has opened 31 dispensing rooms in 24 VA hospitals throughout the United States, all staffed by IFB Solutions employees. These dispensing rooms allow veterans and their families to walk directly from a doctor’s office in the hospital to the dispensary to select their frames and order glasses or contact lenses.

The optical services division at IFB Solutions has opened new career paths for employees like Demarrious Bowens. Born legally blind with glaucoma, Bowens began working at IFB Solutions in the manufacturing facility as a sewing operator, then moved to the customer service department in the optical services division. Impressed with Bowens’ skills, his supervisor encouraged him to pursue certification through the American Board of Opticianry (ABO), the largest opticians’ certification organization in the world. After months of intensive study, Bowens took and passed the exam, making him only the third visually impaired person in the United States to complete the certification requirements. Bowens says the certification process helped him gain valuable technical knowledge that he uses in reviewing incoming customer orders and ensuring IFB can manufacture lenses to the requested specifications.
Rather than rest on his achievement, Bowens has chosen to give back. He recently worked with nine other optical services employees, including three who are visually impaired, to prepare them for the ABO exam. As part of that effort he developed a customized study guide and hosted weekly one-hour review sessions.

Many employees in the optical services division welcome the opportunity to give back to U.S. veterans. Rick Gaefe, an Army veteran himself, operates polishing equipment in the eyewear lab. When a prescription is made into a lens, the lens blank creates a rough, matte texture. Gaefe runs simultaneous finer machines that polish the lenses into a clear, smooth surface. In addition to his work in the lab, Gaefe mentors other employees and participates in the agency’s blind veterans support group and guide.
dog support group, making him a valuable member of the IFB Solutions family.

Providing Outstanding Customer Care
For more than 20 years, callers to the Albany Stratton VA Medical Center have reached a live person who can discuss their needs and direct their call to the right department. Employees of the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) in Utica, New York, have taken care of these veterans and their families under a long-standing contract. CABVI employees run the medical center switchboard and coding system and more recently, began staffing the front reception desk. The contract employs eight to ten people, 75 percent of whom are blind or visually impaired.

In addition, CABVI recently renewed a five-year contract with a federal customer, handling faxes, emails, and phone calls from customers in all 50 states, Canada, and Mexico. That operation, headquartered in Utica, employs 32 full-time employees. Both contracts, says Jessica Watson, vice president of services at the agency, require high levels of knowledge and computer skills.

“Our employees need to know a lot about the contracting organization and their products and services, so we can respond to customers correctly and direct them to the right places. Our calls average 10 to 12 minutes – most call centers average about three and a half minutes,” says Watson. “Our folks working on the federal contract learn a lot about federal rules, regulations, and operations.”

They are also highly skilled with computers. Watson
says employees typically toggle between five to seven screens per phone call. All employees at both locations are fully trained by CABVI and high employee satisfaction levels generally keep attrition low. But Watson admits a few good customer service representatives have been lured away by other employers in the community who appreciate their skills and professionalism – a loss for the center, but an indicator that CABVI is succeeding in its mission of helping people who are blind build meaningful careers.

“We have veterans working in Albany and Utica – we specifically target veterans when recruiting – and they take great pride in supporting their fellow veterans,” notes Watson. “But really, all of our employees take great pride in their jobs because it enables them to contribute to their communities, to be independent, and to support their families.”

CABVI’s mission, says Watson, is to offer people who are blind or visually impaired a variety of job opportunities – to give them career choices similar to their sighted peers. To that end, CABVI has diversified its business, also manufacturing dress neckerchiefs for the Navy that are made in the U.S.A. from start to finish. The agency also packages all of the examination gloves purchased by the Transportation Security Administration.

“We are constantly growing, offering career-track jobs for people who are blind or visually impaired,” says Watson. “We’re proud to be able to fulfill of our mission to provide U.S.-based jobs, goods and services.” It’s a sentiment shared by all of NIB’s associated agencies.

Sharon Horrigan Leonard is a freelance writer based in Asheville, North Carolina.
Defying the limiting expectations of others is a recurring theme in the life of Misty Stenberg, of MidWest Enterprises for the Blind, in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Born with severe visual impairment, Stenberg insisted on taking driver’s education at the age of 16 with her sighted classmates. Assuming she would not pass the driving exam, the teachers didn’t make her master all the rudiments of driving others were required to, so Stenberg had to take the course twice. She accrued five temporary permits while working to secure her license, but persevered until her name and photo were printed on a permanent Michigan driver’s license.

“Regardless of what other people believe you can do, you need to set your own goals and defy what they think,” Stenberg says. Her determination to set her own course has enabled her to achieve things even she never imagined.
As a single mother of three children, Stenberg enrolled at Davenport University and earned a bachelor’s degree in business administration for computer networking. Nonetheless, she repeatedly found herself drawn to jobs working with people rather than computers.

In September 2007 Stenberg joined MidWest Enterprises as a seasonal employee assembling pens in the production department. By 2009 she was promoted to the customer service department while also serving as an IT specialist. Through the Quality Work Environment initiative, a collaboration of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission®, NIB, and SourceAmerica, Stenberg was soon identified as an employee with leadership potential. When NIB launched Advocates for Leadership and Employment, a two-year program devoted to training advocates on public policy and engaging legislators on issues affecting people who are blind, Stenberg was selected as a member of the inaugural class.

Stenberg credits the program with sparking her passion for public policy work. “It was such an exciting experience to realize we can change things and get people employed by removing the stigma of visual impairment,” she says. “I’ve been given such wonderful opportunities and I want to make sure others have the same opportunities to achieve.”

Since completing advocacy training, Stenberg has been promoted to public policy liaison for MidWest Enterprises. “Misty is passionate about this role,” says her supervisor, Vicky Hickok. “She really understands the community’s special needs and brings such commitment, professionalism, and excitement to her work.”
“When I first came here, I never imagined my career would go this way,” Stenberg says. “I just love this place. We have a phenomenal team and a supportive atmosphere that has allowed me to keep learning new skills and find my passion with public policy. I can’t imagine my life without it.”

The warm feelings are clearly mutual, as Hickok explains why Stenberg stands out: “She’s positive and cheerful. She brings the same professionalism and excitement to every job, whether she’s discussing policy or talking to a customer about how she can address their needs.”

Looking to the future, Stenberg wants to expand her role in public policy and become a full-time champion and voice for people who are blind.
Irenesa Olmo has been lighting things up at the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI) in Rochester, New York, since her arrival four years ago, after a former employer, claiming it could not accommodate her vision impairment, referred Olmo to ABVI.

That employer’s loss became ABVI’s good fortune when Olmo, fluent in English and Spanish, started as a customer service representative in the agency’s contact center in late 2013. Soon she was translating scripts for agency contracts held by the contact center and translating and simplifying contract training manuals, in addition to excelling in her customer service position. Ultimately, Olmo was cross-trained on 12 federal and state agency contracts, fielding calls in both English and Spanish on a wide variety of topics.

Promoted to contact center unit lead, Olmo’s thirst for learning soon led supervisors to nominate her for Leap into Leadership, an eight-week program that teaches management
skills to emerging leaders. A year later she was promoted to Environmental Protection Agency information specialist, advising callers on compliance with federal regulations.

Less than a year later, Olmo was again promoted to customer relationship supervisor for ABVI’s manufacturing department. She now supervises one representative and still does what she loves best – answering customer calls, helping with their questions, and ensuring they receive the best service possible.

Olmo serves on several agency committees; even her husband and three children volunteer with ABVI’s annual fundraiser. “The best thing about working at ABVI is feeling so comfortable and working with such a great group of people,” Olmo says. “It motivates me to keep learning new things and volunteering my time to agency projects. The people here aren’t just my co-workers, they’re more like my extended family.”

“Irenesa approaches everything she does with passion and a desire to learn as much as possible and be her absolute best,” says Larry Palumbos, a former manager. “She demonstrates a positive attitude regardless of the circumstances.”

Those circumstances have not always been easy. After earning a degree in criminal investigations and receiving awards for academic excellence, Olmo was diagnosed at age 24 with Keratoconus, a progressive eye disease that causes increasingly distorted and blurred vision.

“The diagnosis and the eye disease took a while to adjust to,” says Olmo. “But with the tools and services I’ve received
through ABVI and the New York State Commission for the Blind, there’s no stopping me.”

Olmo displays the same energy and commitment in her personal life, volunteering at her children’s schools and also participating in Goodwill’s GoodGuides® youth mentoring program.

“Irenesa exemplifies everything that Peter J. Salmon valued: talent, self-sufficiency, and courage,” says ABVI President and CEO Gidget Hopf. “She has challenged herself to take on new opportunities and in so doing has contributed greatly to the success of our organization.”

Looking to the future, Olmo says “I love what I do and am looking forward to developing my leadership skills so that I can empower others with visual impairments to achieve all they desire.”

Rosemarie Lally is a freelance writer and editor based in Washington, D.C.
MILTON J. SAMUELSON AWARD

Harold Brough
South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind

Sierra Diggan
North Central Sight Services

Andy Hoffman
Envision

Melissa Padron
San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Dominick Secchiaroli
Olmsted Center for Sight

Thomas Stivers
Travis Association for the Blind

Tanessa Brown
Industries of the Blind Greensboro

Laurence Ellman
Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind

Cheryl Kindig
VisionCorps

Lisa SanMiguel
Beacon Lighthouse

Brandon Smith
Louisiana Association for the Blind

Canyon Sullivan
West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
2017 EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR

Robert Volker
Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Jill Barbon-Fish
Blind Industries and Services of Maryland

Tony Butler
Lions Volunteer Blind Industries

John Denmark
North Central Sight Services

Jeffrey Frazier
Industries of the Blind Greensboro

Alan Halverson
Outlook Nebraska

Grant Weathers
IFB Solutions

Malik Bevel
Lighthouse Works

Scott Collins
Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind

Joe Feigl
Arizona Industries For The Blind

Sherrie Gabrielson
NewView Oklahoma

Mark Haynes
Lions Industries
MILTON J. SAMUELSON AWARD
PETER J. SALMON AWARD

Cornell Williams
Alphapointe

William Bishop
East Texas Lighthouse
for the Blind

Ricky Covington
RLCB

Juanita Ferrel
Chicago Lighthouse
Industries

Anthony AJ Gilmore
Keystone Vocational
Services

Tracy Hill
Louisiana Association
for the Blind

Joshua Woods
Lighthouse Works

Jeffrey Broz
Clovernook Center
for the Blind and
Visually Impaired

Brian Curtin
ibMilwaukee

John Flores
South Texas
Lighthouse
for the Blind

Hector Gonzales
Lighthouse Louisiana

Heather Hoffman
IFB
Solutions-Arkansas
2017 EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR

Herlene Jones
Eversa Community Services

Jeff Lang
Alabama Industries for the Blind

Ignacio Munguia
The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc.

Chandra Patel
Alphapointe

Clayton Sanders
IFB Solutions

Charlie Kamp
The Lighthouse for the Blind - St. Louis

Terry Lewis
LC Industries

William Murray
Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany

Roberta Perales
San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Gerry Slusher
Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Alice Watson
Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind
MILTON J. SAMUELSON AWARD

Todd Pressley
MidWest Enterprises for the Blind

Joyce Tucker
Mississippi Industries for the Blind

John Ullman
Lions Services

PETER J. SALMON AWARD

Nedeljko Nano Kukic
Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired - Utica

Matthew Mulig
Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

Harold Newbold
Georgia Industries for the Blind

Robert Perez
Travis Association for the Blind

Julius Perez
Beyond Vision

Todd Pressley
MidWest Enterprises for the Blind

Ronald Stukes
Bestwork Industries for the Blind

Joyce Tucker
Mississippi Industries for the Blind

John Ullman
Lions Services

Alan Will
Olmsted Center for Sight

Cori Wills
Bosma Enterprises

Jerry Woodrome
Envision
AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

INSPIRING POSSIBILITIES

Serving people who are blind in six Pennsylvania counties, North Central Sight Services in Williamsport provides employment and rehabilitation skills that make independence possible.

BY MEGAN PROFFITT

NIB associated nonprofit agency North Central Sight Services Inc. (NCSS), in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary this year. Founded in 1957, North Central Sight Services provides employment, rehabilitation, prevention and screening services, and educational programs to people who are blind living in Williamsport and a six county area in north central Pennsylvania.

A History of Growth

NCSS was founded as the Lycoming County Association for the Blind, part of a network of agencies the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind was actively establishing to support people who are blind in their local communities. In its early years, the agency was funded primarily by local Lions Clubs, the Harry Plankenhorn Foundation, and the local United Way.

At that time, the agency’s primary focus was on sending “visitors” to the homes of people in Lycoming County who were blind, to assist them with transportation and

*North Central Sight Services was founded in 1957 as the Lycoming County Association for the Blind.*
provide reading materials on tape from the Library of Congress. There was little focus on employment opportunities.

In 1974, the organization received a substantial grant from the federal government to expand services. Current President and CEO Robert Garrett was hired to work with people in the community who were blind to help them live independently in their own homes.

In 1982, major efforts were made to expand the employment and prevention programs, areas that continue to thrive today. In 2016, the NCSS team provided 5,604 free vision screenings to children and adults in Lycoming, Clinton, Centre, Sullivan, Bradford, and Tioga Counties.

Garrett was named executive director of the Lycoming County Association for...
John Denmark, 2016 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award nominee, uses eSight glasses in his job as a vending operator for NCSS. Positive feedback from employees led NCSS to launch an eSight grant program that will allow area residents who are visually impaired to benefit from the technology.
the Blind in 1986. “I recall
the interview very well,” he
says. “The board of directors
asked about my vision for
the organization and I said I
felt it was essential to grow
our industry and employment
program, continue to look for
new funding and at some point,
conduct a capital campaign to
expand and renovate the 901
Memorial Avenue building.”

Two years after Garrett’s
appointment, the agency
changed its name to North
Central Sight Services to
better describe the breadth
of services and employment
opportunities it offered. In
1988, it became associated
with NIB and conducted a
capital campaign to increase
the facility’s square footage
by one-third. The agency
then began producing
products for the federal
government and by 1990
had increased employment
opportunities by further
expanding its product line.

Employment at the Core
In 2016, people who are blind
or visually impaired worked
more than 53,300 hours at
NCSS. The agency provides a
variety of business services
that offer people who are blind
a choice of career paths in
areas as diverse as document
management and destruction,
vending services, customer
service, shipping and
receiving, plastic grinding,
and packaging. The agency
recently received a grant
from the Lycoming Economic
Development Foundation
at the First Community
Partnership of Pennsylvania to
implement a formal workplace
training program to bring the
next generation of associates
to the agency.

A member of the current
generation, Kenny Bower
has worked at North Central
Sight Services for 34 years.
Bower single-handedly shred
676,664 pounds of paper in
2016. “Employment means
NCSS President and CEO Robert Garrett, who joined the agency in 1974, has dedicated his career to creating employment opportunities that empower people who are blind or visually impaired to live independently.

I have a job, security, and most of all, a purpose,” he said. Bower added hard drive destruction to his repertoire of skills last year.

Pioneering Next Generation Technology
In late 2015, NCSS launched a partnership with eSight Corporation of Toronto, Canada, to demonstrate its revolutionary technology in the community. eSight eyewear is a wearable device that enhances the functional vision of people who have low vision or are legally blind.
In 2016, NCSS was able to provide six pairs of eSight glasses to its associates, a $90,000 investment. “eSight for me means being able to see life in a whole new way,” says John Denmark, 2016 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award nominee and vending operator for NCSS. “It has improved my ability to see things tremendously. It makes doing my job so much easier. The technology is simply amazing.”

Denmark has become a strong advocate for eSight, speaking about his experience at community events throughout the past year. Due to the positive feedback from its employees, NCSS is taking the initiative beyond its own four walls, recently launching its own eSight grant program that will allow Lycoming County residents who are visually impaired to benefit from the technology.

At NCSS, growing opportunities has been a consistent theme throughout the organization’s 60 years. Advancing the latest in technology to aid people who are blind in building fulfilling lives is just one more facet of its mission to provide exceptional programs, services and employment as well as excellent education, prevention services, and products to all customers.

Megan Day Proffitt is marketing and public relations manager at North Central Sight Services Inc.
Blind Enterprises of Oregon

Headquarters: Portland, Oregon  
President/CEO: Tami Foss  
Founded: 1991

Capabilities at-a-glance: Embroidered insignia name and service uniform tapes for the United States Marines Corps and public safety departments such as police and fire; specialty tapes upon request.

Did you know? Employees at Blind Enterprises of Oregon make more than 400,000 name and service tapes annually.

More info: blindenterprises.com
Ensight Skills Center

Headquarters: Fort Collins, Colorado
President/CEO: Denny Moyer
Founded: 2001

Capabilities at-a-glance: Low-vision eye exams, occupational therapy, assistive technologies, training, support groups

Did you know? Ensight Skills Center hosts an annual Halloween Eye Ball fundraiser.

More info: insightskills.org
Bestwork Industries for the Blind

Headquarters: Cherry Hill, New Jersey
President/CEO: Belinda S. Moore, MSW
Founded: 1981

Capabilities at-a-glance: Textile and military apparel, high visibility safety clothing, laundry nets, wiping towels, warehouse and distribution operations, paper converting.

Did you know? Bestwork Industries hosts an annual employee picnic sponsored by the Lions Clubs of District 16 L New Jersey.

More info: bestworkindustries.org
Georgia Industries for the Blind

Headquarters: Bainbridge, Georgia
President/CEO: Mike Jackson and Luis Narimatsu
Founded: 1949

Capabilities at-a-glance: Sewn products, office products, pillows, kitting, call center, warehousing, screen printing.

Did you know? GIB’s nationally recognized safety program received the Georgia Department of Labor Commissioner's Cup award for health and safety; its quality system is ISO 9001/2008 certified.

More info: gvs.georgia.gov/georgia-industries-blind
Connect to what matters

Products and Services with an Impact

By procuring quality products and services through National Industries for the Blind, an AbilityOne® Authorized Enterprise, you provide meaningful employment for people who are blind. Get connected at NIB.org/Connect.

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One of the hardest aspects of living with a visual impairment is dealing with the daily flood of printed materials that threatens to drown you in a roiling sea of text fonts of every size, shape, and legibility imaginable.

Having a sighted assistant, family member, or volunteer has been the most efficient way for a person who is blind to separate the printed wheat from the chaff. Without such assistance, technology options have been limited and often incredibly expensive – especially portable devices.

The first portable optical character recognition (OCR) reader was the result of a partnership between the Kurzweil Corporation and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). The camera device, which used a Nokia N82 somewhat-smartphone, was revolutionary for people who were blind.

Since the first iPhone was released in 2007, app developers have taken their best shots – or ‘snapshots’ as it were – at providing mobile OCR for free or at nominal cost. Users who are
blind will recognize names like Text Grabber, SayText, Text Detective, Goggles, and Prizmo, among others. But unfortunately, the results with these apps remain all over the page in terms of usability and accuracy.

In my frustration with the quality of OCR smartphone apps, I decided to bite the bullet, dig into my wallet and pay for the KNFB Reader app for iPhone. Thankfully, the price is considerably less than the 2005 model, but at $99, it is still an expensive phone app.

Then I stumbled across Office Lens, a productivity app from Microsoft. Designed for road warriors and office pros, Office Lens allows users to snap photos of printed and handwritten materials and upload them to One Drive, One Note, or Outlook email; attach them as .jpg images to outgoing text messages; or even convert them into Word documents, PowerPoint slides, or PDFs.

Even better, it’s free. For users who are blind, the hidden gem within the app is its ability to perform OCR very well, as well as any OCR reader on the market. What’s more, Microsoft recently incorporated another output format, Immersive Reader, with a built-in voice that reads scanned text aloud.

The Office Lens user interface is both accessible and intuitive for people who are blind. The app includes settings to capture text from documents, business cards, and even white boards and photos (though I was unable to perform OCR successfully on the latter two settings).

Using iPhone’s Frame Guide with voice over makes alignment a cinch. Audible instructions to move left, move back, etc. help users
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.

I plan to make Office Lens my primary OCR app until I come across something that takes care of all of my professional and personal print needs better. Whatever that is, it certainly won’t be cheaper.

Office Lens is available for free on both the App Store and Google Play and is available for Windows Mobile OS. The Immersive Reader feature is not available on Android, but Android’s Talkback screen reader should be able to compensate.

Using Office Lens requires some sort of Microsoft account, such as Outlook email, Live mail, or Hotmail. Users can also download free Word and PowerPoint apps to create and edit all sorts of content from Office Lens scans. The only drawback is the need to have a data or network connection to upload images to Microsoft’s processing servers, meaning OCR processing can’t be performed offline.

center the document, receipt, or white board within the camera lens; the phone vibrates when centered.
READY TO LAUNCH

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

Office Products

1. SKILCRAFT® 2018 Wall Calendars and Appointment Planners

SKILCRAFT® 2018 Wall Calendars and Appointment Planners help you keep track of important dates and appointments. Made of 100% post-consumer recycled paper and printed with soy inks, planner books also feature covers made using 50% recycled content. Available in a variety of sizes and styles including monthly, weekly, and daily wire bound appointment planners, 12-month wall calendars in three sizes, and two-sided erasable laminated calendars. Produced by Chicago Lighthouse Industries in Chicago, Illinois.

2. SKILCRAFT® LCD Digital Radio-Controlled Clock

Ideal for use on desktops or hanging on a wall, the SKILCRAFT® LCD Digital Radio-Controlled Clock keeps highly accurate time with a radio-controlled movement. LCD digital display with date, day of week, year, and temperature can be set in standard or military format. Includes dual alarms with snooze function and fold-out stand for desktop display. Produced by Chicago Lighthouse Industries in Chicago, Illinois.
3. **SKILCRAFT® HP Compatible Laser Toner Cartridges**
Competitively priced, remanufactured HP-compatible SKILCRAFT® Laser Toner Cartridges are designed using precision color cartridge technology to meet HP standards for page yield, image quality, and color precision. TAA-compliant cartridges assembled in the U.S.A. are made using 35% post-consumer content and meet ISO 14001 recycling standards. Satisfaction guaranteed with one-year warranty from date of purchase. Produced by Alabama Industries for the Blind in Talladega.

**Maintenance, Repair, and Operating Supplies**

4. **SKILCRAFT® Microfiber Tube Mop Heads**
SKILCRAFT® Microfiber Tube Mop Heads outperform traditional mops in cleaning and durability. Designed to replace traditional wet mops, the highly absorbent microfiber requires less cleaning solution and offers a faster drying time; textured finish loosens and holds dirt until rinsed. Use with traditional mop handles, these 80% polyester/20% nylon mop heads are assembled in the U.S.A. Produced by Alphapointe in Kansas City, Missouri.

5. **SKILCRAFT® Wire Staff Marking Flags**
Perfect for underground utilities, surveying, sewers, and landscaping, these tough, tear-resistant PVC flags on steel stakes withstand high winds and harsh weather. Available in a variety of colors, flag sizes, and stake heights;
SKILCRAFT Expands Line of Tactical Pens

NIB associated agency Alphapointe, in Kansas City, Missouri, is expanding the SKILCRAFT® line of tactical pens with the introduction of two new multi-function writing instruments: the Luminator and the Defender. Like SKILCRAFT’s B3 Aviator pens, the Luminator and Defender are manufactured to meet exacting standards and perform in the most challenging environments. Specially designed to fit flight suit and military uniform pockets, all SKILCRAFT tactical pens feature a non-reflective finish on heavy-duty metal barrels for durability.

The SKILCRAFT® Luminator LED Light Pen features a red LED light that illuminates as you write for use at night or in inclement weather. The pressurized filler writes in sold in quantities of 100. Produced by the West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in San Angelo, Texas.

JanSan Products

6. GOJO SKILCRAFT® Mild Hand Soap
Lightly scented GOJO SKILCRAFT® Mild Hand Soap is made with a dye-free formula that is gentle on skin. This USDA-certified biobased soap is free of triclosan and parabens. Available in convenient pump bottles or 1 liter refills. Produced by Travis Association for the Blind in Austin, Texas.

These and thousands of other products are available for purchase at AbilityOne.com, GSAAvantage.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.
The Luminator and Defender join SKILCRAFT’s B3 Aviator multifunction pens, which offer the convenience of a 0.5mm pencil with screw-top eraser and two-color ink pen in one writing instrument. The Triple Function pen includes a touch screen stylus. B3 Aviator pens provide a 2,000 foot write-out per ink color and the stylus on the triple-function pen provides 10,000 swipes. All pens B3 Aviator pens are FOD and TAA compliant.
NIB EXPANDS PROMOTE TECHNOLOGY TRAINING PROGRAM

Working to make its Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE) program available to more people who are blind, NIB hosted an intensive train-the-trainer session for 10 assistive technology (AT) trainers from seven NIB associated agencies, March 27-31, 2017.

The trainers traveled to NIB headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, for the week-long immersive program aimed at preparing them to offer ProMOTE training at their home agencies. Consultants from TCS Associates, who developed the ProMOTE program in conjunction with NIB, led lectures, discussions, and group activities focused on everything the agency participants will need to successfully launch and manage a ProMOTE program of their own, from setting up a classroom, to new methods for teaching a variety of AT elements, to how to work through common classroom scenarios.

“I have a new perspective on how to use different teaching techniques and better connect with students,” said Jan Lynch, an AT software training manager from East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in Tyler, Texas. “It was wonderful connecting with the other trainers, now we have a network of resources to help each other.”

The next ProMOTE program Train-the-Training session is slated for September at East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind. To learn more about the ProMOTE program, contact NIB Employment Support Services Program Director Billy Parker at bparker@nib.org.
Ten assistive technology trainers from seven associated nonprofit agencies participated the first-ever Train-the-Trainer session for NIB’s innovative ProMOTE program. Pictured from left to right are (front row) Art Rizzino, Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh; Pablo Cesar Morales, IFB Solutions; Jan Lynch, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind; Imtiaz Khan, Olmsted Center for Sight; Spero Pipakis, Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh; with (back row) Muhammad Salman Haider, Bosma Enterprises; Elhanna Porter, Olmsted Center for Sight; Tim Shockley, The Lighthouse for the Blind; Michael Mote, IFB Solutions; Greg Aikens, Center for the Visually Impaired.
Col. Ned Rupp, USA (Ret.) celebrated 30 years with NIB in April 2017. Rupp joined NIB as a project coordinator in 1987 and over the years advanced to Senior product development specialist before taking on his current role. As NIB veterans affairs specialist, Rupp leads NIB’s outreach efforts to wounded warriors and organizations supporting veterans through the Operation Warfighter program.

*NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch (left) presented Col. Ned Rupp, USA (Ret.) with a plaque recognizing 30 years of service, and a framed group photo of NIB headquarters staff that includes congratulatory messages from some of his many NIB co-workers over the years.*
NIB WELCOMES NEW ASSOCIATED AGENCY

NIB is pleased to welcome My Blind Spot in New York City to its nationwide network of associated nonprofit agencies. My Blind Spot provides outreach, advocacy, education, and services by promoting an inclusive culture and accessible digital infrastructure to ensure equal access to employment, education, recreation, and independent living opportunities for people with disabilities.

CLARK RACHFAL JOINS PUBLIC POLICY TEAM

Clark Rachfal has joined the NIB public policy team as program manager. Clark has nearly 10 years of experience in government relations, including serving as a congressional legislative analyst. A member of the U.S. Paralympics National Team as a tandem cyclist since 2007, Clark has been named National Champion in the U.S. Para-Cycling Championships 18 times; was World Champion in the 2009 UCI Para-Cycling Track World Championships; and received bronze medals in UCI Para-Cycling World Championship contests in 2011 and 2014.
NYSPSP HONORS OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEES

Employee of the year nominees from nonprofit agencies affiliated with the New York State Preferred Source Program for People Who Are Blind (NYSPSP) were honored at an awards luncheon during the New York State Commission for the Blind’s Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Institute conference in May.

Ralph "Randy" Ashcroft, a production employee at Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany (NABA), was named the 2017 NYSPSP Employee of the Year. A member of the agency’s Health and Safety Committee and Quality Work Environment Team, Ashcroft commutes five hours round trip to NABA. He has worked on a variety of NYSPSP products, from safety vests to trooper boots, for New York State customers including the state Department of Transportation, the New York City Transit Authority, Metro North Railroad, Long Island Railroad and the New York State Trooper Academy.

NYSPSP is a state-mandated initiative managed by NIB to create and sustain employment opportunities for New Yorkers who are blind or visually impaired. Empire State Employment Resources for the Blind (ESERB), which administers the NYSPSP, sponsored the awards luncheon.
Brian Daniels, Associate Commissioner, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, with NYSPSP Employee of the Year nominees. Pictured left to right are Kevin Snow, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Binghamton; Milton Harding, Alphapointe, Brooklyn; Randy Ashcroft, Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany; Dennis Mahoney, Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Utica; and Jessica McTiernan, Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Rochester; with Carrie Laney, Executive Director, NYSPSP, and Ron Tascarella, Chairperson, ESERB Board of Directors. Tyler Palermo, of Olmsted Center for Sight in Buffalo, and Bina Kayastha, of Visions in New York City, were unable to attend.
COMPLIMENTARY ADMISSION FOR GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

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