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80 Years of Innovation

NIB and its associated nonprofit agencies embrace creativity and innovation to expand employment opportunities in a rapidly changing world.
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Jennifer Click
Editor-in-Chief

Laura Reimers
Vice President, Communications

Mike Johnson
Director, Communications

Lisa Koroma
Communications Design Manager

Jermaine Eubanks
Communications Design Specialist

Opportunity welcomes news and stories about the careers and capabilities of people who are blind. Contact communications@nib.org.

To add or change a mailing address, contact communications@nib.org.

NIB Executive Team:

Kevin A. Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer

Angela Hartley
Executive Vice President and Chief Program Officer

Steven T. Brice
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer

Jon Katz
Vice President, Business Development and Channels

Heather Lyons
General Counsel

Andy Mueck
Vice President, Operations

Carrie Laney
Executive Director, New York State Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers Who Are Blind

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.
When the Wagner-O'Day Act was signed into law in 1938, society had a very limited view of the capabilities of people who are blind. Those who were able to find work were mostly limited to assembling mops and brooms, weaving rattan and caning chairs, or tuning pianos. The founding of NIB, with its mission to create, sustain, and improve employment opportunities for people who are blind, marked a turning point.

Today, we are living in a time of unparalleled progress, where technological innovations are making the world accessible to people who are blind in ways only dreamed of when NIB was founded. While our mission has remained constant, the means of achieving it have evolved as those innovations have opened doors to new careers for people who are blind.

Now, people who are blind working at NIB associated nonprofit agencies are protecting government information networks from cyber threats, managing supply chains that support military operations around the world, crafting precision-cut optical lenses for our nation’s veterans, closing out contracts for the Department of Defense, driving forklifts and operating other advanced machinery, and performing work in nearly every sector of the economy.

In a future where opportunity is limited only by our imagination, NIB will continue to embrace innovation to empower people who are blind to choose their preferred career path and chart their own journey to achieving the American Dream.

Kevin A. Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer
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To create a work environment that sustains employees on good days and bad, Reinhard Mabry gets serious about fun.

BY GREG PITKOFF

On his first day at Kansas City-based Alphapointe, President and CEO Reinhard Mabry received a company credit card. “The name was Richard E. Malloy. They didn’t even get the middle initial right,” he recalls. “I didn’t get upset, though. I just thought: ‘Instant alias!’ ”

Given his unusual name, Mabry has learned to roll with the punches when people mangle it. By the same token, he says, as daunting as creating new employment opportunities for people who are blind can seem, he believes work can – and should – be fun.

“We need to be able to loosen up to release some pressure,” he says. “We’ve had company picnics for years and I’ve been right there on the frontlines. I’ve taken my share of abuse in the dunk tank. I even rode a mechanical bull in my suit pants and tie. It was all great fun.”

When Alphapointe merged with Brooklyn-based New York City Industries for the Blind, Mabry confronted the challenge of blending two distinct cultures into a cohesive operation. To build employee engagement, he introduced a rivalry centered around the locations’ respective professional sports teams.

“All the teams played one another, the location with the winning team got a trophy and a specialty food from the other town,” he explains. Cheesecakes from Brooklyn and barbecue from Kansas City helped people feel more connected.

Over time, employees become like family, he says, sharing life’s highs and lows. When a beloved agency employee died, Mabry brought staff members together to grieve the loss of one of their own. “I’d never had to do that before,” he says. “It really drove home the importance of co-workers as family.”

**Reinhard Mabry, president and CEO at NIB associated agency Alphapointe, is also president of the National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind.**

With nearly 25 years in the industry, Mabry knows working to deliver rehabilitation and training services to people who are blind can make for long and stressful days. Usually one of the most “buttoned up” people in the room, he affects a staid persona, but is quick to point out that a jocular character lies beneath.

*A Rewarding Mission*

“When I leave work, no matter how harrowing the day may
have been, I always have a smile on my face,” Mabry says. “If we did our jobs well, someone worked that day, someone’s life was changed for the better. How can you not be energized by that?”

Mabry will need all the energy he can muster now that he has taken on the role of president of the National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind (NAEPB).

“The nonprofits that have created sustainable jobs for Americans who are blind are facing a host of challenges, but there is also tremendous opportunity,” Mabry says. “The NAEPB’s mission is to strengthen and maximize opportunities for people who are blind, so our members work closely with NIB to help develop new career paths.”

“The unemployment rate among people who are blind is extraordinarily high, despite federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination based on disability,” he notes. “During my tenure as president of the NAEPB, I want to enhance our visibility and perceived value to the nation. And if we can have some fun achieving that goal, so much the better.”

Greg Pitkoff is a communications consultant based in Brooklyn, New York.
For 80 years, NIB and its associated nonprofit agencies have embraced creativity and innovation to expand employment opportunities in a rapidly changing world.

**BY SHARON HORRIGAN**

The United States was still struggling to emerge from the Great Depression when it hit another bump in a road – a financial downturn that started in 1937 and lasted for 13 months. The unemployment rate, which had fallen to 14 percent in 1937, jumped to 19 percent in 1938 and production fell nearly 30 percent.

Despite these challenges, President Franklin D. Roosevelt remained committed to employment for all Americans and on June 25, 1938, signed into law the Wagner-O’Day Act, which directed government agencies to give priority to suppliers employing people who are blind when purchasing products.

Two months before the bill was signed, 20 nonprofit agencies serving people who are blind formed an advisory group and decided to develop a central nonprofit agency that could allocate orders and certify that nonprofit agencies

- Mops were among the first items produced by NIB associated agencies, which employed 150 people who were blind by the end of 1939.
participating in the program, and those that wanted to join, complied with the requirement that 75% of labor be performed by people who are blind. In August of 1938, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) was formed as a corporation in the state of New York.

NIB’s mission then – to enhance opportunities for economic and personal independence of people who are blind by creating, sustaining, and improving employment – has remained unchanged for 80 years. How that mission is accomplished, though, is a journey NIB and its associated agencies could scarcely have imagined in 1938.

**1938-1949**

NIB and its associated agencies wasted no time in supplying the federal government with corn brooms and cotton mops, the first two products placed on the federal procurement list. Within eight months, the government had purchased 348,768 mops and 52,306 brooms. Other products were soon added to procurement list, including whisk brooms, pillowcases, deck swabs, sanitary swabs, and cocoa mats. By the end of 1939, NIB and its 36 associated agencies employed 150 men and women who were blind in the production of products for the federal government.

Although the U.S. would not officially enter World War II until December 1941, it was already gearing up for it and NIB associated agencies were ready to do their part. More than 1,000 employees who were blind were added to associated agency payrolls in 1941 alone to meet increased demand. By the war’s end, NIB and its associated agencies had built a solid reputation for providing high quality products to the government on time and at a fair price.

By 1944, the tide had turned in the war: Germany was expected to surrender that summer and Japan by the end of 1945. Recognizing that with victory would come a drop in Department of Defense (DOD) purchases, NIB and a group of leaders from 16 associated agencies met to look at ways to maintain and grow employment in the post-war era. The group, known today as the National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind, continues to work closely with NIB to develop employment opportunities for people who are blind.

**1950-1959**

One postwar strategy was establishing a brand name for products produced by the agencies. In 1952, the SKILCRAFT® brand was born. During this time, NIB also entered the military resale market, providing products to military commissary and exchanges to offset decreases in Department of Defense spending after World War II ended.
exchange stores. The first products hit store shelves in 1955. Over the next few years, more SKILCRAFT products were added, from polishing cloths to wax applicators, and an additional 259 SKILCRAFT products were added to the federal procurement list.

As NIB busied itself diversifying product lines and customer bases, U.S. troops were deployed to South Korea during the Korean War. NIB associated agencies once again provided critical products to support war efforts, even as they worked to develop products that would provide stable income streams and, more importantly, retain jobs, in times of war or peace.

1960-1969

The Cold War heated up in the 1960s, with the 1962 Cuban missile crisis raising the fear of an attack on American soil. As bomb shelters were built throughout the country, seven NIB associated agencies stepped up to assemble 1 million sanitation kits for the federal bomb shelter program, a contract that employed 300 people who were blind.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary in 1963, NIB marked the occasion by showcasing the capabilities of people who are blind at the World’s Fair in New York City. There, NIB unveiled a redesigned SKILCRAFT logo and highlighted products made at its 67 associated agencies.

The 1960s were also a time of considerable change for NIB and its associated agencies. The number of agency employees who were blind had leveled off, encouraging NIB President and General Manager Robert Goodpasture and agency leaders to take some risks to increase employment. Goodpasture introduced...
new programs and special projects. The biggest, both in terms of volume and future direction, was built around a modest ballpoint pen.

In 1967, NIB accepted a challenge to produce 70 million ballpoint pens for the federal government. The result, the iconic SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen, created 133 jobs for people who were blind in the first year of the contract. The project was not only a huge success, it also opened the door for NIB and its associated agencies to develop a full line of writing instruments and office products in the decades ahead.

1970-1979
The 1970s were lean years for NIB and its associated agencies. NIB took a hard look at operations, expanding some, drastically cutting or eliminating others altogether, and taking on some new initiatives. One of the latter was a new management orientation program, designed to strengthen the management skills of NIB and associated agency staff, launched in 1975.

That same year NIB launched its first financial assistance program for associated agencies taking on new projects. Assistance with start-up and training costs for new manufacturing and service projects encouraged associated agencies to create new jobs. Today, NIB offers a range of grants, incentives, and loans that are designed to assist associated agencies with everything from gaining ISO manufacturing certification, to purchasing raw materials, to developing new products and services that increase employment.

An extensive government and public affairs campaign celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Wagner-O’Day Act in 1988, but there were new challenges on the horizon for NIB and its associated agencies. The General Services Administration (GSA) was about to change its funding structure, leading to dramatic changes in procurement practices in the federal marketplace.

1980-1989
In the 1980s, more sophisticated technical manufacturing required NIB associated agencies equip employees with more precision skills.

1990-1999
The internet affected every industry in the 1990s, and NIB was no exception. Changes in the way NIB and its associated agencies worked and communicated,
combined with the changes to federal procurement procedures and disruptions in the distribution of SKILCRAFT products, contributed to an era of realignment.

The new decade also ushered in new military action. In August 1990, a coalition of forces from 35 countries, led by the U.S., declared war on Iraq in response to its invasion of Kuwait. The Gulf War had begun, and NIB products were desperately needed. NIB associated agencies had never before been asked to deliver so many products in so short a period of time.

Some operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week to meet the demand for plastic flatware, desert neckerchiefs, canteen caps, coat liners, mattress pads, pillows, paper towels, detergents, and writing instruments, among other supplies needed to support the troops.

In the mid-1990s the military, looking to cut costs, began closing on-base military supply stores throughout the U.S., forcing personnel to go off-base for office and cleaning supplies. In the aftermath of the unpopular move, LC Industries (LCI) of Durham, North Carolina, saw an opportunity to expand employment for people who are blind, offering to operate and staff a Base Supply Center (BSC) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Within a year, LCI opened three more BSCs and helped other associated agencies do the same. Today, NIB associated agencies sprang into action during the Gulf War, providing U.S. troops with supplies from neckerchiefs to plastic flatware.
agencies operate 153 BSCs, stocked with SKILCRAFT and other AbilityOne products, serving military bases and other federal installations.

In the 1990s, NIB associated agencies also began branching out into other types of services, adding warehousing and distribution, customer service, order entry and invoicing, data entry, and database management.

2000-2013
The 21st century opened with NIB and its associated agencies once again called upon to support war efforts after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Helmet covers, T-shirts, combat shirts, ammunition pouches, poncho liners, entrenching tools, and canteens were some of the products supplied to the military. At the same time, NIB associated agencies operated BSCs across the U.S., providing hundreds of jobs for people who are blind.

In response to federal policies designed to protect the environment, NIB associated agencies added greener cleaning, maintenance, and office products to their product lines. New products used bio-based technologies and more recycled materials, and janitorial and sanitation products were redesigned to earn Green Seal certification.

In 2003 NIB launched the Fellowship for Leadership Development, the first track in its Business Leaders Program, designed to help people who are blind develop management and business leadership skills. The Business Leaders Program has since grown to include five additional tracks: Business Management Training, Leaders at All Levels, Business Basics, Effective Supervision, and Emerging Professionals.

In 2009, NIB partnered with DOD’s Defense Acquisition University to provide online training for qualified people who are blind in the core courses needed to establish a foundation for contract management. Since the Contract Management Support (CMS) program was born, people who are blind working in the CMS program have processed more than 500,000 contracts and identified more than $2.3 billion in taxpayer dollars for de-obligation.

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When NIB celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2013, 91
associated agencies in 35 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico employed more than 5,500 people who are blind at more than 250 locations across the U.S.

2014-2018
Since its 75th anniversary, NIB and its associated agencies have continued to focus on robust and innovative training programs and the introduction of new products, services, and partnerships, while continuing their long support of the military and veterans.

In 2015, 19 employees who are blind from 16 NIB associated agencies and NIB graduated from the Business Management Training program, joining 79 previous graduates of the competitive, graduate-level program taught by faculty from the George Mason University School of Business.

That same year, NIB launched a web-based pilot program to prepare people who are blind for careers in information security. Twenty participants who are blind have enrolled in the online Information Assurance study program, which allows participants to maintain current employment while preparing for a new career. To date, 10 have earned the Computing Technology Industry Association (COMP TIA) A+ certification, and two have earned A+, Network+, and Security+ certifications.

In 2016, NIB launched the Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE) program. The four-week immersive program, designed specifically for assistive technology (AT) users, first takes students through the most common computer-related office tasks from start to finish, to close any learning gaps. Students then learn key processes for using the Microsoft Office suite and how to manipulate AT to most effectively interact with the programs. Building on ProMOTE’s success, NIB is now expanding the program’s reach, hosting train-the-trainer sessions to prepare qualified assistive technology instructors to execute the four-week ProMOTE program at NIB associated agencies around the country.

In 2017, NIB added a new track, Emerging Professionals, to the Business Leaders Program. Emerging Professionals prepares high-potential employees who

In 2015, 19 employees who are blind from 16 NIB associated agencies and NIB completed the 15-month Business Management Training program taught by faculty from the George Mason University School of Business.
The Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE) program, launched in 2016, provides people who are blind with intensive training for positions requiring advanced computer skills.

are blind working at NIB associated agencies for upward mobility using learning and development strategies from several Business Leaders programs: The hands-on work experience of the Fellowship for Leadership and Employment, the formal training of Effective Supervision, and the distance learning offered through Business Basics. Participants in Emerging Professionals remain at their agencies, in their current jobs, while they prepare for career advancement.

To create jobs for people who are blind, NIB and its associated agencies also launched new products and expanded into new markets, such as Alphapointe in New York, which partnered with Walmart to sell Speedy Scrubbers in select Walmart stores. In addition, NIB associated agencies launched a lockout-tagout line and entered co-branding agreements with Zebra pens and labeling tool industry leader Dymo.

All the while, NIB and its associated agencies continued supporting the U.S. military and veterans with new products and services. IFB Solutions in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, continues to produce 2,000 pairs of lenses each day, mostly for the Veteran Affairs (VA) hospital system and U.S Navy NEXCOM centers, and for some commercial customers as well, including a recent partnership with Walmart Vision Centers. In addition to making eyeglass and contact lenses, the agency also operates 31 dispensing rooms in 24 VA hospitals throughout the United States, all staffed by IFB Solutions employees.

In the past 80 years, technological innovations have made the world accessible to people who are blind in ways only dreamed of in 1938. Today, NIB and its 103 associated agencies look forward to the next 80 years and the day when blindness will not limit people’s ability to reach their full potential.

Sharon Horrigan is a freelance writer based in Asheville, North Carolina.
GET TO KNOW NIB ASSOCIATED NONPROFIT AGENCIES

South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind

Headquarters: Corpus Christi, Texas
President and Chief Executive Officer: Nicky Ooi
Founded: 1964

Capabilities at-a-glance: Sewing, kitting, and manufacturing of paper products, office products, sand bags, corrugated plastic trays, and candles.

Did you know? In 2016, STLB doubled the size of its headquarters to provide space for a paper conversion line used to manufacture toilet paper for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

More info: stlb.net

Mississippi Industries for the Blind

Headquarters: Jackson, Mississippi
Executive Director: Michael G. Chew
Founded: 1942

Capabilities at-a-glance: Textile sewing including felling, bar tacks, programmable pattern tacks, single-needle lock and chain stitch; steel rod bending, robotic welding, metal stamping, and assembly of various products. Full service contact center and electronic document imaging, conversion, and management of electronic files.

Did you know? Mississippi Industries for the Blind has been manufacturing the barracks bag issued to every soldier entering in the U.S. Army since 1956.

More info: msblind.org
Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired

**Headquarters:** Cincinnati, Ohio  
**President and CEO:** Christopher Faust  
**Founded:** 1903

**Capabilities at-a-glance:** Braille printing house; employment and training services; vision clinics; social enterprises; arts, recreation, and youth programs.

**Did you know?** Clovernook’s Braille Printing House, in operation since 1914, produces more than 25 million pages of braille annually, making it one of the largest volume producers of braille in North America.

**More info:** clovernook.org

VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

**Headquarters:** New York, New York  
**Executive Director and CEO:** Nancy D. Miller, LMSW  
**Founded:** 1926

**Capabilities at-a-glance:** Transition services; after-school programs for youth; rehabilitation, occupational therapy, and orientation and mobility training; counseling in 10 languages for people of all ages throughout New York City, Long Island, Lower Westchester, and Rockland County.

**Did you know?** VISIONS has provided racially and ethnically integrated programs since its founding in 1926, with a focus on employment for people who are blind and support and training for families.

**More info:** visionsvcb.org
For some employees, working at NIB associated agencies is a family affair.

BY LYRYSIA SMITH

Like many office employees, Steve and Sarah had side-by-side cubicles. They joked with each other over the divider. They shared snacks. They overheard each other’s conversations. But Steve and Sarah had a deeper connection than most employees – the two are siblings who are blind. The office was at NIB associated nonprofit agency Industries for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IBVI) in Milwaukee.

Steve and Sarah Heesen, who have Leber congenital amaurosis (LCA) – an inherited retinal degenerative disease – were familiar with IBVI long before they entered the workforce: Their mother, Karen Heesen, had worked at the agency years earlier.
It’s not uncommon to find family members working at NIB associated agencies across the nation. Husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters often have intertwined histories at agencies they may have initially visited for vision or rehabilitation services.

Karen Heesen was working at The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc. in Seattle when she decided to move her family back to Janesville, Wisconsin, so her children could attend the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (WCBVI), as she had. Steve and Sarah attended both community schools and WCBVI, where Karen now teaches music.

As a young man, Steve followed in his mother’s footsteps at the Lighthouse in Seattle, joining IBVI when he returned to Wisconsin to be closer to family. After college, Sarah worked in a position doing hand assembly at an agency manufacturing plant in Janesville, but wanted more. “Steve suggested I come to the main IBVI office where he was working. He recommended me for a customer service job like his, because I know computers and I’m a good people-person.”

She took her big brother’s advice in 2006 and loved the job. After a few years, each sibling was promoted to inside sales. Today, Steve is an account specialist at IBVI and Sarah – after taking a few years off to care for her son – has taken on a new role as a talent recruiter at Beyond Vision, another NIB associated agency in Milwaukee.

“My job is the happy part of HR, helping good people to find good jobs,” Sarah says. “I tell people who are hesitant – ‘I get it!’ And I convince them there’s a forward path for them.”

Selected for NIB’s Business Management Training program, Sarah is excited to join the 15-month-long program that covers topics from business framework, finance, development, and marketing to organizational performance. “The fact that I am blind doesn’t stop me from making important management decisions that

Steve Heesen, who continues to work at IBVI, is now an account specialist.

Sarah Heesen is now a talent recruiter at NIB associated agency Beyond Vision in Milwaukee.
have positive impact,” she says. “Professionals who are blind are using their talents and making new career paths happen.”

Although they don’t share a cubicle wall anymore, the siblings still support each other’s careers. “Steve is very connected professionally,” explains Sarah. “He recommends great people for me to recruit all the time.”

Steve says working for different employers doesn’t matter. “We share support, awareness, and information because we understand each other and we know what’s needed.”

Rebuilding a Brother’s Confidence
David Pressley knew what his younger brother, Todd, needed too.

The fourth and fifth, respectively, of six boys who grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Todd and David are two of four brothers who have retinitis pigmentosa (RP), an inherited disease that causes the retina to progressively degenerate. Uncles on their mother’s side of the family also had RP.

Employed for many years in the automotive business and management, David left as his vision decreased. He began doing hand and machine assembly work at MidWest Enterprises for the Blind in 2007. “I love to keep busy and learn new things, so this work suits me well,” he says.

Todd worked in manufacturing, making metal gymnasium bleachers for 32 years, but feels he was pushed out of his career due to diminishing eyesight. “David was already working at MidWest,” Todd recalls, “and he said, ‘Man, you got to come here. You won’t be treated like that anymore.’”

Todd started at MidWest in 2015 and fell in love with the agency right away. “I work alongside my brother, David, in maintenance and production, and lots of my coworkers are blind,” Todd says. “I have never worked with a harder working group of people. Nobody is afraid to try anything, people have all kinds of skills. I enjoy it all.”

After the pain of losing his prior job, Todd appreciates
the ability to work and grow at MidWest. “I was in a dark place,” he recalls. “David and this job pulled me out of that. I don’t know what I would have done without them.”

The gratitude is mutual, as MidWest has recognized the brothers’ outstanding work. In 2008, David won the Outstanding Quality award, and in 2010 was the agency’s national employee of the year nominee. In 2016, Todd earned the nomination.

After completing NIB’s Effective Supervision program in 2012, David was promoted to production supervisor running the furniture manufacturing department. “I met people from different agencies and we all do different things. But everyone is passionate about what we do,” he says. “We have a versatile workforce. I make sure everyone has a voice. We truly are leaders at all levels.”

Todd says he enjoys coming to work every day. “MidWest is really positive,” he says. “No one is in a corner whining [about being blind]. We are moving forward.”

As with the Heesen family, working at MidWest Enterprises for the Blind is something of a family tradition for the Pressleys. “Two of my older brothers worked at MidWest, so there’s four of us who worked here,” says David.

“We help each other, brother to brother,” adds Todd. “Our co-workers are like family, too.”

Fostering Independence
Melony Weiser and her younger sister, Sandy Wilkinson, have been involved with NIB associated agencies since childhood. Growing up in Pennsylvania, the sisters and an older brother received services from Keystone Blind Association along with their parents, all of whom have RP. The three siblings had some vision when they were younger and like their parents, went to public school. “Our parents said ‘you must learn to function in a sighted world.’ They did not shelter us. They did not want us to be limited,” recalls Sandy. “So they taught us to balance the checkbook and to grocery shop, which was helpful to them and to us. We learned life skills early, which made us ready for a sighted world.”

“We knew everyone [at Keystone Blind Association] from the time we were kids,” says Melony. Years later, the
Keystone connection made a vital change possible for her.

Melony married after high school, but the marriage soured and she struggled with low self-esteem. In 2012, a friend told her about a job opening at Keystone. “I told her I didn’t think anyone would ever hire me, even though it’s all I ever wanted.”

After the friend gave Melony a pep talk she applied and got the job. “I’d felt alone, as if I was the only one with no sight,” recalls Melony. “At Keystone, I realized I can be myself and be independent.”

She left the troubled marriage and discovered independence for herself and her daughter. Over the years Melony has worked in mailing, shredding, tool assembly, and now in the file room. “I’m happy to do whatever they ask me to do.”

She married again, this time to a man who was a wonderful husband and father, but he was soon diagnosed with, and later succumbed to, lung cancer. “It was very hard. But I got great support from both my biological family and my work family,” she says. “I couldn’t have made it through the loss without them.”

Like her sister, Sandy yearned for independence and a chance to create her own identity in a new place. She moved to Ohio and worked as a caregiver, but when that job ended she found “so many doors were closed to me because I had a guide dog.”

Determined, Sandy searched the Internet for “full-time jobs for vision impaired people” and found opportunity roughly 900 miles away, at Envision in Wichita, Kansas.

Sandy has no regrets about pulling up stakes and making the move. “Envision made it easy because they treat people so well,” she says. Since relocating she has purchased a home where she cares for both her current guide dog and her retired guide dog. “I can afford to have both dogs and a fenced backyard for them. I love the independence my dog and my work give me.”

Their parents’ lessons of hard work and self-sufficiency made deep impressions on both sisters. In 2018, Melony was named Keystone’s national employee of the year nominee, and Sandy earned the honor at Envision.

The nomination came as a surprise to Melony, who says, “I was just doing my job as best I can.” Sandy is as happy about her older sister’s nomination as her own. “Before she was tentative,” says Sandy. “Now she’s confident. I love to see her so happy.”

Lyrysa Smith is a freelance journalist and writer based in Denver, Colorado.
FEATURE STORY

AWARDS LUNCHEON
SPOTLIGHTS EXTRAORDINARY EMPLOYEES

The New York State Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers Who Are Blind honors exemplary employees from its affiliated agencies.

BY AMY GRAY

Mandy Zehr, a production employee at the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) in Utica, New York, was named the 2018 Employee of the Year for the New York State Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers Who Are Blind (NYSPSP) at an awards luncheon held June 6. Employee of the Year nominees from six other NYSPSP agencies were honored at the luncheon, which recognizes the exceptional work and achievements of people who are blind employed at NYSPSP-affiliated agencies.

NYSPSP Executive Director Carrie Laney said she looks forward to the event every year. “It’s a special opportunity for us to come together and recognize these outstanding employees and their contributions to our agencies, their communities, and our state and local government partners,” she said.

A versatile employee, Zehr came to CABVI in 2012 and is considered a key point person for new production projects. She is cross trained to work on pens, pencils, file folder, and textile products;

NYSPSP Employee of the Year Mandy Zehr, Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (front) with (back row, left to right) Brian Daniels, New York State (NYS) Office of Children and Family Services; Sarah Buckner, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment; Carrie Laney, NYSPSP executive director; Diane Hubbard, Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany; Christopher Louden, Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired; Sheila Poole, NYS Office of Children and Family Services; and Ron Tascarella, chairperson, Empire State Employment Resources for the Blind.
assists in packaging dental kits, flashlights, and tape; and has worked in the textiles and assembly departments. In addition to her production duties, Zehr is the work area representative for CABVI’s Central Industries Committee, and also completes clerical tasks with computer production data entry.

“I like being able to do different things at my work and I also like my coworkers,” said Zehr. “I’m so happy to win this award and I want to thank everyone.”

“Mandy is very deserving of this award,” said CABVI President and CEO Rudy D’Amico. “Her perseverance and dedication to this agency make her an invaluable asset, and we are thankful to have someone like her representing our CABVI family as the NYSPSP Employee of the Year.”

Away from the agency, Zehr is enthusiastic about helping others – she volunteered 139 hours in 2017 alone with groups such as the Center for Missing and Exploited Children, where she assists with mailing posters. A talented artist, Zehr participates in a volunteer project with the Utica Rescue Mission where she paints decorative placemats for holiday community dinners.

NYSPSP, a state-mandated purchasing initiative, is a related 501(c)(3) corporation of National Industries for the Blind that creates and sustains employment opportunities for New Yorkers who are blind or visually impaired. Empire State Employment Resources for the Blind administers the NYSPSP program and sponsored the awards luncheon, held during the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Institute conference. The conference is sponsored by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services/New York State Commission for the Blind.

“The New York State Commission for the Blind has been a proud partner of the Preferred Source Program for the past six years,” said New York State Commission for the Blind Associate Commissioner Brian S. Daniels. “We have successfully collaborated to make opportunities available to blind and visually impaired New Yorkers so they can live independent lives and enjoy fulfilling careers. We look forward to continued successes like Mandy’s and congratulate her on this deserved recognition and her many accomplishments.”

Amy Gray is a communications project manager at National Industries for the Blind.
The LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco is taking bold steps to boost awareness worldwide of what people who are blind can achieve.

BY CAROLINE HART

What would you do with $25,000 to fund a project of your dreams? The LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco is posing this question to people around the world who are blind, and the answers are as varied as the individuals who submit them.

In two years, LightHouse has awarded funds though its Holman Prize – which aims to launch worthy projects that will change

advocacy among people who are blind.

In the 80 years since it first partnered with National Industries for the Blind, LightHouse has evolved and adapted its programs to serve a wide variety of community needs. What hasn’t changed is the organization’s unabashed optimism and enterprising momentum – from its start in a public library basement to its current three-story, 40,000-square-foot headquarters in the heart of downtown San Francisco designed by an architect who is blind.

A Place to Meet and Learn

The Reading Room for the Blind – started in 1902 by Josephine Rowan, whose brother was blind – enabled people who were blind and visually impaired to access print materials. In its earliest form, the organization served

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

REDEFINING ‘BLIND AMBITION’

In 1914, the name “Blindcraft” was trademarked for the brooms and baskets produced by the organization’s rattan weaving business.

The craftmanship cultivated by Superintendent Ruth Quinan evolved to include a range of industrial and non-industrial careers.

The public perception of blindness for years to come – to a beekeeper, a mountain climber, a kayaker, a baker, a world traveler passionate about accessibility, and an educator determined to improve education in Mexico. But the Holman Prize is just one facet of the agency’s mission to foster entrepreneurship, creative thinking, and energetic
In July, LightHouse awarded the 2018 Holman Prize to (pictured left to right) Red Szell, Stacy Cervenka, and Conchita Hernández. Szell is embarking on an extreme adventure that involves an ocean swim, 200-foot climb, and a rigorous 100-mile off-road bike ride. Cervenka will launch the Blind Travelers Network, a “blind Yelp” of sorts, and Hernández aims to bring blindness education to a new demographic in Guadalajara, Mexico. These trailblazers embody the spirit of the LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco and its belief in the unlimited potential of people who are blind. To learn more, go to https://holman.lighthouse-sf.org/.

As a teaching space and gathering place in the city for people who are blind.

In 1914, the Reading Room changed its name to the San Francisco Association for the Blind, and Ruth Quinan was hired as superintendent. Her first action was to trademark the name “Blindcraft” for the brooms and baskets produced by people at the association. Under her leadership, the Association dramatically expanded its production activities, added a cooking school, and cultivated multi-material craftsmanship among members of the organization. Quinan’s hands-on focus provided a baseline for future programs and later evolved to include a range of industrial and non-industrial careers.

As the organization grew, students and employees needed more space. In 1924, three members of the Cowell family offered to buy land and provide a building for the organization. The new structure, at 1097 Howard Street, provided more space for the manufacture of Blindcraft brooms, baskets, and furniture, in addition to rooms for counseling and instruction in white cane technique and braille.

At a time when people who are blind were not generally perceived as capable of performing most professions, and few opportunities were available, the Association changed expectations. Its profession-oriented focus made the Association one of the most progressive organizations of its kind.

In 1950, Rose Resnick and Nina Brandt founded Enchanted Hills Camp in the Napa Valley as Recreation for the Blind Inc. The organization soon merged with the Association to become San Francisco LightHouse for
the Blind. Today, Enchanted Hills Camp remains one of the most beloved annual destinations for children who are blind and their families to experience the joys of summer camp in a pressure-free, blind-positive environment.

Leveraging Technology
In the 1960s, LightHouse expanded to include services for people who are DeafBlind, a focus that continues today. In 1977, Jewel and Jim McGinnis founded Broadcast Services for the Blind, a print reading service that merged with the LightHouse in the 1980s. Today, LightHouse’s media and accessible design (MAD) Lab produces braille, tactile maps, and other design products for a wide range of individuals and Fortune 500 corporations around the globe.

LightHouse continues to partner with tech companies, media organizations, and artists to facilitate accessible media, and its access technology department consults with corporations on digital accessibility and design thinking. The agency also co-hosts the Superfest Disability Film Festival, the world’s longest-running disability film festival, with the Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability at San Francisco State University.

Devastated by wildfires in October 2017, community support helped Enchanted Hills Camp rebuild and reopen for summer 2018.

Bequest Fuels Innovative Award
In 2014, Seattle businessman Donald Sirkin left LightHouse a bequest of $125 million, affording the agency a wealth of new opportunities. Some of the funds were used to renovate the home of the agency’s industrial employment program, renamed the Sirkin Center, which provides employment at competitive wages for people who are blind and visually impaired in customer service, shipping and receiving, inventory management, and light manufacturing.

The bequest also made possible the 2016 purchase of the LightHouse’s new headquarters in downtown San Francisco. The state-of-the-art accessible building’s expanded facilities include a dormitory where people who are blind can stay while receiving training in blind tech, cane navigation, and other necessary skills.

In addition, the bequest provided the funds for LightHouse CEO Brian Bashin to realize his dream of creating an award for people who are blind to do extraordinary things. The Holman Prize for Blind Ambition, launched in 2016, empowers people to “dream and have options and be proud of who we are.”

Under Bashin’s leadership, the LightHouse will continue working to foster ambition in people who are blind, support trailblazers, normalize blindness, and educate the public. With the Holman Prize, it is taking those efforts to a new level as it encourages people who are blind to travel, innovate, and spread impactful ideas that contribute to the diverse global community.

Caroline Hart is a communications associate at the LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco.
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.

1. SKILCRAFT® Laser Toner Cartridges – HP Compatible

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. Cartridges are made using 35% post-consumer content and meet ISO 14001 recycling standards. Satisfaction guaranteed with one-year warranty from date of purchase. Assembled in the U.S.A. TAA-compliant. Produced by Alabama Industries for the Blind in Talladega, Alabama.

2. SKILCRAFT® Recycled Laser and Inkjet Labels

High quality, bright white printer labels are environmentally friendly, with a face sheet made using 100% recycled post-consumer fiber free of processed chlorine. Acid- and lignin-free labels are non-yellowing and safe for archiving. Compatible with both desktop laser and inkjet printers, with adhesive that meets USPS-2-1238 specifications. Product packaging of 100% recycled content and 60% post-consumer waste. Produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

3. SKILCRAFT® Shipping Label with Receipt

Create shipping labels with paper receipts with one pass through the printer with these smudge- and jam-resistant labels that feature a permanent adhesive. Compatible with most internet shipping software and services, these 51/16 x 75/8 inch white labels can be used with color or black and white laser printers. Made in the U.S.A., one label per sheet, 50 sheets per package. Produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

4. SKILCRAFT® Weatherproof Laser and Ink Jet Labels

Weatherproof mailing labels made of durable polyester resist moisture, scuffing, tearing, and smudging and stand up to even the harshest conditions. Compatible with laser printers, these easy-to-customize labels feature permanent adhesive that sticks to even tough surfaces to
ensure packages reach their destination. These made-in-the-U.S.A. labels are available in a variety of sizes. Produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

5. SKILCRAFT® Portable Power Pack
Fully recharge two devices at once with these 12,000mAh or 6,000mAh portable USB power packs with dual charging ports. Compact and easy to carry, these power packs can be recharged up to 500 times and feature an integrated flashlight and LED power indicator that shows the amount of charge remaining. Produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

6. SKILCRAFT® Blow-Molded Folding Tables
Durable, commercial grade SKILCRAFT® Blow-Molded Folding Tables are made of powder-coated steel tubing with high-density polyethylene that resist dents, scratches, and stains. Lightweight bi-fold tables adjust from 25 to 35 inches high in 2 inch increments and fold down to 30 x 36 1/2 inches to store. Made in the U.S.A. with a five-year limited warranty, these tables are TAA and Berry Amendment compliant. Produced by MidWest Enterprises for the Blind in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

7. Isopropyl Alcohol Pads
Ideal for cleaning small wounds or prepping injection sites, these 11/2 x 2 inches non-woven pads are saturated with a 70% isopropyl alcohol solution that dries quickly after application. Individual sealed packages prevent evaporation and keep pads sterile until opened. Sold in boxes of 200 individually wrapped pads. Produced in the U.S.A. by Lighthouse Works in Orlando, Florida.

These and thousands of other products are available for purchase at AbilityOne.com, GSAAdvantage.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.
For many, the changing leaves and cooler temperatures of the fall season are welcome breaks from the often-punishing heat and humidity of the summer months. Days become shorter and darkness falls earlier and earlier. Pretty soon, we’ll be spending more time indoors with family and friends seated around the high-definition family room digital campfire, watching an endless selection of sports and movie titles.

For people who are visually impaired, televised sports events are usually fairly easy to follow. Capable play-by-play TV analysts fill in the visual gaps, while extra detail can be gained by tuning into a radio broadcast of the event if one is available.

But movie watching is a different experience. Unlike televised sports broadcasts, there is no one offscreen describing the scene-by-scene action, nor is there a radio broadcasting play-by-play details of the action onscreen.

This is where two-person startup Actiview enters the mobile app scene. Brilliant in the simplicity of its concept, Actiview is a free iOS app that can turn an iPhone or iPad into an assistive device for people with disabilities. Actiview goes one step further than many apps, offering assistance to viewers who cannot understand movie dialogue due to language barriers.

Once downloaded, the Actiview app gives users the ability to tap into accessible secondary channels, such as video description for people who are blind, enhanced audio for people with hearing impairments, closed captioning, real-time ASL sign language interpretation for people who are deaf and, finally, foreign language captioning.

Users can launch the Actiview app in a movie theater or at home at the start of a supported movie. Once an assistive channel is selected, the accessible content synchronizes and streams through the viewer’s ear buds or, in the case of closed-captioning and sign language, on the device screen.

The process takes just seconds to execute. Users who are blind can also activate the iOS Voice Over screen curtain function to ensure
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.

Launcher in 2016, Actiview’s mission is to provide free and equal access to the movie-going experience that so many already enjoy – without the hassle associated with locating and using separate adaptive devices.

Granted most, if not all, of the major movie theater franchises offer assistive devices, but many ticket agents know little about the technology. As a result, moviegoers who are blind often receive the wrong device, or one that doesn’t work. I have been given closed-captioning devices and amplified audio devices for people who are hearing-impaired. After a few such experiences, it’s no surprise people opt to stay home and watch a video-described movie on Netflix, forgoing that pricey tub of delicious movie popcorn.

Currently, the movie choices available through Actiview are sparse because the company must negotiate with multiple movie studio and movie distributor legal teams for content licensing rights. Add in the fact that there are entirely separate licensing requirements for in-theater and home viewing, and the process can take months for each title.

Actiview’s founders believe the more people download and use the app, the more motion picture studios and distributors will recognize that the full movie-going experience should be equally experienced by all. Actiview for iOS devices is free in the App Store. Actiview is not currently supported in Android OS or Windows Mobile.

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NIB WELCOMES TRUE LIGHT CENTER

NIB is pleased to welcome True Light Center in Miami, Florida, to its nationwide network of associated nonprofit agencies. Founded in 2016, True Light Center works to ensure individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or who have other disabilities have access to the information, technology, education, and resources they need to live independent and productive lives. True Light Center provides training, skills, and job placement to support people with disabilities and help them achieve success.

JAIME GONZALES RECEIVES ROEDER SCHOLARSHIP

Jaime Gonzales, a student at Metro Community College in Omaha, Nebraska, received the 2018 Roeder Scholarship in July. Majoring in business administration, Gonzales, whose GPA is 3.2, is employed at Outlook Nebraska in addition to attending college full time. After completing the course of study and becoming a certified nursing assistant, Gonzales learned his visual acuity was insufficient to continue in the nursing field. Determined to earn a college degree, he switched his major to business.

When not working or studying, Gonzales plays on the Outlook Nebraska Mavericks goalball team, and assists with agency events like Camp Abilities, tandem bike rides, and the annual vision resource fair. The Roeder scholarship is named for Joe Roeder, senior accessible technology specialist at NIB from 1997 until his death in 2010, who was instrumental in development of the Section 508 electronic and information technology accessibility standards incorporated in the Rehabilitation Act.

NIB ATTENDS VFW NATIONAL CONVENTION

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) national convention attendee Larry H. Steele of Des Moines, Iowa (second from left), meets Brandon Norris (left), of NIB associated agency Alphapointe; Mississippi Industries for the Blind Advocacy Coordinator and U.S. Army veteran Herb Humphrey; and NIB Veterans Affairs Specialist for Wounded Warriors, Col. Ned Rupp, USA (Ret.) (far right) at the 119th VFW National Convention held in Kansas City, Missouri, July 21-25.
In August, National Industries for the Blind entered a strategic alliance with the William L. Hudson BVI Workforce Innovation Center to deliver world-class training and professional development for people who are blind. The center, located in Wichita, Kansas, provides an unparalleled focus on training people who are blind or experiencing vision loss, placing them into jobs, and providing accessibility inclusion expertise to businesses.

The joint initiative of NIB associated nonprofit agencies Envision and LC Industries challenges employers and communities to look beyond the horizon and transform the landscape of employment and independence for people who are blind or visually impaired.

“As technology evolves and the demand for new workplace skills grows, organizations serving people who are blind must adapt and evolve as well,” said NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch. “NIB, Envision, and LC Industries have been leaders in this change, and are now uniquely positioned to transform the employment landscape for people who are blind through the delivery of advanced training and professional development that will build the workforce of the future.”

Thirteen NIB employees graduated from NIB’s second “Leading the Way” training program on August 8. The year-long program is designed to bolster strategic thinking, leadership, customer service, and staff development skills among NIB managers. The program includes interactive courses facilitated by industry experts, as well as guest lecturers from NIB’s leadership team. Congratulations to the graduates!

Leading the Way Class of 2018. Pictured left to right are (front row) Jennifer Click, Tracye Varner, Ann Walling, Ryan Gold, Clark Rachfal, Evans Mensah, and NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch; (back row) Annelie Eyre, Luis Interiano, Mark Koester, Courtney Getachew, Chris Budny, and Jim Bean. Not pictured: Jeff Papalia.
Lighthouses on The Mag Mile, a public art display presented by The Chicago Lighthouse and Huber Financial Advisors, LLC, wrapped up August 11 having touched the lives of thousands of visitors to the Windy City during its seven-week run.

The display showcased 51 lighthouse sculptures designed by local and national artists, many with disabilities, on Chicago’s famed North Michigan Avenue, also known as The Magnificent Mile, and surrounding areas.

“Our intent was to celebrate access and inclusion for people with disabilities,” said Chicago Lighthouse President and CEO Dr. Janet Szlyk, who spearheaded the initiative. Szlyk hopes the display will encourage employers to hire more individuals with disabilities.

Over the summer, the lighthouses attracted national and international attention through extensive coverage on social media and in major outlets, including CBS Sunday Morning.

Dr. Szlyk observed that in their own special way, the lighthouses have promoted more kindness and greater civility in our society. Quoting author Mark Twain at the June 19 event launch, she said “Kindness is a language which people who are deaf can hear and people who are blind can see.”

Martel Hill (left); Brett Shishkoff with guide dog, Poet; Sandy Murillo; and Sara Chung (right) of The Chicago Lighthouse pose with one of The Lighthouses on The Mag Mile, “The Light Within,” by artist Diane Rakocy.
OCTOBER IS NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

AMERICA. WORKING.

Purchase SKILCRAFT® products through the AbilityOne® Program and help create jobs for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.