The NIB Board of Directors established the Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award in 1996. The award is presented to an individual who demonstrates career advancement at an NIB associated agency or in the private sector. Milton J. Samuelson, former NIB board member and past executive director of The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired, was a leader in the blindness field and an advocate for upward mobility and placement programs benefiting people who are blind.
SAMUELSON NOMINEES

ERNESTO ACEVEDO

Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Utica, New York

Ernesto assists in all aspects of store operations at the AbilityOne Base Supply Center® (BSC) at Picatinny Arsenal, New Jersey, and assists five other BSCs remotely. Before joining the agency in 2015, Ernesto was a team lead for an investment firm on Wall Street.

DEVIN BULLOCK

Alphapointe
Richmond Hill, New York

Devin, who joined Alphapointe in 2015 as an entry-level machine operator, is now an assistant supervisor in the mail division and a mentor to others at the agency. A dedicated athlete, he serves on the board of the New York Association for Blind Athletes.

ISRAEL CAZARES-ZURITA

Beyond Vision
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Israel started at Beyond Vision in the machine shop and soon became a contact center agent lead, where he discovered his passion for technology and accessibility. In 2019, he was promoted to accessibility coordinator and in 2020, ensured a large call program contract was accessible, training more than 60 employees who are blind or visually impaired to use JAWS.
**WESLEY CLEVELAND**

*Alabama Industries for the Blind  
  Talladega, Alabama*

A versatile employee who has filled roles in several departments, Wes is now a warehouse delivery driver. With his outgoing personality, Wes frequently engages customers and vendors face-to-face. When he isn’t making deliveries, you can find him helping pull and process orders in the warehouse.

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**JOHN DENMARK**

*North Central Sight Services  
  Williamsport, Pennsylvania*

A consummate team player with a “can-do” attitude, John has held a variety of positions since joining the agency in 2010. When he stepped in to fill a front desk/receptionist position during a coworker’s absence, his talent for customer service was clear to all. He would like to become a customer service manager.

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**AMIR GHAHREMANI**

*Visually Impaired Advancement (VIA)  
  Buffalo, New York*

After completing VIA’s career training program, Amir joined NewView Oklahoma, where he has been promoted three times. Currently the manager of the READable program, Amir oversees a team that makes PDF documents accessible to people who rely on assistive technology.
TERESE GOREN

Envision
Wichita, Kansas
An accessibility and usability tester in the Workforce Innovation Center, Terese also serves as the lead instructor for the agency’s Level Up program. A role model for others, Terese wants to test and remediate digital media and get involved in app development for assistive technology users.

TOMMIE L. JOHNSON, IV

MidWest Enterprises for the Blind
Kalamazoo, Michigan
Tommie, who started at the agency in 2015, was promoted to channel development/customer support lead in 2021. His career goals include growing in his current role and using his education and experience to help other people who are blind in reaching their goals.

KELLY JONES

Industries of the Blind
Greensboro, North Carolina
Hired as a customer service assistant, Kelly is now the agency’s first totally blind customer service representative. She regularly takes on new roles and enjoys testing computer applications for accessibility, including a new mobile attendance app that allows associates to clock in and out remotely.
CESAR LOPEZ

East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
Tyler, Texas
Cesar started working at the agency’s low vision store as a college student and the following year, added an internship in the IT department. He maintained both positions until he graduated with a degree in computer information systems and now works full time in the IT department.

ROBERT PELLECHIA

Travis Association for the Blind
Austin, Texas
Hired in 2018 as a data systems specialist, Robert is now the agency’s data systems officer. While pursuing a master’s degree in data science he participates in the agency’s strategic planning process and upgraded the agency’s warehouse management system.

MARIANNE RAIA

Lighthouse Works
Orlando, Florida
Marianne has been promoted several times since joining the agency in 2016. As a supply chain supervisor she enjoys motivating, coaching, and developing team members to achieve their goals. Marianne is always willing to do what it takes to further the agency’s mission.
JOSEPH REHMATULLAH

IFB Solutions
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
A native of Pakistan who holds four master’s degrees, Joseph joined IFB Solutions in 2013 and volunteered to teach his coworkers assistive technology (AT). Now the AT trainer at IFB’s Asheville location, he helped create an AT program for kids that is taught in five states.

ALVARO RODRIGUEZ

Envision Dallas
Dallas, Texas
An assistive technology trainer, Alvaro began receiving services at Envision Dallas in middle school. When he graduated from college with a bachelor’s degree in business administration and set his sights on working for a nonprofit, he knew Envision Dallas was the place for him and joined the agency in 2009.

SANDRA ROSALES

South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
Corpus Christi, Texas
Sandra joined the agency in 2018 as an assembler/packer, transitioned to account floater, and before year’s end, was promoted to an accounts payable role. Sandra has a bachelor’s degree in accounting and was with The Corpus Christi Caller-Times for 23 years.
JOHN SAMUEL

LCI
Durham, North Carolina

John made his passion for accessibility the focus of his career, joining LCI to lead the agency’s accessibility practice. In 2020, John launched Ablr, a company focused on digital accessibility and disability consulting. He is a frequent speaker on raising awareness of digital accessibility for people of all abilities.

CLINTON TYLER, JR.

VisionCorps
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Clinton who started in production, is now plant supervisor overseeing a team and managing day-to-day production at VisionCorps’ Lancaster facility. Actively involved in the agency’s quality and continuous improvement initiatives, he is a graduate of NIB’s Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE) program.

DAVE UKEN

The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired
Chicago, Illinois

Dave joined the Chicago Lighthouse in 2003 and quickly established strong working relationships, setting high standards for customer service. As the sole staff member onsite during the pandemic, he ensured that customer operations continued uninterrupted while team members worked remotely.
DANA VAN DUSSEN

The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc.
Seattle, Washington

Dana joined the Lighthouse in 2005 as a human resources coordinator and is now the senior director of human resources. A fierce advocate and ambassador for the agency, Dana constantly works to promote the organization and to better herself.

TONIA WALTERS

Lighthouse for the Blind
Saint Louis, Missouri

Introduced to the Lighthouse in 1994, Tonia worked there for two years before pursuing a career as a programming analyst at Boeing. Returning to the Lighthouse in 2006 as a new business development assistant while completing her bachelors degree in business administration, she is now a production manager.

HEATHER YOUNG

Lions Volunteer Blind Industries
Morristown, Tennessee

Heather came to Lions Volunteer Blind Industries in 2016, working in several positions until she found her forte. As a paper towel facilitator, she has taken on a leadership role among her peers and has an uncanny ability to catch deficiencies before they cause issues further along in the production line.
JEFFREY YOUNG
IBVI
West Allis, Wisconsin
Jeff, who joined IBVI in 2017, loves a good technical challenge. When the agency switched to a new ERP system, he was the first to master it. Jeff also works on a variety of other platforms, including web-based platforms that are often difficult to navigate, and serves on the wellness and JAWS committees.

MANUEL ZAVALA
West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
San Angelo, Texas
Manuel joined the Lighthouse in 2009, where his outstanding work resulted in several promotions over the years. Now a production development assistant, he is a member of NIB’s Advocates for Leadership and Employment and serves as an advocate for the Lighthouse in the community and on Capitol Hill.