Evolving with the Times

Known for quality products, SKILCRAFT adds professional services to its offerings
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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.
GROWING AND CHANGING

Growth by its very nature requires change, and NIB has always been about growth. Not just growing the number of people who are blind employed in our associated nonprofit agencies, but growing new opportunities for people who are blind to pursue careers in fields of their choosing. And as technological advances have changed our economy, those career choices have increasingly grown to include services.

That’s one reason NIB decided to refresh our iconic SKILCRAFT® brand to encompass the knowledge-based services available through many of our associated agencies. Unifying our products and services under a single brand makes it easier than ever for customers to remember that SKILCRAFT is ready to meet a growing array of needs. The refresh includes a bold new logo and an updated brand architecture to help customers better understand the breadth and depth of SKILCRAFT offerings — from office supplies to...
military gear to contract management support and contact center services — and the impact their purchases can have on empowering people who are blind.

For more than six decades, SKILCRAFT has delivered quality, reliability, and value while fulfilling a greater purpose: Growing opportunities for Americans who are blind to achieve economic and personal independence through meaningful careers. While the look is different, the SKILCRAFT brand promise hasn’t changed: Exceptional quality. Extraordinary impact.

We invite you to join us on this journey as we continue to grow the offerings available under the SKILCRAFT brand and in turn, grow opportunities for people who are blind to reach their career potential.

Kevin A. Lynch
President and
Chief Executive Officer
THE EVOLUTION OF A MISSION-DRIVEN BRAND

Since 1952, the SKILCRAFT® brand has consistently delivered quality, value, and reliability.

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LUCKY MAN

Bosma Enterprises new CEO has no memory of the day that changed his life, but remembers distinctly the moment his attitude changed.

BY JENNIFER CLICK

Jeff Mittman always wanted to be the center of the attention, and as a U.S. Army Master Sergeant, he got what he wanted: Everything his soldiers did was up to him, from when they awoke, to how hard they trained. “The focus was on me, people spun around me, and I absolutely loved it,” Mittman said in a TEDx talk at Indiana University.

All of that changed on July 7, 2005, when he drove down a highway off-ramp in Baghdad and directly into an all-out attack. The projectile that went through his vehicle’s six-inch-thick bullet-proof window immediately knocked Mittman unconscious. He awoke a month later with no memory of the attack and found his left eye destroyed, the vision in his right eye severely altered, his right arm badly injured.

President and CEO Jeff Mittman brings experience as a warfighter, businessman, and blinded veteran to his new role leading NIB associated nonprofit agency Bosma Enterprises.
most of his teeth shattered, and his nose and lips missing.

Mittman accepted the injuries as part of military life, until the day doctors told him his vision was gone. “Why me?” he asked. The Army was the only career he’d ever known; with two young daughters, how could he provide for his family?

But just hours later, Mittman learned a friend and fellow service member had died of very similar injuries sustained just two weeks prior. “Then it dawned on me: I was lucky — very lucky. I was still here with my children and my wife, but my friend wasn’t.”

From that moment on, the man who loved being the center of attention realized there was more to life. “When you’re not the center of the world, you can focus on other people. You can focus on your family, you can focus on your community, you can focus on your employees.”

While undergoing 40 surgeries to reconstruct his face and completing a blind rehabilitation training program with the Veterans Administration, Mittman contemplated how to serve his family and community.

“I think one of the great equalizers in the world is education,” he told a reporter from his hometown newspaper, the Daily Reporter in New Palestine, Indiana. “I saw an opportunity to not only set an example for my children and to teach them that you can overcome whatever obstacle is laid in front of you, I realized I could have an effect on others as well.”

So Mittman returned to college, earning a bachelor’s degree from Troy University and ultimately, two masters’
degrees from Ball State University. Along the way, he completed an internship with National Industries for the Blind, where he worked as a national account manager as part of the Wounded Warriors in Transition program.

Returning home to Indiana, he worked his way up from public affairs specialist to executive officer in six years with the Defense Finance Accounting Service, joined the board of directors at NIB associated nonprofit agency Bosma Enterprises, volunteered with veterans groups, and became a sought-after public speaker, sharing the life lessons learned from his traumatic war injury.

Mittman joined Bosma as chief operating officer in July 2018 and was named to succeed retiring president and CEO Lou Moneymaker in February of this year.

His dedication to serving others makes him a perfect fit for the role, according to Moneymaker, who believes Mittman’s passion will be a valuable asset not only to Bosma Enterprises, but to the community at large.

Jennifer Click is editor-in-chief of Opportunity magazine.
Our Mission is to Support Yours

As an AbilityOne® Authorized Enterprise, National Industries for the Blind delivers quality products, services, and custom solutions to meet the exacting demands of the U.S. military. When you purchase through NIB, you help create meaningful employment for people who are blind – including our nation’s veterans.

Connect to veteran-made products and services at NIB.org/Connect.
In 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Wagner-O’Day Act requiring government agencies to purchase products from suppliers employing people who are blind. NIB was formed shortly after to distribute those orders for products among approximately 20 associated nonprofit agencies.

SKILCRAFT evolves with a fresh new identity that brings knowledge-based professional services under the brand name known for delivering quality, value, and reliability to military and federal customers.

By Sharon Horrigan
In the more than 80 years since, government and military customers have come to rely on the quality and value of products provided by NIB associated nonprofit agencies. And as the needs of the government and military have grown, NIB associated agencies have evolved to meet them.

With the advances of technology driving growth in professional services, NIB associated agencies are at the forefront of developing new careers for people who are blind in the provision of knowledge-based professional services. Those services will now be available under the brand name government and military customers have come to rely on: SKILCRAFT®.

A survey by Penn Schoen Berland of 500 federal government employees who were purchasers or end users showed the SKILCRAFT brand is highly regarded.

But it also revealed a need to raise awareness of the mission behind SKILCRAFT. NIB is now embarking on a brand “refresh” that aims to change the conversation around SKILCRAFT, bringing greater awareness of both the breadth of the brand’s offerings, and the people behind them: Americans who are blind. “People who are blind are often underestimated,” explains NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch. “When customers realize that the people making SKILCRAFT products come to work every day and shatter expectations about what they’re capable of achieving, that’s meaningful to them.”

Bringing the professional services offered by NIB associated agencies under the SKILCRAFT name is a key component of raising awareness. “This linkage will align products and services under a common identity and create a unified brand story
that can be communicated to stakeholders,” explains Catherine Schultz, NIB branding and packaging manager. “Ultimately, it will enhance the brand and reduce confusion.”

The Birth of a Brand
After the Wagner-O’Day Act became law, business at NIB associated agencies took off as they began supplying federal government agencies and the U.S. military with a variety of products. By the end of 1939, the program employed 150 men and women and had sold nearly $250,000 worth of products to the federal government.

Business remained brisk through the mid-1940s, with the

NIB introduced the SKILCRAFT brand to shoppers in military commissaries and exchanges in the mid-1950s.
federal government and U.S. military purchasing supplies needed for World War II. During that time, NIB and its associated agencies employed more than 1,000 people who were blind to meet the federal government’s supply demands. Along the way, the agencies built a strong reputation for providing high quality products on time and at a fair price.

NIB leaders knew, though, that once the war ended, demand for the agencies’ products would decline. In 1945, in anticipation of that reduced demand, NIB and its associated agencies decided to expand into the consumer market, a move that would position their products against those of well-established and widely recognized private-sector companies. To be competitive in those marketplaces, NIB needed a brand. In 1952, after several years of careful planning, the SKILCRAFT brand was born.

By 1955, the first products sporting the SKILCRAFT logo were hitting the shelves in military commissaries and exchanges. SKILCRAFT products included wax applicators, dish and polishing cloths, door mats, and clothespin bags.

The move into what is known as the military resale market was a smart one, says Mary Jane Surrago, former editor-in-chief of Opportunity magazine and current assistant secretary for the NIB board of directors. Military families were already familiar with the products, knew of their strong reputation for quality and value, and were aware that they were made by Americans who were blind. By 1957, commissary sales provided more than 270,000 employment hours annually at NIB associated agencies.

Expanding Product Lines
To say that NIB and its associated agencies have
Triangular flag captures the brand’s focus on creating and sustaining U.S.-based jobs

Forward-moving angles represent innovation
SKILCRAFT’s new brand narrative helps customers better understand how their purchases empower people who are blind to live the American Dream. The modernized logo and design elements reflect SKILCRAFT’s reputation for quality and innovation, and commitment to creating U.S.-based jobs for Americans who are blind.

Bold letters convey strength and quality

CRAFT

Half-star draws on the brand’s patriotic heritage
Evolving with the Times

After several years of careful planning, the SKILCRAFT brand was born in 1952 to help NIB products compete with national brands in military commissaries. A new SKILCRAFT logo, redesigned to celebrate NIB’s 25th anniversary and unveiled in 1964, was a focal point for all SKILCRAFT promotions at the World’s Fair in New York.
A modernized SKILCRAFT logo, introduced in the mid-1990s, was used first on office products and later expanded to other items sold to the federal government. A logo refresh in 2000 made the SKILCRAFT name more prominent and provided associated agencies with comprehensive guidance on branding.
In 1968 the U.S. Government Pen became the first SKILCRAFT-branded product sold outside military commissaries and exchanges.

**COVER STORY Continued from page 15**

expanded SKILCRAFT product lines over the years would be an understatement. What started out as a handful of home products sold through military commissaries and exchanges has expanded to include thousands of products that carry the SKILCRAFT name. NIB associated agencies make SKILCRAFT products for the home and office, industrial settings, and maintenance operations, as well as many custom items and products co-branded with industry leaders like 3M, Dymo, and Purell.

Home products sold in commissaries through the military resale program include household supplies, kitchen gadgets, and paper products. In addition, office supplies, scores of writing instruments, office equipment and furniture, and computer accessories, are available to federal government purchasers under the SKILCRAFT name. Among
the industrial products produced are cleaning and janitorial supplies, food service and operating supplies, paint, hardware, tools, and safety supplies.

NIB associated agencies also make military equipment, tactical gear, hydration systems, and textiles and uniform accessories. Specialized products, from engineering carpenter kits used for construction on and off the battlefield, to custom wall clocks with agency insignia, are all available to federal customers.

In addition to products, employees at NIB associated agencies provide an array of services to federal government customers. From advising callers seeking compliance information on an Environmental Protection Agency hotline, to closing out executed federal contracts for the Department of Defense, to testing software, systems, and websites for compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, people who are blind provide solutions for a number of agency needs.

Over the years, the SKILCRAFT product line has played an important role in helping NIB and its associated agencies fulfill the mission of empowering people who are blind to build meaningful careers. Today, NIB associated agencies employ more than 6,000 people who are blind, many of whom provide SKILCRAFT products or services as part of the AbilityOne® Program.

Growth along the Journey
As the product line grew and changed over the years, so too did SKILCRAFT’s look. To celebrate NIB’s 25th anniversary, the 1952 logo was redesigned, becoming a focal point for NIB’s exhibit in the Better Living Center at the
1964-65 World’s Fair in New York. The new logo included the tagline “Quality Blind-Made Products,” to firmly establish the link between the products and employment for people who are blind.

Although most products sold in military commissaries and exchanges were identified with the SKILCRAFT brand, products sold through the federal procurement process were still being shipped in plain cardboard boxes, recalls Surrago. In 1968, the first SKILCRAFT-branded product for federal customers was introduced — the iconic U.S. Government Pen.

“The U.S. Government Pen was stamped on the barrel with the SKILCRAFT name and the box carried the logo from the start,” recalls Surrago. “That’s when the connection between the products we made for the

**Launching in 1995, the AbilityOne Base Supply Center program lets federal and military personnel purchase needed supplies on-base and provides jobs for people who are blind at more than 150 locations.**
federal government, and the SKILCRAFT products we sold through the commissaries and exchanges, really started to be made.”

The logo was updated in the 1970s, Surrago says, when packaging for commissary and exchange products was redesigned and the SKILCRAFT line was expanded yet again. But with the exception of SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen boxes, there was still no branding on packaging for the federal sector.

Two developments spurred a change in the 1990s. First, the federal procurement process became more decentralized, making the branding of SKILCRAFT products at the federal and military levels critical to helping federal customers identify mandatory purchase products. Second, the U.S. military began closing military supply stores throughout the United States to cut costs. In 1995, NIB opened the first AbilityOne Base Supply Center® store to provide military members the convenience of shopping on base for supplies.

NIB worked closely with a design firm and its associated agencies to modernize the packaging of military, and later, federal products starting with writing instruments and paper products. Eventually, packaging for more than 2,000 products was redesigned, including office and cleaning supplies, household items, chemicals, and military apparel.

The logo has remained the same since the mid-1990s update. By 2014, it was time for a refresh.

**SKILCRAFT Reimagined**
The 2014 survey that found
SKILCRAFT was highly regarded included another significant finding: People were much more likely to purchase SKILCRAFT products when they learned that their purchase would support employment for people who are blind. “The mission is our differentiator in the market,” explains Schultz. “People need to know that when you buy a SKILCRAFT product, you are employing people who are blind.”

NIB partnered with Kaleidoscope, a Chicago-based branding firm, with the dual goals of creating better customer awareness of the array of SKILCRAFT offerings, and bringing NIB’s mission of creating jobs for people who are blind to life for customers in a distinct and relevant way.

To make the effort truly collaborative, NIB brought representatives from its associated agencies into the process. Schultz and Kaleidoscope staff worked closely with the marketing committee of the National Association for the Employment of People who are Blind (NAEPB) which consists of CEOs and marketing associates from more than 20 NIB associated agencies.

Representatives from four NIB associated agencies traveled to Chicago with NIB staff for a two-day meeting at Kaleidoscope, where they learned about the branding process. Lise Pace, vice president of external affairs for Bosma Enterprises, was one of those representatives. “It was an incredible experience,” recalls Pace. “We looked at competitors and that gave us a great way to assess our strengths and weaknesses.” The participants gained insight into what a good brand should mean, and how it should look and feel. “It was truly a collaborative process.”
“The SKILCRAFT brand symbolizes independence for the people who are blind who make the products,” says Pace. “It dispels stereotypes about the capabilities of people who are blind.”

“As we worked through this process and the new branding evolved, I was so proud and honored to be a part of it,” says Pace, who is legally blind. “I have never been a part of a process that was so collaborative and thoughtful.”

Seth Anderson, IFB Solutions director of marketing and a participant in the Chicago meeting, agrees. Anderson admits that, given his own experience working in advertising, he had high standards coming into the process — standards professional services from contact center operations to contract management support to technology assurance will now be part of the SKILCRAFT family.
that Kaleidoscope not only met, but exceeded. “They really did their research,” says Anderson. “They went into Base Supply Center stores, took pictures of SKILCRAFT products and how they were displayed, researched e-commerce, and got a reality check on what our customers think.” “NIB did this by the book, says Anderson. “They used all the current best practices when looking at the brand, sought input from the associated agencies, and worked with a great partner in Kaleidoscope.”

Shoppers in military commissaries and exchanges today find sections throughout the store with SKILCRAFT products that meet a variety of needs.
The end product is more than just a logo: It’s a new SKILCRAFT identity that builds on the brand’s strengths and reputation across all product and service offerings. The consistent, unified look, tone, and feel of the refreshed brand sets SKILCRAFT up for success across the board.

The new identity aims to help customers understand that purchasing SKILCRAFT products and services has implications beyond just making a procurement. As public servants, they work to improve their communities, enhance the lives of others, and advance the interests of our country. When they make the decision to purchase SKILCRAFT, they’re supporting jobs for Americans who are blind, empowering them to build their own American Dream.

Rooted in the new identity is a succinct brand promise that highlights the mission behind every SKILCRAFT offering: Exceptional Quality. Extraordinary Impact. With its foundation anchored firmly in the brand’s reputation for quality and reliability, NIB associated agencies are poised to deliver on that promise for years to come.

Sharon Horrigan is a freelance writer based in Asheville, North Carolina.
MAKING AN IMPACT IN THE EMPIRE STATE

NYSPSP is building on successes as it breaks down barriers for New Yorkers who are blind.

BY AMY GRAY

Focused on creating diverse employment opportunities and upward mobility, the New York State Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers Who Are Blind (NYSPSP) is always exploring new prospects that will help drive its mission. In 1945, New York established a preference in state and local government procurement for products and services produced by people who are blind. In 2012, the state designated NIB to facilitate the program for affiliated nonprofit agencies serving people who are blind or visually impaired. The result: NYSPSP.

Scott Thornhill and Guy Latronico of Alphapointe, and Chervelle Amaker (right) of NYSPSP, stopped off in the lobby of the Empire State Plaza Concourse in Albany before heading to legislative offices to speak with lawmakers about NYSPSP’s positive impact in the lives of New Yorkers who are blind.
NYSPSP affiliated agencies produce more than 1,600 products, from office supplies to safety items to cleaning chemicals, and provide skilled and technical business services from data transcription and contact center services, to online and digital accessibility testing and remediation for state agencies, public authorities, universities, hospitals, and local and municipal governments.

Since 2012, labor hours generated by the program have increased 30% and total wages paid to New Yorkers who are blind have increased almost two-fold. In fiscal year 2018 the agencies employed nearly 450 employees who are blind, enabling them to become taxpayers contributing to New York’s economy.

“When we succeed, it’s about more than making a sale,” says NYSPSP Executive Director Carrie Laney. “Every year we’re improving and enriching the lives of hundreds of New Yorkers who are blind and their families.”

NYSPSP board member Susan Robinson, who has Stargardt’s disease, uses humor to shift the narrative and change the way her audiences think about people with disabilities.

Building on Success
In 2019, NYSPSP is pursuing a number of new opportunities.
expanded letter of designation (LOD) signed in March, the organization is partnering with private businesses in the state on collaborative efforts with several stakeholders, including the 10 affiliated agencies. The LOD represents a commitment to create jobs for New Yorkers who are legally blind, empowering partners to combine and maximize resources and physical and technical capacities to improve competitiveness for contracts and other professional services opportunities.

“Our partnership with NYSPSP will continue to encourage successful employment opportunities for New Yorkers who are blind,” said Associate Commissioner Brian S. Daniels of the New York State Commission for the Blind. “We are so proud of the vast success we’ve seen together, and this expansion will open the field for more people to participate in the program.”

NYSPSP’s new service offering, Digital Accessibility and Usability Testing and Remediation Reporting Services (DAUTRSS), is one example of the drive to create new career paths. With demands for accessible technology and digital assets continuing to grow, this new service helps organizations evaluate websites and digital documents for compliance with federal and state policies and regulations on accessibility. The state’s Office of Information and Technology Services recently issued a policy on Accessibility of Information Communication and Technology that specifically directs agencies to use NYSPSP as a preferred source for digital accessibility compliance services.

**Embracing the Mission**
Each year, NYSPSP recognizes the exceptional work and achievements of affiliated agency employees at its Employee of the Year Award luncheon. This year’s state
winner, Mark Foster, a machine operator at the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment in Binghamton, exemplifies the organization’s vision. Cross-trained to perform operations in multiple departments, Mark goes above and beyond his assigned responsibilities to assist in training new employees.

“The NYSPSP program is so important because it gives people like me, who have low vision, a chance to be a part of the workforce and take care of my family,” said Foster. “It is such a good feeling that I can work and support my loved ones.”

Changing Perceptions
NYSPSP board members are also making a mark by changing the conversation about public perceptions of people with disabilities. Susan Robinson — a business leader, speaker, blogger, and entrepreneur who joined the NYSPSP board in July 2016 — is one example.

Diagnosed with Stargardt’s disease in 1992, Robinson does not let her vision impairment, or the perceptions of others, define her. She reaches diverse audiences all over the world using humor to shift the narrative and change the way they think about people with disabilities. Her TED Talk, “How I Fail at Being Disabled,” is just one example of her approach to elevating the conversation about what she refers to as the “so-called disability community.”

Robinson often focuses on others’ expectations, stressing the importance of language and terminology and addressing common mindsets and narratives about the capabilities of people with disabilities, especially in the professional sphere. In December 2018, she participated in a panel targeted at global corporate executives.
and employees as part of the United Nations’ (UN) recognition of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

“We want to start to create an environment of possibility and potential,” Robinson said of the UN panel discussion. “It is shifting the dialogue to fully promote the skills and potential of people who have disabilities, versus what others often see as only

Employee of the year (EOY) nominees and state officials at the NYSPSP awards luncheon included (left to right) Associate Commissioner Brian Daniels, New State (NYS) Commission for the Blind; Commissioner Sheila Poole, NYS Office of Children and Family Services; EOY nominee Sean Dwyer, Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI); Rudy D’Amico, CABVI president and CEO (now retired); Chris Burke, Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany (NABA) president and CEO; EOY nominee James Jones, NABA; EOY award winner Mark Foster, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (AVRE); Ken Fernald, AVRE president and CEO; Carrie Laney, NYSPSP executive director; Orlando Bruno, Alphapointe; and Ron Tascarella, Empire State Employment Resources for the Blind (now retired).
In May, personnel from NYSPSP and its affiliated agencies took to the state capitol for the program’s annual Albany Advocacy Days, visiting more than 40 legislative offices to raise awareness of the program and the importance of compliance. During meetings with legislators and their staffs, the group explained the mission and work of NYSPSP and its affiliated agencies, encouraged lawmakers to support the Preferred Source Program, and touched on ways to strengthen it.

“One of the most effective ways to advocate is to convey personal stories with the challenges, opportunities, and successes of people who are blind,” explained NYSPSP employee Chervelle Amaker. “It was great to speak with legislators and their staff and tell them the importance of the program in the lives of people like me.”

**Looking to the Future**

Building on the successes of the past 6½ years, NYSPSP is growing business lines and creating new service opportunities to grow employment while meeting the needs of state and local government entities. New accounts on Facebook and LinkedIn featuring a mix of mission, business, and agency support; participation in key industry tradeshows and events; and email marketing outreach all aim to deepen customer engagement and better reach key stakeholders and new audiences in support of one mission: Creating employment opportunities for New Yorkers who are blind.

Amy Gray is communications project manager at National Industries for the Blind.
When it launched in 1974 in an elementary school classroom, Beacon Lighthouse in Wichita Falls, Texas, had a mission to provide employment for people who are blind. Now in its 45th year, the NIB associated nonprofit agency is accomplishing that, and much more.

In addition to operating a 50,000-square-foot manufacturing and administrative space, Beacon Lighthouse runs AbilityOne Base Supply Centers® (BSCs) at Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas and Fort Sill Army Post in Oklahoma — all while preparing employees who are blind for the jobs of the future.

Meeting Customer Needs
In Wichita Falls, 32 employees, 95% of whom are blind or visually impaired, produce SKILCRAFT® products from scouring pads and sponge scrubbers to aircraft cleaning kits to re-manufactured cartridges for laser printers.

Beacon Lighthouse President and CEO Buddy Edgemon says the agency regularly expands its product lines to meet the changing demands of customers.

“Our employees are very customer-oriented and do their best to meet customers’ needs,” Edgemon says. In addition, Edgemon’s team is always on the lookout for ways to grow employment opportunities for people who are blind. “I’m very pleased that we’re in every channel...
available to sell our products and provide employment,” he says, noting that Beacon received an Employment Growth Award from NIB in 2018 in recognition of its efforts to increase employment retention, growth, and upward mobility for people who are blind.

Beacon’s recently opened Base Supply Center at Sheppard Air Force Base has four employees — all of whom are legally blind, including the managers. The BSC provides supplies for breakrooms and restrooms; cleaning products, hardware, and lightbulbs; lawn and garden supplies; and office furniture and supplies, all without requiring customers to make a trip off base. The BSC Beacon launched at Fort Sill in 2006 offers the same products and convenience to military customers and civilian contractors while employing people who are blind.

The agency has manufactured products for the military resale
AGENCY SPOTLIGHT Continued from page 35

“Beacon is the number one agency for meeting the fill rate, at 99.98% for this fiscal year,” says Anne-Marie Wallace, director of the military resale program at NIB. “They do an excellent job for us. Their merchandise is well-made, priced competitively, and ships on time with no customer complaints.”

On-time delivery is only one part of the story, innovation is another. “They’re always working with us to refine their product assortment to meet the needs of the retail environment,” says Wallace.

All six military resale program employees are blind, including supervisor Patti Archer. Archer began her career at Beacon on the manufacturing floor and worked her way up through several positions. An Army veteran, Archer lives the slogan “Be All You Can Be.” She says that manufacturing gave her

After an oil rig accident shattered Bill Skinner’s body and deprived him of his eyesight, Beacon Lighthouse gave him a chance to rejoin the workforce.

program in commissaries and exchanges since 1983. NIB, which manages the military resale program for associated agencies, gauges delivery performance with a monthly scorecard. Beacon regularly exceeds the ambitious 97% delivery rate goal, a goal 5% higher than the general retail industry standard.
the opportunity to show herself what she could do.

“The people on the [manufacturing] floor are doing the daily work that makes this all possible,” Archer says. “We’re like a family here. I get to spend every day with the hardest-working, kindest people you could ever meet.”

One of those people is Bill Skinner, Beacon’s 2019 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year nominee. Skinner came to Beacon in 2017 after a near-fatal oil rig accident shattered his body and deprived him of his eyesight. After spending two months in the hospital and several years in rehabilitation, he was “getting antsy” at home and anxious to get back into the workforce.

“I never thought they’d hire me,” he says, noting some lingering physical deficits. But Beacon saw Skinner’s drive and gave him a chance to operate a press and winding machine. Today he produces stainless steel sponges and takes great pride in his work.

“I look forward to my job every day — how many people can say that?” Skinner asks. “The people are the best thing about working here. Everyone tries to help you any way they can.”

Preparing for Jobs of the Future

Given that Beacon’s core mission is providing employment opportunities for people who are blind, the agency strives to promote from within. Many employees who began on the manufacturing floor have advanced to administrative positions, Edgemon says, adding that seven of the agency’s 10 administrative staff are blind.

Deanna Dockman-Henry, HR manager and Edgemon’s executive assistant, is one
Since completing NIB’s Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE) training, Jill Thurmond spends several afternoons each week teaching co-workers basic computer skills to prepare them for career advancement.

of those seven. A college graduate who has been blind since childhood, Dockman-Henry joined the agency as a production employee and was soon asked to help with public policy and advocacy work.

She advanced to positions in quality control and label design while continuing her advocacy work.

“I love, love, love my job,” she says. “I love what we stand for and how we help people change their lives.”

“Some people come in here hopeless — the spark is out of them,” she says. “We focus on teaching, training, providing opportunities and support, getting people to try new things and push their limits — and then you see them shine bright. It’s wonderful.”

Edgemon, committed to providing job opportunities beyond manufacturing, is enthusiastic about a new software training program at Beacon that teaches manufacturing employees the basic computer skills needed to move into administrative positions.
The program was proposed by employee Jill Thurmond, a former microbiologist who lost her sight to retinitis pigmentosa. Having worked in sales at the Sheppard BSC and in accounting and order processing, Thurmond was excited to learn that NIB’s Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE) training program was being offered nearby at East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind. Competition for a seat in the intensive program was fierce, but Thurmond was accepted.

She completed the four-week training, where she mastered Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, and PowerPoint, and returned to Beacon inspired to share what she had learned.

Edgemon embraced her proposal to start a software training program at Beacon. “Buddy is so approachable and open to new ideas,” Thurmond says. She now spends several afternoons each week teaching co-workers basic computer skills, and expects to expand the program to serve visually impaired veterans and other members of the community.

“My work here at Beacon is totally different than what I used to do, but I’m so happy where I am,” she says. “I used to find satisfaction in helping people get well; now I find that same satisfaction helping people in other ways.”

Looking to the future, Edgemon plans to continue his work to change society’s perceptions of the capabilities of people who are blind. “People are the same everywhere,” he says. “Some just need a little accommodation to succeed.”

Rosemarie Lally, J.D., is a freelance writer and editor based in Washington, D.C.
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. **Swingline®/SKILCRAFT® Personal Pencil Sharpener**

   Sharpen pencils quickly and quietly with this heavy-duty, UL-listed electric pencil sharpener with carbon steel helical blades. Features include a thermal cutoff, automatic stop to prevent over-sharpening, translucent shavings receptacle with safety lock, and a storage area for pencil organization. TAA compliant, produced by the Blind Center of Nevada in Las Vegas.

2. **Swingline®/SKILCRAFT® SpeedPro™ Pencil Sharpener**

   Sharpen a variety of pencil sizes quickly and quietly with this commercial grade, UL-listed electric pencil sharpener with carbon steel blades. Adjustable dial fits six pencil sizes up to 7/16 inch in diameter. Features include a thermal cutoff, lead-saver to prevent over-sharpening, translucent shavings receptacle with safety lock, and storage area for pencil organization. TAA compliant, produced by the Blind Center of Nevada in Las Vegas.
3. **SKILCRAFT® Desktop Sit-Stand Workstation**

Help employees avoid the detrimental health effects associated with sitting for extended periods of time with this two-tiered, adjustable-height standing desk designed to accommodate dual-monitors or meet larger workspace requirements. Workstation can be placed atop any desk or table and raised to a standing position or lowered to a sitting position. Desktop workstation constructed of wood and steel is 36 inches wide and has a 35-pound capacity. TAA and Berry compliant; assembled in the USA. Produced by Beyond Vision in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
4. **SKILCRAFT® Lens Wipes**

Prolong the life of your lenses with convenient, individually wrapped towelettes that leave glasses clean and streak-free. These anti-static, anti-fog, silicone-free wipes are great for cleaning glass, plastic, or polycarbonate lenses; face shields; goggles; computer screens; and microscope lenses. Dispenser boxes contain 100 pre-moistened 5 inch x 8 inch towelettes. Produced by West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in San Angelo.

5. **Cup Carrier**

Perfect for take-out and to-go environments, these sturdy, multi-compartment cup carriers are built to accommodate up to four cups or containers holding up to 32 ounces. Made from pre-consumer-waste molded fiber and BPI certified as biodegradable and compostable in as little as 30 days, this cup carrier suits all beverage needs. Made in the U.S.A. and TAA compliant; sold in boxes of 300. Produced by Lighthouse Louisiana.
6. Trash Can Dolly
Transport fully loaded round trash cans securely, even on rough or uneven surfaces, with these 5-wheel round dollies. Twist locks hold 20-55 gallon trash containers securely in place during transport, yet unlocks easily for loading. All-plastic construction resists rust, chipping, and dents. Choose from standard dolly with 250-pound capacity or Quiet Wheel model with 350-pound capacity, each with a base constructed of at least 30% post-consumer recycled content. Produced by MidWest Enterprises for the Blind in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

These and thousands of other products are available for purchase at AbilityOne.com, GSAAAdvantage.gov, your local AbilityOne Base Supply Center®, or through AbilityOne authorized distributors. For more information about how to purchase SKILCRAFT and other products produced by people who are blind, visit NIB.org/products.
Across the landscape of new technology for people who are blind there are nearly as many misses as hits. Too often, otherwise well-intentioned researchers, developers, and entrepreneurs misfire after proceeding down a path of first building an expensive piece of technology before fully understanding the big problem they wish to solve.

That’s why the unofficial tenet of Tech Corner continues to be highlighting accessible products that enhance life, solve problems, and are also accessible to readers’ wallets.

If the products are free, all the better.

As such, there is a new and improved solution in the realm of wayfinding for people who are blind — more specifically, indoor wayfinding. Unlike the manifold options available for our outdoor driving, biking, or walking needs, indoor wayfinding is — pardon the pun — still struggling to find its way in the world.

Unlike the majority of our many outdoor wayfinding choices, indoor wayfinding cannot rely on the Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites orbiting above our heads. Wood, brick, steel, and concrete prevent GPS signals from

YOUR FREE CLEW TO SUCCESSFUL INDOOR WAYFINDING

BY DOUG GOIST

Product: Clew
Cost: FREE

For more information, visit NIB.org/TechCorner
penetrating most structures and pinpointing foot travelers’ approximate whereabouts in time and space.

Thus far, most solutions have required that building owners purchase, install, and configure dozens of small wall-mounted signal-emitting Bluetooth beacons that need battery replacement every few years. While this setup can give accurate indoor positioning to a traveler who is blind, the traveler still needs to know which of the many wayfinding apps is paired with a building’s beacon array.

That’s why a small team of researchers at the Olin College of Engineering — an innovative undergraduate school in Needham, Massachusetts, founded in 1997 — is using cutting-edge technology from Apple as the engine to power its indoor navigation app, Clew. Led by principal researcher Paul Ruvolo, the Clew team is capitalizing on Apple’s augmentative reality software tool, ARKit, to guide travelers who are blind through unfamiliar surroundings.

Apple created ARKit to help game designers build rich virtual worlds and creatures within settings like a gamer’s own living room. But instead of making a terrifying Medieval knight jump from behind your couch, Clew uses ARKit’s complex algorithms and the iPhone’s back-facing camera to capture and map out in real time all of the objects along a traveler’s path.

Everything is done through the software, with no external connections to GPS or Bluetooth devices necessary.

This extreme level of object-in-space mapping gives Clew the ability to work with the iPhone’s camera to drop electronic “breadcrumbs” on objects, walls, doors, and in stairwells, to keep track of a user’s route. Several months ago, I tested Clew within my office building and successfully re-traced multiple
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breadcrumbed routes back to my desk through turn-by-turn feedback and musical chimes. While the app was impressive, I was disappointed Clew could not save any of my routes.

Since then, Ruvolo’s team has added the ability to save multiple routes and made other improvements.

My own hope is that the improved Clew will remedy one of my most irksome business travel challenges — re-tracing the way to my hotel room from within the mazes of identical hallways and phalanxes of elevator banks inside massive convention hotels. I’m cautiously optimistic that now I’ll be able to head down to the breakfast area for morning coffee and return to my hotel room without discovering, thanks to my pre-caffeine gogginess, that I’ve hopped on the wrong elevator.

Clew is easy to use, free, and available for iOS download from the App Store. With its most recent updates and ongoing user engagement with Olin’s research team, Clew is on target to be a hit.

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.
NEWS & NOTES

LCI OPENS NEW BSC IN VICKSBURG

NIB associated nonprofit agency LCI celebrated the grand opening of its newest AbilityOne Base Supply Center® (BSC) at the Vicksburg Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC) with a ribbon cutting ceremony on June 25. Officials attending the grand opening included ERDC Commander Col. Ivan P. Beckman, NIB BSC Program Manager Quan Leysath, and LCI President Jeffrey Hawting. Nearly 100 people visited the BSC on its grand opening day, providing a great opportunity for LCI to showcase employment opportunities for people who are blind and visually impaired.

LCI Vice President of Store Operations Bill Blackton (left) celebrated the opening of the new BSC in Vicksburg, Mississippi, with ERDC Commander Col. Ivan Beckman and LCI President Jeffrey Hawting (right).
In June, the National Contract Management Association (NCMA) welcomed nearly 100 contract close out professionals from NIB associated agencies as part of a new corporate training partnership with NIB that will make world class e-learning courses accessible to people who are visually impaired. Completion of NCMA training courses will prepare associated agency employees working in the Contract Management Support program to advance in their contract management careers.

Founded in 1959, NCMA is the world’s leading professional resource for procurement and acquisition personnel, dedicated to professional growth and educational advancement. “As an organization that believes in the ability of people who are blind or visually impaired to pursue any career they choose, we are excited to embark on this new partnership with NCMA,” said NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch.

The EXCEL Awards recognize excellence and leadership in nonprofit association media, publishing, marketing, and communications. This year there were 800 submissions to the competition, which is open to nonprofit organizations and for-profit industry service partners submitting on behalf of association clients.

NIB’s Opportunity Magazine took home the silver in June at the EXCEL Awards presented by Association Media and Publishing. The Spring 2018 Opportunity cover story An American Classic, which tells the story of the SKILCRAFT U.S. Government Pen, won second place in the Best Feature Article Under 10,000 Words category.
OCTOBER IS NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) and NIB and its associated agencies across the country are joining in to raise awareness of disability employment issues. The 2019 NDEAM theme, “The Right Talent, Right Now,” emphasizes the essential role that people with disabilities play in America’s economic success, especially in an era when historically low unemployment and global competition are creating a high demand for skilled talent.

“Every day, individuals with disabilities add significant value and talent to our workforce and economy,” said U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta. “Individuals with disabilities offer employers diverse perspectives on how to tackle challenges and achieve success. They have the right talent, right now.”

NIB associated nonprofit agencies, AbilityOne Base Supply Centers, and authorized distributors and wholesalers received toolkits from NIB to help them recognize NDEAM and communicate the importance of creating meaningful employment for people who are blind. Readers can join NIB in recognizing NDEAM and contribute to the conversation on social media using the hashtag #NDEAM.
NIB CONCLUDES SOURCING CERTIFICATION PILOT

Five individuals who are blind completed the Sourcing Certification Training Pilot, receiving certificates from the Sourcing Institute Foundation and NIB on August 22. Sourcing professionals support human resource recruiters by identifying qualified candidates for employment who may or may not be actively looking for job opportunities. Once candidates are identified, sourcing professionals “hand off” the information to a team of recruiters who carry out the qualification, interview, and placement process.

The sourcing profession, which has seen consistent growth over the past several decades, is an excellent career opportunity for employees who telework, because job duties can be performed any time, in any internet-connected location. NIB’s Sourcing Certification Program provides comprehensive instruction in the use and application of tools, resources, and research methods to identify candidates, and assists successful participants with job placement.
Sourcing Certification Training program instructors and students at the August 22 recognition ceremony. Front row, left to right: Trainer Rob Delp, Sourcing Foundation Institute (SFI); students Felicia Roberts of Massachusetts and Sarah Davis of Vermont; NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch; students Laura Haynes of South Carolina, Maurice Crittendon of Virginia, and Wendy Sproul of Texas. Back row, left to right: Trainer Shally Stekerl, SFI; student Daniel Armstrong of Florida; trainer Bob Richardson, Orion Global Talent; Human Resources Specialist Rikki Howie and Employment Support Services Program Director Billy Parker, both with NIB.
By purchasing SKILCRAFT® products and other products and services provided through the AbilityOne® Program you help create U.S.-based jobs for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

OCTOBER IS NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH