

A Publication of National Industries for the Blind

# O PPORTUNITY

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## Lives of Service

Veterans working at NIB associated agencies can continue serving their country

NEXT PAGE

# OPPORTUNITY

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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](http://NIB.org).*

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

# A COMMITMENT TO SERVE

It's a scene played out countless times throughout our country each year: Young men and women raise their right hand and take an oath to serve, prepared to risk their lives to preserve the principles and ideals Americans hold dear.

It takes a special kind of person to put others before themselves, to run toward the dangerous situations that most would run from. Often, when their time in service to our country is done, military veterans still have a desire to serve others.

In this issue of Opportunity magazine, we introduce you to veterans who are blind working in our nationwide network of associated nonprofit agencies who have found ways to continue serving others. From our profile of Matt Koch, a former Navy pilot who learned what he could do after losing sight in one eye, and now helps other people who are blind learn what's possible for them, to the veterans in our cover story, who serve their country by providing high quality equipment and supplies to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines filling the roles they once filled.

A song popular during World War I proclaimed old soldiers don't die, they just fade away. At NIB associated agencies, former soldiers don't fade away, they find new ways to fulfill their commitment to serve.



**Kevin A. Lynch**  
President and  
Chief Executive Officer



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# THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

## Medically retired from the U.S. Navy, Matt Koch found a new way to serve.

BY LYRYSA SMITH

An accomplished U.S. Navy pilot, Matt Koch was on his third deployment to the Middle East, flying helicopters off destroyers and frigates, when he noticed some loss of peripheral vision in his left eye. Back in the U.S., physicians found a tumor growing in a precarious location on his pituitary gland, pressing against the optic nerve.

The third attempt to remove the tumor succeeded, but Koch opened his eyes to discover he was blind in his left eye. “My immediate and only thought was, ‘How am I going to support my family? How can I help care for them now?’” he recalls. “I didn’t know what was possible.”

Today, as chief executive officer at Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB), Koch not only knows what’s possible for people who are blind or visually impaired, he helps others discover what’s possible for them.

### An Itch to Serve

After a medical retirement from the Navy, Koch joined Capital One in Richmond, Virginia. The job paid well and he gained valuable experience, but something was missing. “It wasn’t scratching my itch for public service, and I realized that is an important part of who I am,” he says. Koch’s wife agreed he should return to the public sector.

Koch began working for the state and soon found his opportunity at

Virginia Industries for the Blind. “It was the mission of service to others that attracted me to VIB,” says Koch, who started at the agency in 2014.

With his business and military background, the agency was a perfect fit. “It is my calling to serve others. It’s not about money, but greater rewards,” explains Koch. “I am focused on helping people with vision impairment.”



▲ When a visual impairment ended Matt Koch’s Navy career, he wondered how he would support his family. Now he knows what’s possible for people who are blind and visually impaired.

Although Koch didn’t set out to hire veterans, four of his direct reports are vets, as are many other VIB employees. “VIB is very attractive to former military members because we’re on a public service mission bigger than ourselves.”

Similar to the military, Koch says, VIB works with “whoever walks in the door, and we do the best we can to help them be the best they can. We employ capable people and don’t give up on anyone.”

### Equipping the Military

Founded in 1925, VIB today employs more than 180 people, 105 of whom are blind or visually impaired, across 25 locations in Virginia. VIB employees manufacture goods in two locations, manage 10 AbilityOne Base Supply Centers™, and perform service contracts in more than a dozen locations.

The majority of VIB customers are federal and state agencies, including many military bases and defense organizations. VIB makes one-third of shipboard mattresses for the U.S. Navy – the agency’s quality manager is a retired sailor who recalls sleeping on VIB-produced mattresses while serving on submarines.

The agency also produces LED lighting, pillows, shower curtains, mops, janitorial and office supplies, and spices, as well as recertifying fire extinguishers. It recently began packaging and distributing coffee for Coffee Vets – a veteran-owned and operated company that donates 100 percent of net proceeds to nonprofit organizations supporting veterans with PTSD – to grocery stores nationwide. Now, VIB is working on bringing the product to military commissaries. (See story on page 11.)

Koch says VIB is always recruiting people who are blind or visually impaired for its variety of jobs, noting that many employees transition to private companies or the federal government with the skills and training they received at VIB.

Such transitions fit in perfectly with Koch’s philosophy of growth and giving. The paradigm used to be you learned one thing and that was your career and your life, he says. “Now we embrace learning different things and doing new things. We find new ways to contribute.” □

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



**AJ**

*Navy Veteran, Machine Operator*

*Connect to*

what matters

***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.

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▼ Antonio Arbelo served the U.S. Navy in an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit for nearly eight years.



# LIVES OF SERVICE

**America's veterans are finding second careers at NIB associated agencies that allow them to continue serving their communities and country.**

BY SHARON HERRIGAN

NIB associated nonprofit agencies are proud of the work they do to support America's veterans. At the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) in upstate New York, for example, 12 employees, nine of whom are blind or visually impaired, offer 24/7 telecommunications and front-desk support for the Albany Stratton Veterans' Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Albany, New York.

At IFB Solutions in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, employees make about 263,000 pairs of lenses annually, mostly for the VA. In addition to making lenses at the central lab, IFB Solutions runs 31 dispensing rooms in 24 VA hospitals across the country, enabling veterans and their families to walk directly into the dispensary from their doctor's office in the hospital and order glasses or contact lenses. About 150 employees, 46 of whom are blind or visually impaired, work

in the agency's optical services division, which includes the lab, the VA dispensaries, and a customer service department.

Alphapointe, headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri, offers customer support services for the VA in California, Missouri, and New York. In addition, the agency has been making medicine bottles for the VA since the mid-1990s. In 1995, two employees worked on the VA contract. Today 27 employees who are blind or visually impaired work around the clock to make, pack, and ship the medicine bottles. U.S. Navy veteran Antonio Arbelo is one of them.

## Finding a Follow-up Career

Arbelo enlisted in the U.S. Navy in February 1985. After basic and advanced training, he was assigned to an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit, and for nearly eight years it was his

job to, as he says, “blow things up.” Wounded on a mission, he lost sight in one eye and was medically discharged in 1992.

After his discharge, Arbelo says, he had to find himself all over again. “My marriage failed and I found myself fighting another war, this time inside myself.” But he kept going, won that war, and is at peace now. He worked 10 years for Kansas City, supervising a crew of 15 men who maintained the city’s water system infrastructure, but retired after losing vision in his other eye as a complication of renal failure.

Not ready to retire completely, Arbelo joined Alphapointe in October 2016. As a full-time packer and machinist in the plastics department, he helps fulfill the VA contract. “I’m pretty sure I’ve made a lot of the bottles in my own medicine cabinet,” he says with a laugh.

He appreciates the work and the veterans he serves. “It gives me purpose. Veterans have so much to offer,” says Arbelo, “but we don’t often get to show how what we learned in the military applies in the civilian world. And all veterans can bring a lot.”

Like Arbelo, Aaron “AJ” Johnson doesn’t like to get into too much detail when it comes to his three tours of duty in Vietnam. He will tell you that he was drafted and went into the Navy, where he served as a machiner’s mate on Navy vessels. He will mention – only when prompted – that he was awarded

the Bronze Star for heroism while trying to rescue a wounded soldier. And he will recall that as difficult as his war experience was, coming home was difficult too. “We’d come home after being deployed for three months to people throwing things at us,” says Johnson. “It was a volatile time in the U.S.”

Honorably discharged after serving four years, Johnson worked in construction until 1992, when he failed the eye exam to get a chauffeur’s license and realized he was losing his vision. He joined Alphapointe as an office product machinist three years ago and loves the work. “I’m so grateful to be here,” he says.

### Helping Troops Gear Up

Rick Medina, 2013 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year nominee at Arizona Industries for the Blind (AIB), was following in his brother’s footsteps when he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1986. He had hoped to make a career of it, but was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa and medically discharged after only 18 months. That didn’t stop Medina from continuing to serve the military: He got a job as a medical supply buyer at the same hospital where he had worked while on active duty and remained there until the base closed in 1996.

Medina then transferred to Luke Air Force Base, where he worked until 2006, when his sight deteriorated to the point that he was declared legally blind and medically retired from civil service.



**A** Aaron “AJ” Johnson served as a machiner’s mate on Navy vessels through three tours of duty in Vietnam and received the Bronze Star for heroism.



**A** Discharged from the U.S. Air Force when he was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, Rick Medina now makes sure troops preparing for deployment get the equipment they need as a customer service representative at the Base Supply Center on Luke Air Force Base.

## COVER STORY

*Continued from page 7*

Although he retired from civil service, Medina wasn't ready to retire from serving others. He joined AIB in 2009 as a customer service representative at the AbilityOne Base Supply Center™ (BSC) on Luke Air Force Base and now helps troops prepare for deployment, making sure they have the right gear. "Each person needs about 30 pieces of equipment when they are deployed. I make sure they get everything they need," says Medina, who estimates he's helped equip more than 400 military men and women over the years.

"I love my job. AIB is a great organization," says Medina. "Here, I can be myself. Everyone is so accepting and encouraging and that helps us all do our best work."

### Renaissance Men

For more than a decade, Walter Winn says, he was the military equivalent of the "Maytag Repairman," fixing anything and everything the Army needed fixing. He was wounded during Operation Enduring Freedom and medically retired in 2012.

Before joining LC Industries, Winn worked for the Wounded Warrior program at Fort Bragg making deliveries, providing customer service, and taking care of daily operations. In 2014, he was selected from among 3,500 candidates for the

first-ever Wounded Warrior of the Year Award for his work with the program.

Winn joined LC Industries in October 2016 through NIB's Wounded Warrior Program. Now a customer service representative at the Fort Bragg BSC, Winn says he feels like he is still serving his country through his work.

Willie "Dallas" Richardson graduated from high school early and soon realized that cooking was his love. But he also caught the travel bug, so when an Army recruiter told him he could see the world, Richardson put his cooking plans on hold. After basic training, he joined the 101st Infantry Division.

But then Richardson's travel plans had to wait a while. "When I was at basic training, I cooked a meal for the Post Commander and before I knew it, I was his personal cook for two years," Richardson recalls. He was eventually sent to Germany, where he was a field cook for a time. He later joined Special Forces, became a field medic, and did indeed see the world: 41 different countries on four different continents.

Richardson mustered out of the Army in 1989 after serving for more than 11 years. He worked as a paramedic for a few years,

## HELPING WOUNDED WARRIORS TRANSITION

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have caused more injuries resulting in blindness than any conflict since the Civil War. Blindness can be devastating under any circumstance, but it can be especially devastating to wounded warriors and their families, who face the challenge of emotional and physical healing while transitioning back to civilian life.

NIB's Wounded Warrior Program is designed to help with that transition. The program offers training and internship opportunities in business-related areas for interested veterans, and assists in finding meaningful jobs in a wide variety of positions throughout NIB and its associated agencies. Learn more at [NIB.org/WW](http://NIB.org/WW).







▲ Willie “Dallas” Richardson (right) served in 41 different countries on four continents over the course of more than a decade in the U.S. Army.

▲ A self-described “Maytag Repairman” for the Army, Walter Winn, shown here with his wife Rita, received the 2014 Wounded Warrior of the Year award for his work at Fort Bragg. Photo courtesy of Lewis Perkins/Paraglide.

was a special needs teacher’s aide, and – until he lost his vision at the age of 49 – served as a deputy sheriff in Texarkana, Texas.

Now totally blind in one eye, with partial vision in the other as a result of diabetic retinopathy, Richardson hasn’t slowed down. He credits his mother with teaching him how to take care of himself from an early age, but the road hasn’t always been easy. He looked for work as a cook for seven years, but restaurants considered his low vision a liability and wouldn’t hire him. He joined LC Industries on the Red River Army Depot in April 2017 as a customer service representative in the BSC.

“I love it here. I look forward to coming to work every day,” says Richardson, who helps customers, stocks shelves, and generally does whatever is needed. “I work with a lot of beautiful people.” And he still cooks. “I’m making a dish for the ladies here tomorrow,” he says with a laugh.

### Former Rivals, Now Brothers

People who think there is a rivalry between branches of

the service have never met Army veteran Daryl Wells and Marine Corps veteran Davain Andrews. Wells – an expeditor in the distribution center at Industries of the Blind (IOB) in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the agency’s 2018 Career Achiever of the Year – and Andrews, a handler in the distribution center – say they are truly brothers who watch out for each other.

Wells enlisted in the Army in April 1980 with no idea what to expect when he arrived for basic training. To his surprise, he excelled. “I got the Soldier of the Cycle Award (given to the top soldier for each training cycle) and spoke in front of the class,” he recalls with pride.

While at advanced training for communications, a recruiter from the 82nd Airborne Division introduced himself to Wells. “He told me that I could jump out of airplanes,” says Wells. With that and a guarantee that he would be stationed out of Ft. Bragg, just an hour and a half from his hometown of Greensboro, Wells headed to Airborne training. He

## COVER STORY

*Continued from page 9*

remembers the intense physical training well. “I had always been physically fit, but this was another level altogether.”

“It was a great experience, jumping with the unit. At any given time, we had to be able to have ‘boots on the ground’ in 18 hours,” recalls Wells, who set up communications on the battlefield.

His unit took training and sports very seriously, and Wells got into boxing. “I was winning,” he says with a laugh, “until I ran into a Mike Tyson look-alike and got hit in the head.” The injury resulted in legal blindness and he was medically discharged after serving four years.

“The next couple of years were hard,” says Wells. “I loved being in the military and serving my country.” He credits his wife, who he met while boxing, with helping him through that time. He spent a number of years in Fayetteville loading tires – hard, physical work that offered few opportunities for himself and his family.

Wells found opportunity in 2003. When IOB offered him a job in Greensboro he didn’t hesitate to move his family back to

his hometown. In his years with the agency, Wells has bagged T-shirts, sewn dust mops, and made pens. He moved into the distribution center in 2006 and has been there ever since.

“I love it here,” says Wells. “I love the team, the people I work with. Everyone supports each other. It has given me personal development, greater independence, and self-worth. And I’m still supporting our troops, and that feels great.”

Davain Andrews wasn’t given much of a choice when it came to joining the U.S. Marine Corps. As a young man he “got into some trouble,” while visiting his grandparents in North Carolina. “I was given two options by the judge: I could join the military or go to jail. I chose the military.”

In late July 1977, Andrews got off the bus – in handcuffs – at Parris Island for basic training.

“At first, I didn’t want to be there, but I eventually saw the light,” says Andrews. “All of a sudden, I wanted to be like my drill sergeant.” In a few short weeks, Andrews went from a reluctant enlistee to a dedicated Marine.



▲ Medically discharged from the U.S. Army after his retinas detached, former 82nd Airborne Division member Daryl Wells keeps track of inventory in the distribution center at IOB Greensboro.



**A** Davain Andrews served 16 years in the Marine Corps and received the Purple Heart before losing his eyesight in a helicopter crash.

During his military career, Andrews was stationed in Iran and Beirut, and spent a year detonating bombs in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. He earned a Purple Heart after he was shot twice in the chest while on a mission in Panama. “That one hurt a bit,” he says. Andrews also survived two helicopter crashes and served in Desert Storm, retiring from the Marines in April 1993.

After his discharge, Andrews worked as a security contractor overseas. He survived his third helicopter crash in 1999, but this time both of his retinas detached and he lost his eyesight.

The next few years were difficult. “I was a blind Marine who still wanted to fight,” he says. After working 13 years at NIB associated agency Lions Services Inc., in Charlotte, North Carolina, he moved to IOB in August 2016. Now he picks and packs boxes of supplies in the distribution center, a job, he says, that makes him feel like he is still serving.

“Everything we touch is for our troops,” says Andrews. “In the Marines, it was drilled into me to trust my equipment. Now I’m proud to be a part of an organization that makes high-quality products and equipment for our troops.”

Looking back at the arc of his life Andrews has no regrets “I wouldn’t change a thing.” **Q**

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

## TEAMING UP TO COMBAT PTSD

After more than two decades in service to his country, Kip Nicely, Capt. USN (Ret), has a new mission: Brewing support for veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), one bag of coffee at a time.

Nicely is founder and president of Coffee Vets, a veteran-owned and operated company that gives 100 percent of net proceeds to nonprofit organizations supporting veterans with PTSD. The coffee is packaged by employees who are blind at NIB associated agency Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB).

“Our business development officer met Kip Nicely, a fellow Virginian, at an NIB-sponsored event and found a connection between our two missions,” explains Matt Koch, chief executive officer at VIB. “We asked, ‘How can we partner?’ We offered to package their coffee and distribute it and worked it out.”

On average, 22 veterans die from suicide each day. Coffee Vets aims to help reduce the number of injuries and suicides caused by PTSD, and reduce the stigma many military members and veterans associate with seeking help for mental illness.

“Many people at VIB proudly served in uniform and strongly support Coffee Vets’ cause. Capt. Nicely supports VIB’s mission of helping veterans and Virginians who are blind to find quality employment,” says Koch. “Both missions benefit from the partnership. We are so happy to have them on board with us.”

— Lyrysa Smith



**A Hero's Story Behind Every Cup.**

[www.CoffeeVets.com](http://www.CoffeeVets.com) #CoffeeVets @CoffeeVets

# GET TO KNOW NIB ASSOCIATED NONPROFIT AGENCIES

## ● Wayfinder Family Services

**Junior Blind**  
has a new name!



**Headquarters:** Los Angeles, California  
**President and CEO:** Miki Jordan  
**Founded:** 1953

**Capabilities at-a-glance:** Wayfinder strives to empower individuals, support families, and strengthen communities through five overlapping areas of service: vision loss, special needs, temporary shelter and residential services, foster care and adoption, and mental health.

**Did you know?** Wayfinder traces its origins to Norm and Nadia Kaplan who, with dozens of friends and volunteers, began taking children with visual impairments on weekend outings, eventually founding the Foundation for the Junior Blind (now Wayfinder Family Services).

**More info:** [wayfinderfamily.org](http://wayfinderfamily.org)

## ● Envision Xpress



**Location:** Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota  
**Operated by:** Envision  
**Year opened:** 1999  
**More info:** [envisiunus.com/Fueling-Our-Mission/Envision-Xpress](http://envisiunus.com/Fueling-Our-Mission/Envision-Xpress)

## ● Travis Association For The Blind

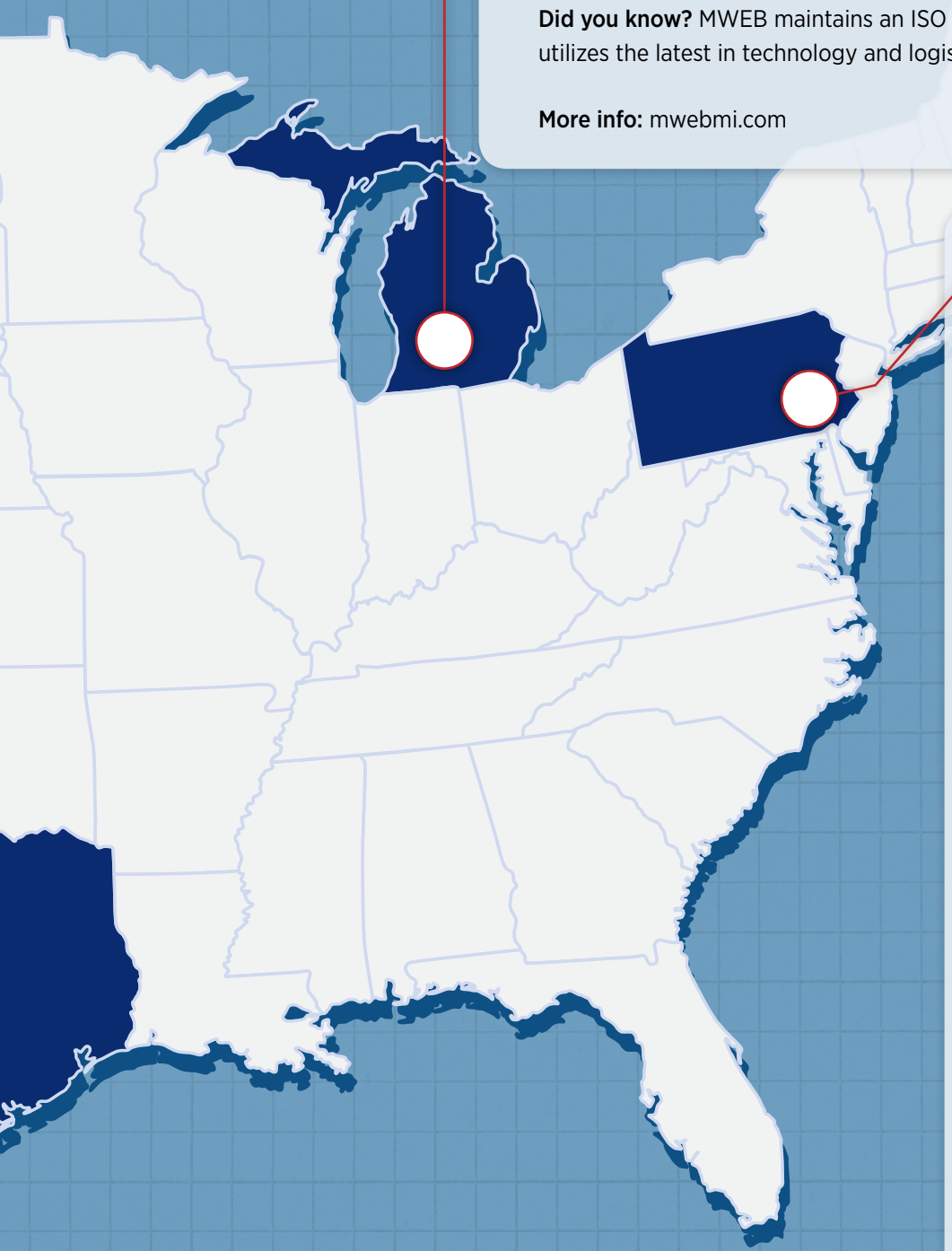
**Headquarters:** Austin, Texas  
**Executive Director:** Jerry A. Mayfield  
**Founded:** 1934



**Capabilities at-a-glance:** Provides vocational and office training, job placement, and a training and employment program for people who are DeafBlind. Produces sewn textiles, loose-leaf binders, skin care products and dispensers, and cleaning products.

**Did you know?** Formerly known as the Austin Lighthouse, the agency assembled keyboards for IBM Selectric typewriters and electric signals used to control traffic intersections all over the United States.

**More info:** [austinlighthouse.org](http://austinlighthouse.org)



## ● MidWest Enterprises for the Blind



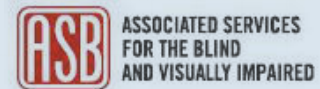
**Headquarters:** Kalamazoo, Michigan  
**President:** Karen Walls  
**Founded:** 1992

**Capabilities at-a-glance:** MidWest Enterprises for the Blind's (MWEB) full-service assembly, warehousing, and distribution facility provides quality products and services to a wide range of government and commercial customers.

**Did you know?** MWEB maintains an ISO 9001:2015 certification and utilizes the latest in technology and logistics.

**More info:** [mwebmi.com](http://mwebmi.com)

## ● Associated Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired



**Headquarters:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**President and CEO:** Karla S. McCaney

**Founded:** 1874

**Capabilities at-a-glance:** Orientation and mobility training, access technology training, job readiness program, client drop-in center, braille production, large print production, and custom audio.

**Did you know?** Associated Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired promotes self-esteem, independence, and self-determination through education, training, and resources that teach the skills individuals need to integrate into daily life and adapt to vision loss.

**More info:** [asb.org](http://asb.org)

# HEART OF A CHAMPION

**NIB and the U.S. Association of Blind Athletes helped Paralympian Clark Rachfal translate his competitive drive into workplace success.**

BY JOHN DOS PASSOS COGGIN



▲ NIB Public Policy Manager Clark Rachfal (left) accompanies Advocate for Leadership and Employment Mike Guajardo (center) of San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind and Vision Impaired, and agency President and CEO Michael Gilliam on a Capitol Hill visit during the 2017 NIB/NAEPB National Symposium.

After retiring from sports, many Olympic and Paralympic athletes struggle to join the workforce. “If they’re throwing their entire life into being the best in the world, how can any athlete also fully concentrate on their education, their career?” asks Mark Lucas, executive director of the U.S. Association of Blind Athletes (USABA), in explaining the challenge. For people who are blind, the transition can be even tougher: Nearly 70 percent of working-age Americans who are blind are not employed.

A partnership between USABA and National Industries for the Blind (NIB) is working to change that, helping athletes who are blind integrate into the workforce. USABA, a nonprofit founded in 1976, empowers Americans who are

blind and visually impaired to experience life-changing opportunities in sports, recreation, and physical activities. The partnership with NIB began in 2016 at the recommendation of NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch. USABA refers athletes to NIB for employment at NIB headquarters, associated nonprofit agencies, or at other companies.

NIB Public Policy Manager Clark Rachfal is the first athlete referred by USABA to be placed at NIB. Rachfal was declared legally blind at age 4 and diagnosed in his mid-20s with Leber congenital amaurosis (LCA), a rare degenerative eye condition that resulted in almost total blindness.

He came to NIB from the world of competitive cycling. At the 2012

Paralympic Games in London, Rachfal and his pilot, Dave Swanson, took sixth in the individual pursuit and seventh in the individual 1 kilometer time trial.

Rachfal discovered the sport in college, while studying abroad in Australia in 2004 and 2005. While Down Under, a friend encouraged him to ride a tandem bicycle on a 270-kilometer, three-day fundraising ride. Rachfal was hooked, dedicating himself to excelling in cycling. After graduating from Towson University in Maryland with a degree in political science and economics he was accepted to a USABA tandem cycling camp at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 2006.

At that summer camp, Rachfal met Swanson and launched full-speed into the competitive cycling life, competing nationally in 2007. Training as a tandem cyclist required forging an unbreakable bond with his pilot, a challenge compounded by the fact that Swanson lived in Arizona, 2,000 miles away from Rachfal’s home in Annapolis, Maryland. While training, Rachfal worked as a policy analyst at a large telecommunications company in Washington, D.C. In 2009, he and Swanson won the World



▲ Rachfal (center), with NIB Employment Support Services Director Billy Parker (left) and NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch (right), was one of 10 exceptional individuals with disabilities recognized as an employee of the year by CAREERS & the disABLED.

Championship at the UCI Para-Cycling Track World Championship competition; by 2012, the duo was competing in the London Paralympic Games.

USABA's Lucas says discovering an elite athlete of Rachfal's caliber is far from the norm for the organization. "Occasionally one in 15, one in 20, will have the ability, the skills, the drive, the knowledge, the desire to want to take their game to the next level, including going to national championships and the highest level, the Paralympic Games." He calls Rachfal's high marks at the Games in London "incredible feats."

"Other than being on the podium at events, being selected to the Games and walking through the tunnel and into the stadium at opening ceremonies is probably the emotional high of any athlete's career," says Rachfal. He is proud of his medals, the longevity of his success with Swanson, and the successes of his teammates, who became like family.

After London, Rachfal became a mentor with Classroom Champions, a program connecting top athletes with students in underserved schools. Co-founded by three-time U.S. Olympian Steve Mesler, Classroom Champions has reached more than 25,000 students

across the globe. Rachfal found the experience rewarding on many levels. "The program pushed me beyond my comfort zone for group and video communications, and I gained greater understanding of what morals and values are important to me."

After he retired from cycling at the end of 2016, USABA referred Rachfal to NIB, where he joined the public policy team in April 2017.

At NIB, Rachfal manages the Advocates for Leadership and Employment program, serving as a mentor, tutor, and role model for about 50 employees who are blind working at NIB associated agencies, helping them learn about lobbying and public policymaking.

"This program is in line with the NIB mission of enhancing opportunities for people who are blind," Rachfal says. "The goal of the Advocates for Leadership and Employment program is promoting self-confidence and enriching communication skills so participants can effectively share their story and positively impact public policy decisions on the federal, state, and local levels."

In April, Rachfal was one of 10 exceptional individuals with disabilities recognized as

an employee of the year by CAREERS & the disABLED, a career-guidance and recruitment magazine for college students and professionals with disabilities. He was selected for the award based on job performance, community service, and advocacy for people with disabilities.

"Clark's only scratched the potential of where he's going, I know," says Billy Parker, employment support services program director at NIB.

So far, 20 candidates from a variety of sports have been referred to NIB by USABA. Some athletes who are still competing want to establish a relationship with NIB now, intending to circle back after retirement.

Parker looks forward to growing the relationship. "The people at USABA have been great partners who have provided NIB excellent candidates for employment," he says. "The attributes that contribute to being successful as an athlete also contribute to success as an employee." Rachfal brings those attributes and more to his public policy career at NIB. □

*John Dos Passos Coggin is a freelance writer based in Alexandria, Virginia.*



▲ On the podium at the 2009 UCI Para-Cycling Track World Championships in Manchester, England, world champions Rachfal (left) and pilot Dave Swanson sport their gold medals after winning the 4 kilometer Individual Pursuit.



▲ Rachfal and pilot Dave Swanson competing in the London 2012 Paralympic Games. Photo by Brian Hodes, Cycling Illustrated.



This year's 2018 NIB/NAEPB National Symposium, held May 16 - 18 in Alexandria, Virginia, brought together 72 employee of the year nominees representing 59 NIB associated nonprofit agencies from across the nation, along with 12 new Advocates for Leadership and Employment. Activities included public policy training, employee of the year activities, an assistive technology showcase, and more! After a busy day on Capitol Hill, where attendees visited 160 Congressional offices, everyone came together at the awards banquet to recognize R.B. Irwin Award winner 3M Company and national employees of the year EJ Ford, winner of the Peter J. Salmon award, and Gay Young, winner of the Milton J. Samuelson award.



**“Working at the Lighthouse has helped make my goals a reality, not just a dream.”**

**Dustin Bradford,**  
Peter J. Salmon  
Employee of the Year Award nominee,  
The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc.  
Seattle, Washington



**Tina Ballard, executive director of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission, said the employees of the year remind everyone of the importance of the mission.**



**Jim Kesteloot, chairperson of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission, thanked employees of the year for representing their agencies on Capitol Hill.**



**“Our common message is that we have something to offer to this nation. We have our own energy and our own wisdom to contribute.”**

**Gay Young,**  
Milton J. Samuelson  
Career Achievement Award winner,  
Lighthouse Louisiana,  
New Orleans, Louisiana



**“Industries of the Blind at Greensboro has opened opportunities for employment, where I can achieve and develop personal independence.”**

**Daryl Wells,**  
Milton J. Samuelson  
Career Achievement Award nominee,  
Industries of the Blind,  
Greensboro, North Carolina



**“I just want to say thanks to God for this opportunity. Without him, I couldn’t do this.”**

**E.J. Ford,**  
Peter J. Salmon  
Employee of the Year Award winner  
IFB Solutions, Winston-Salem,  
North Carolina



**NIB welcomed the 2018 class of Advocates for Leadership and Employment during the National Symposium. Pictured left to right are (front row) Owen Neil, Mark Haynes, LaRue Peters, Yehia Eldaouk-Elkadi, and Scott Seder, (back row) Guy Latronico, Mark Ivy, Tracy Hill, Keith Pegram, Shannon Wilder, and Raymond Montgomery**



**“Through the advocates program I learned how I could impact the lives of individuals that I work with as well as individuals who are blind or visually impaired in the wider society.”**

**Nikki Barre,**  
Milton J. Samuelson  
Career Achievement Award nominee,  
RLCB, Raleigh, North Carolina



**“These jobs don’t just affect the lives of individuals who are visually impaired. They affect the lives, hearts, and minds of our families, friends, our communities, and our country.”**

**Sandy Wilkinson,**  
Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award nominee,  
Envision, Wichita, Kansas

# SUPPORTING THE MILITARY AND THE COMMUNITY

**South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind provides essential products to state and federal customers, in addition to community education and awareness activities.**

BY ROSEMARIE LALLY, J.D.

When South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind (STLB) was established in 1964, its business plan was modest: to make brooms and mops and sell them door-to-door. Today, producing critical products and providing services to the U.S. military and federal government, as well as to the state of Texas, has helped the NIB associated nonprofit agency steadily build its manufacturing and retail capabilities to become the largest employer of people who are blind in south Texas.

STLB operates ISO 9001-certified Quality Management Systems manufacturing facilities in Corpus Christi and Victoria, Texas, in addition to operating six AbilityOne Base Supply Centers™ (BSCs) on military installations in Texas, California, Hawaii, and Mississippi.

The South Texas Lighthouse employs about 180 individuals, according to

Alana Manrow, director of public affairs and development, including a number of military veterans who work in positions ranging from production to management. Chief Operations Officer Thomas Boyers is a retired Air Force officer.

The agency makes a wide variety of products, including binders, index tabs, toilet paper, sandbags, customized mousepads, specialized gloves, army combat helmet chinstraps, mail trays, and eco-friendly chemicals, in addition to performing kitting and sewing projects for commercial customers.

Roughly 90 percent of STLB's sales are to government. Both the federal government and the state of Texas rely on the organization for a variety of essential products. For example, the agency produces 350 varieties of three-ring binders customized for

each branch of the armed forces with traditional colors and desired graphics. The United States Postal Service relies on the agency for its corrugated plastic mail trays, with the Victoria facility sometimes running three shifts to meet the postal service demand, Manrow said.

Texas state agencies contract with STLB for products ranging from collection kits used by the Texas Department of Public Safety for testing DNA from blood samples or mouth swabs and performing blood toxicology, to toilet paper provided to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for all of the state's prisons.

## Supplying the Military

South Texas Lighthouse operates two AbilityOne Base Supply Centers, known as 1 Store Solutions, in Texas on Naval Air Station Corpus Christi and Naval Air Station Kingsville, as well as the Corpus Christi Army Depot



▲ In the 1960s, mops and brooms produced by the South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind were sold door-to-door in Corpus Christi.



▲ Tina Flores, shown here working on three-ring binders, has been with South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind for 19 years. She loves the agency's willingness to experiment with new ways to get a job done.

Safety Store. Outside the state, the agency operates BSCs on Travis Air Force Base in California, Sand Island Coast Guard Base in Hawaii, and in Mississippi on Naval Air Station Meridian and Columbus Air Force Base. The centers employ 20 people, including three military veterans employed as managers, according to Pamela Braatz, vice president for retail and government services.

The BSCs offer military and government personnel more than 160,000 mission-essential products from office necessities and furniture to cleaning supplies, safety equipment, and military uniforms. Ordering is available in-store or through STL B's BSC website, [Istoresolutions.com](http://Istoresolutions.com).

Shortly after it began operating the BSC at Travis in 1998, STL B added individual equipment to its offerings, providing flight suits, uniforms, gloves, boots, helmets, and other gear needed for deployment.

STL B employees with hazmat training and certification provide services at Naval Air Stations Corpus Christi, Kingsville, and Meridian. The contracts are comprehensive, covering shipping and receiving of hazardous substances on-base through to tracking customer use and storage of the materials.

At the Corpus Christi Army Depot STL B provides safety items, such as gloves, eye protection, and personal protective equipment. In addition, agency employees reclaim and refurbish G-Paks – collapsible military shipping containers the agency produces under contract with the Defense Logistics Agency – for re-use.

Managers keep the work fresh and interesting by rotating employees through different tasks. Robert Blakeney, employed by STL B since 2005, currently packages index tabs, but has also worked in sewing and manufacturing. "I love it here because of the people I work with and the variety of assignments," he said.



▲ Robert Blakeney and Eva Faz working on mail trays at the South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind plant in Victoria, Texas. After a discouraging job search, working at the Lighthouse has helped Blakeney regain his self-confidence.

Blakeney said searching for work years ago was discouraging, but coming to STL B restored his self-confidence. "The Lighthouse is proof that people who are blind can do things, that we're ready and willing to work and contribute," Blakeney said. "That's why I love the Lighthouse so much."

Blakeney's co-worker Tina Flores, who has been with STL B for 19 years, echoed his comments. "The door is always open here. The Lighthouse gives people who are visually impaired the opportunity to hold a job and is willing to explore different ways of doing things, to experiment with alternative ways to get a job done to suit an individual's abilities."

Manrow says her goal at the agency is "to make South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind a household name by increasing awareness of opportunities for people who are blind."

### Serving the Community

In addition to its employment opportunities, STL B works to empower people who are blind and educate the larger community about issues affecting them. Its Corpus Christi office offers a variety of assistive products ranging from talking watches,



▲ Johnny Joe Juarez supports his son Jevin as he reaches for a beeping Easter Egg created by the Corpus Christi Police Department for the South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind annual Easter Egg Hunt.

calculators, and key chains to 20/20 pens – felt tip pens with a special point that provide bold, easy-to-read writing without bleeding through paper – to braille watches, and other items.

The agency promotes awareness of issues affecting people who are blind or visually impaired through its "Blindness Etiquette" program offered free to schools, colleges, and civic organizations. The program, designed to help sighted people feel more at ease around people who are blind, provides guidance on everyday interactions such as shaking hands, crossing the street, and behavior around guide dogs.

Manrow's favorite outreach activity by far is the annual Easter Egg Hunt for local children who are blind. Each spring, the agency partners with the Corpus Christi Police Department Bomb Squad, which creates dozens of oversized, brightly colored beeping eggs for the children to find. It's a simple ritual of childhood they might otherwise miss out on. "The look of sheer delight on the faces of those kids is just amazing," she says. □

*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.**

### Office Products

#### 1. SKILCRAFT® Privacy Shield® Privacy Filter, Made with 3M™ Materials

Perfect for desktop and notebook LCD monitors, SKILCRAFT® Privacy Shield® Privacy Filters, made using quality 3M™ materials, have a 16:9 aspect ratio to provide world-class “black out” privacy and keep classified or sensitive material from being viewed by others. Easy to install and remove without damaging screens, filters stay in place when notebooks are closed. Custom cut for specific devices, confirm the model and size before ordering. Produced by Beyond Vision in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

#### 2. Kensington®/SKILCRAFT® Ergonomic Backrest

The Kensington®/SKILCRAFT® Ergonomic Backrest, with patented SmartFit™ system technology and adjustable straps, works in nearly any chair. Easily customize back rest height for maximum firm support of spine and lumbar region. Four independent springs conform to fit body shape and articulate with posture and position. Ventilated supports allow for air circulation. Easy-to-remove nylon fabric cover can be machine washed as needed. TAA compliant with two-year warranty. Produced by Chicago Lighthouse Industries in Chicago, Illinois.

#### 3. SKILCRAFT® Laser Toner Cartridges – HP Compatible

Competitively priced, remanufactured SKILCRAFT® Laser Toner Cartridges are compatible with HP printers and designed using precision color cartridge technology to meet HP standards for page yield, image quality, and color precision. TAA-compliant cartridges of 35 percent post-consumer content meet ISO 14001 recycling standards. Satisfaction guaranteed with one-year warranty from date of purchase. Assembled in the U.S.A., produced by Alabama Industries for the Blind in Talladega, Alabama.

#### 4. SKILCRAFT® 2019 Wall Calendars and Appointment Planners

SKILCRAFT® 2019 Wall Calendars and Appointment Planners help you keep track of important dates and appointments.

Made of 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper and printed with soy inks, planner books also feature covers made using 50 percent recycled content. Available in a variety of sizes and styles including monthly, weekly, and daily wire bound appointment planners, 12-month wall calendars in three sizes, and two-sided erasable laminated calendars. Produced by Chicago Lighthouse Industries in Chicago, Illinois.

### Medical and Surgical Supplies

#### 5. Better Touch™ Hot/Cold Therapy Packs

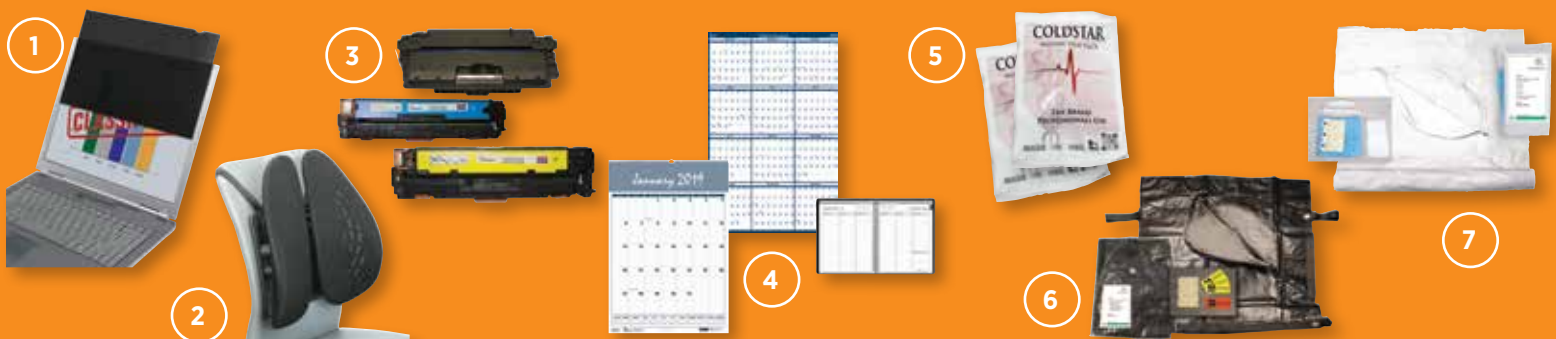
FDA-approved instant disposable hot and cold packs offer immediate soothing relief for a wide variety of injuries. Latex- and ammonium nitrate-free packs are easily activated, with flexible construction that conforms to body contours for maximum relief. Disposable packs available in a variety of sizes are ideal for first aid treatment on-the-go. Produced by the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Utica, New York.

#### 6. Disaster Bag Kit

Disaster Bag Kit features bag made of 20 mil thick, high grade, scrim-reinforced PVC with heavy-duty, rust-proof wrap-around zipper. Kits include a 34 inch x 96 inch bag with 450 pound capacity and component pack. Exceeds DOD thickness specifications by 2 mil; complies with OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard for containment of body fluids. TAA compliant; assembled in the U.S.A. Produced by Bosma Enterprises in Indianapolis, Indiana.

#### 7. Post Mortem Bag Kit

Post Mortem Bags made of strong, high-grade PVC plastic feature heavy-duty, rust-proof nylon zippers and include a component pack essential for proper handling and transport. Sewn and heat-sealed edges provide strength and prevent leakage. Choose straight, curved, or wrap-around zipper. Complies with OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard for containment of body fluids. TAA compliant; assembled in the U.S.A. Produced by Bosma Enterprises in Indianapolis, Indiana.



These and thousands of other products are available for purchase at [AbilityOne.com](http://AbilityOne.com), [GSAAdvantage.gov](http://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](http://NIB.org/products).

# WAYAROUND: A UNIQUE NEW APPROACH TO AUDIO TAGGING

BY DOUG GOIST

Attendees of the April NIB/NAEPB National Symposium had the chance to see, hear, and touch a brand new assistive technology solution called WayAround.

Falling under the category audio tagging devices or audio taggers, WayAround relies on what is known as Near Field Communication (NFC) technology to perform its labeling duties. WayAround appears to be the first tagger designed for people who are blind or visually impaired to utilize the NFC technology already built into many smartphones. Other assistive devices, such as PenFriend (reviewed in the summer 2016 issue of Opportunity), have primarily used standard radio-frequency identification (RFID), or optical barcode or micro-barcode readers to function.

Near Field Communication, a form of RFID technology, has been around for quite some time, especially within Android phones. The technology itself dates to around 1945. Much like Bluetooth and RFID technology, NFC performs wireless electromagnetic radio data transfers between objects that contain NFC chips, such as bank cards and card readers. It provides more security than Bluetooth and standard RFID because the wireless data exchange is limited to a distance of only around one inch – hence the name Near Field Communication.

WayAround is a product of Blind InSites, a Texas-based startup founded by visually impaired co-founders Darwin Belt and Armand Fisher. It uses NFC chip-embedded clothing buttons, plastic clips, and adhesive stickers (called WayTags) to help users who are blind or visually impaired label pretty much anything around the house or office.

Once users download the free WayAround app to their Android or Apple iOS smartphones, the app takes over. Simply launch the WayAround app and hold the phone close to the WayTags to pair the NFC-enabled




**Product:** WayAround  
**Cost:** Free App, WayTag packs begin at \$22.99

For more information visit [www.wayaround.com](http://www.wayaround.com)

smartphone to the WayTag. An accessible input screen comes up on the phone display, allowing users to type or dictate a description of the item being labeled, along with selecting categories such as Clothing, Washing Instructions, Kitchen, and so on. Once the descriptions are saved, the WayTag labels are ready for use.

The WayTags themselves are both functional and intuitively designed. In the case of the two different clothing button options, users can sew WayTag buttons onto garments using included buttons with standard multiple small holes or run a safety pin through the center of WayTag buttons designed with larger single oval holes. All WayTag buttons and clips/fasteners are waterproof and resist heat and cold. Also included are WayTag adhesive stickers, about the size of a postage stamp, for use with items such as file folders or other objects that do not require great durability.

WayAround is available for both Android and Apple iOS devices. Owners of older iPhones (5, SE, 6) will need to purchase WayLink, a thin, credit card-sized device containing an NFC chip, for an additional \$99; the chip is already activated in iPhone models 7, 8, and X running iOS 11.

Multiple assortments and quantities of WayTag buttons, clips, and stickers are available, all reasonably priced. For more information on how to download the free WayAround smartphone app or to purchase WayTags and the WayLink, go to: [www.wayaround.com](http://www.wayaround.com) 

*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.*



## BEACON LIGHTHOUSE OPENS BSC AT SHEPPARD AIR FORCE BASE

NIB associated agency Beacon Lighthouse for the Blind celebrated the opening of a new AbilityOne Base Supply Center™ (BSC) at Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas on May 31. Beacon Lighthouse also operates the BSC on Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

“To have an AbilityOne-sponsored store right here that provides for our Airmen is critical, and in return, we’re providing for our community,” Brig. Gen. Ronald E. Jolly Sr., 82nd Training Wing commander, said. “We’re highlighting the skill and talent of those some will say have disabilities, but I say have many abilities.”

Beacon Lighthouse President Buddy Edgemon said BSCs help spread awareness of the abilities of people who are blind by providing “a chance for people to meet a person with a disability, and they won’t see a disability.” Beacon Lighthouse employees are proud to be part of Sheppard, Edgemon said, and proud to be able to help Airmen accomplish their mission. □



▲ Cutting the ribbon to open the new Base Supply Center at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, on May 31, 2018, are (left to right) Lt. Col. Paul Cancino, 82nd Logistics Readiness Squadron commander; 82nd Training Wing Commander Brig. Gen. Ronald E. Jolly Sr.; Buddy Edgemon, president of Beacon Lighthouse and BSC contractor; and Lt. Col. Rodrick Edwards, 82nd Contracting Squadron commander. (U.S. Air Force photo by John Ingle)

## NIB WELCOMES THE LIGHTHOUSE OF BROWARD COUNTY

NIB is pleased to welcome The Lighthouse of Broward County to its nationwide network of associated nonprofit agencies. The Lighthouse of Broward County provides specialized rehabilitation and collaborative health care solutions that enhance the independence, productivity, and dignity of children and adults who are blind or visually impaired.



Since its founding in 1973, The Lighthouse of Broward County has provided a steadily expanding continuum of training and rehabilitation geared to blind or visually impaired children, youth, working-age adults, and elders, including a job readiness and entrepreneurship program, an outreach program to increase referrals of people of all ages who are blind or visually impaired, and an access technology bank of equipment for loan to individuals preparing for competitive employment. □

## VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR HOSTS NEARLY 200 JOB SEEKERS

Nearly 200 job seekers who are legally blind from across the U.S. and Canada connected with 23 NIB associated agencies at NIB’s first-ever virtual career fair, held on May 9. A number of job seekers followed up with formal interviews at NIB associated agencies.

NIB’s first virtual career fair ranks among the top events in the number of participating job seekers who are legally blind. The format provides a low-cost, accessible opportunity for job seekers and employers to meet and explore opportunities, with one participant noting that “Virtual fairs give people who are blind control and confidence.” NIB is looking into developing more virtual career fairs to help qualified job seekers who are blind find meaningful employment. □



## PROBLEM SOLVING AT THE REHAB ENGINEERING FORUM

IFB Solutions in Winston Salem, North Carolina, hosted 57 participants from 19 different NIB associated agencies at the Rehab Engineering Forum and Product Development Plan Training April 25-27. During the forum, agencies shared success stories of project implementation, job conversions, and process improvements made to meet cost targets. In multiple brainstorming sessions participants shared concerns and potential solutions for addressing challenges encountered on specific projects in progress, and common issues such as attendance and increasing efficiency. [□](#)



**▲** Participants in the Rehab Forum tested a balloon racing car designed during a group exercise simulating blindness and other disabilities. The group exercise encouraged networking, teamwork, and employee perspectives.

## SKILCRAFT U.S. GOVERNMENT PEN MAKES NATIONAL HEADLINES

An Associated Press (AP) story on the 50th anniversary of the SKILCRAFT® U.S. Government Pen ran in news outlets nationwide in April. In addition to the written story, AP circulated a photo slideshow and 60-second video about the pen and the people who make it. The pieces put NIB associated agency employees front-and-center in telling the story of the pen, NIB's support for the military, and the positive impact of meaningful employment.

AP is the largest news source in the United States, and its stories are picked up by thousands of news outlets around the world. USA Today, Stars and Stripes, The Washington Post, ABC News, and hundreds more news outlets ran the government pen story. The outlets have a combined reach of 130+ million people, and reach millions more through their social media channels. [□](#)





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