

Mission Critical, Mission Accomplished

AbilityOne manufactures
and delivers 50,000 new
uniforms for Army troops

page 36



AbilityOne

PROGRAM



TM



Letter from Leadership

Dear Friends and Supporters of the AbilityOne Program:

I hope you will join the AbilityOne Program as we celebrate **National Disability Employment Awareness Month**. This month is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of people with disabilities, their great contributions to our history and to consider all that we can do to increase employment opportunities for people who are blind or who have significant disabilities.

The AbilityOne Program creates employment opportunities through the Federal procurement system. Our workforce provides more than 3,000 quality products and services to meet our customers' requirements. As a result, AbilityOne currently employs nearly 46,000 individuals at over 600 community-based nonprofit agencies nationwide.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month is an excellent time to celebrate the work and abilities of our population. We invite you to celebrate with us, and to recognize those in your organization who have demonstrated a willingness to create opportunities for individuals who are blind or who have other significant disabilities.

I encourage you to read our magazine from cover to cover. It demonstrates the breadth and capabilities of our workers, as well as our commitment to both our population and the Federal

community. Our cover story, *Mission Critical, Mission Accomplished* highlights a cornerstone of our success – providing just-in-time products and services to our Federal customers in support of their critical missions. In *Providing Coffee and Caring to Soldiers Overseas*, you can read about our support of the military in unique ways; and in *Putting Milk on the Table*, you can read about how we do the same for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Back from the Brink - A Veteran's Perspective, features four veterans who are blind or have other significant disabilities as they discuss transitioning from the military to the AbilityOne Program. In *Positive Vibes from AbilityOne* you will read performance success stories, including one about Program employees staffing emergency call centers to support families affected by an earthquake in Haiti. In *Faces of AbilityOne*, you'll hear AbilityOne employees express how the Program has affected their lives. *Small Business Hailed for Hiring* underscores the potential benefits of AbilityOne-participating nonprofits and small businesses on working together by employing people with disabilities.

I hope these articles inspire you to join us and make an even greater commitment to advancing opportunities for people who are blind or who have other significant disabilities. Together with our partners, AbilityOne had a banner year and our future looks even brighter!

Thank you for your continued support.

Tina Ballard

Tina Ballard
Executive Director and CEO

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AbilityOne magazine is a joint publication under the AbilityOne Program between the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH- Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities. If you would like additional information on any subject in AbilityOne magazine, contact George Selby at gselby@abilityone.gov. Address corrections or additions should be mailed to the managing editor at the address below; please include the mailing label.

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*Cover photo courtesy of: U.S. Army

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Detector Dog's Best Friend

Canines working in Customs and Border Protection at JFK Airport successfully get the job done due to the love and care they receive from their hard-working AbilityOne Program kennel caretakers.

By **CHRISTINE MCLAUGHLIN**

In the depths of one of the world's busiest airports, JFK Airport in New York—where nearly 46 million people traveled through last year—a pack of dogged professionals are on the job to protect our Nation day

in and day out. They don't ask for much: just a clean environment with fresh food and water and maybe a pat on the back once in a while. In return, they sniff out dangerous and prohibited substances preventing

illegal drug and agriculture from entering the United States. In other words, these powerful noses belong to detector dogs who play a major role in keeping our borders, our airports, and our country safe.

Working to sniff and snuff out crime alongside their human partners, U.S. Customs and Border Protection handlers, canine members who reside at JFK airport include male and female German Shepherds, Beagles, Labrador Retrievers and mixed-breed dogs.

Who Detector Dogs Are

These special four-legged detectives primarily come from animal shelters, are donated by owners who can't keep up with their activity level, or are purchased from vendors in the U.S. and overseas. Detector dogs are rigorously tested and chosen for



Photo of Trouble courtesy of U.S. Customs and Border Protection.



A detector dog checks for illegal substances.

their specific personality and drive in retrieving objects. Then, they go through training at the Canine Enforcement Training Center outside Washington, D.C., usually starting between the ages of one and three. After initial training is completed, they are matched with a handler, continue daily training on the job, and work for about eight years. Once they've reached retirement age, they are adopted by either their handler or placed in a good home—no dog is ever sent to an animal shelter. They're simply too valuable.

These highly trained, diligent doggies can check packages and agricultural items, as well as inspect humans in a fraction of the time it would take a person. That's why each dog is valued at approximately \$125,000.

So when it comes to the daily care of these pricey pups, it's serious business.

Not just any one will do. Enter The Corporate Source, a member of the AbilityOne Program's network of 600+ nonprofit agencies. Since 1998, they have been providing employees with developmental and intellectual disabilities to serve as kennel caretakers for the 20 dogs at the airport. The duties include feeding the dogs according to their plan, disinfecting cages and bowls, administering medications if needed, and observing any health changes in the canines.

The Kennel Caretakers' Role

"Their main goal is to keep the dogs healthy, clean and ready to work," said John Mein, project manager, at The Corporate Source headquartered in New York, N.Y.

Because the dogs' work day is the same as their human handlers—about eight hours a day—the kennel caretakers must

be committed to keep up with such busy and precious pooches ...and they are.

"Corporate Source employees are dedicated to maintaining our kennel facility in strict compliance with U.S. Customs and Border Protection standards. They play an important role in maintaining the overall health and well-being of our detector dogs," said Gary Walck, Canine Chief, for U.S. Customs and Border Protection at JFK Airport.

The workers feel a sense of complete responsibility for the dogs. "They don't call in sick. They find a way to get in there and take care of these dogs," said Mein, adding that turnover is also low for this particular group of workers.

While dogs have traditionally been used in therapeutic situations as service animals for individuals with disabilities,



Corporate Source employee Michael Haynes with "Dollar" and K-9 Officer Jiji Kuriakose. Photo courtesy of U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

individuals to work in an environment where they can have meaningful relationships and a feeling of self-esteem and productivity from the animals," said Michael Kramer, senior director at The Corporate Source.

A Devoted Employee

Take Michael Haynes, for example. He has worked with the dogs at JFK for 12 years. He loves his job because he loves the dogs, every single one of them. "I have no favorites," he said. "I love them all."

Every morning, he greets all of them by name like Toby, Kaz and Strider and they greet him with barks excitedly anticipating his attention. "When I get ready to feed them, they're right at the front of the cage and jump, sit and are ready to eat. That's my favorite part of the job. That they're ready to eat and go and be happy," said Haynes.

They also speak up every time a plane comes in to land or if someone new enters the kennel. "It can get pretty noisy at times," he said. "But I don't mind."

After petting each dog before feeding them, Haynes is then charged with cleaning the cages and bowls. If a handler is away on vacation, Haynes

will take over walking the handler's dog. The problem with that, said Haynes, is that all the other dogs want to come out, too. It's not easy saying no to all those furry faces, he admits.

Haynes has a strong relationship with the handlers who must know the latest health or behavior issues of the dogs but said "most of the time it's me and my dogs working together."

Being in such close contact with working dogs who have such serious jobs might be dangerous, but Haynes said it's really not the case. These dogs, he emphasizes, are a friendly bunch. Another aspect of the job that Haynes enjoys is a therapeutic benefit—that the dogs can lend an ear (or many) to whatever is on his mind. "I talk to them. They sit there and they listen."

Not only are they good listeners, but they seem to enjoy music, especially Christmas tunes sung by Haynes at Christmas time, an annual tradition. "Some of them bark along with me. It's cute," said Haynes. "I put on my Santa Claus hat and sing."

Two-Way Benefits

Mein said that it's clear when he does his rounds supervising the kennel, how much the dogs enjoy and trust the employees. "They're wagging

their tails and get excited to see [the kennel caretakers]. I see the comfort level. And that is exactly what gives them the best possible working environment."

While the kennel caretaking job might be perceived as ordinary to some, the long tenure these employees have speaks to the power of the human-animal bond, according to Kramer. "I think the fact that the [kennel caretakers] are so willing to give of themselves that the dogs do benefit from those relationships...The relationships really have to go both ways," Kramer said. "And I don't think Customs and Border Protection would allow our employees to work with the dogs, if the dogs didn't receive a benefit from it."

Haynes couldn't agree more. "This job has been good to me," said Haynes. "It's like a second home to me...with my dogs." ■

Christine McLaughlin
cmclaughlin@abilityone.org



Photo of Dan courtesy of U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

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U.S. General Services Administration



“I call on all Americans to celebrate the contributions of individuals with disabilities to our workplaces and communities, and to promote the employment of individuals with disabilities to create a better, more inclusive America, one in which every person is rightly recognized for his or her abilities and accomplishments.”

—President Barack Obama

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

By GISELE MCAULIFFE

People with disabilities are the most underserved population. In light of this situation, the President and Congress designated October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) to help educate the American public about issues related to disability and employment—a vital objective during this current period of high unemployment and budget cutbacks. The Federal Government and nonprofit agencies across the U.S. promote the benefits of the AbilityOne Program during a monthlong celebration of special events.

No matter what the economic climate, every day is an extremely tough job market for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities. They remain one of America's greatest

untapped labor resources, with almost 70 percent not employed. During the annual observance of NDEAM, AbilityOne honors and promotes the program since it is the largest single source of employment for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities in the United States, providing employment opportunities to nearly 46,000 people, including 2,000 Wounded Warriors and service-disabled veterans.

The Pentagon Celebrates NDEAM

Last year marked the third annual AbilityOne Recognition Ceremony at the Pentagon to honor those who demonstrate exceptional commitment to increasing employment opportunities within the AbilityOne Program through the

Federal procurement process. Approximately 32,000 AbilityOne employees who are blind or have other significant disabilities work on DoD contracts. In

fiscal year 2009, DoD awarded approximately \$1.5 billion in contracts to AbilityOne-participating NPAs, creating an additional 1,600 jobs for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities. AbilityOne employees produce quality office products, military goods, and provide essential services used throughout the military by our Warfighters and other personnel at all levels. The Honorable Ashton Carter, the under secretary of defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, hosted last year's awards presentation.

Shay Assad, director of the Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy and the Honorable Andrew Houghton, chairperson of the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, the Federal agency administering the AbilityOne Program, made opening remarks. "We wouldn't be here today if it were not for the support of the Department of Defense and the military," Houghton said, noting the Pentagon has "raised the bar" for other Federal agencies through its employment of people who are blind or have other significant disabilities. A war-disabled veteran and AbilityOne employee, SPC Alvin Ramlu, USA (Ret.) was the guest speaker. ■

1945: Congress established the first week in October as an observance of the need to employ service-disabled veterans and other individuals with disabilities

1988: Congress designated October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Department of Labor: The Office of Disability Employment Policy takes the lead for Federal observance of this special month



Mr. Shay Assad, Director of the Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy

Partnering with Small Business - Martins hailed for hirings

By **CHRIST PROKOS**

Washington Daily News, North Carolina

It is rare to find a “Help Wanted” sign in the front window of The Meeting Place restaurant on West Main Street in Washington.

When co-owner Anne Martin needs help, she does not place a classified ad in the newspaper or comb the Internet for prospective employees.

Martin knows her most reliable employees are found through the Beaufort County Developmental Center’s (BCDC) Supported Employment program for people with developmental disabilities.

“I have always said that if I could hire every one from BCDC, I would,” Martin said. “They are very dependable and have a great attitude. The fact they are dependable is number one with me.” Martin and her husband, Bob, have hired more than 15 BCDC clients in the past 12 years. Their commitment to the program earned them national recognition from NISH as recipients of the 2009 Small Business Partnership Award. BCDC provides qualified prospective

applicants along with job coaches who furnish on-the-job training in work-related skills and behavior. As the skill and confidence of the new employees develop, job coaches spend less time at the work site but are always available for support.

In a field known for an above-average turnover rate, The Meeting Place has been able to keep departures to a minimum by hiring BCDC participants.

“Every (hire) has been long term,” Anne Martin said. “They stay as long as they want to and they have a really good track record.”

At a recent Washington-Beaufort County Chamber of Commerce’s Business After Hours, Martin fought back tears as she encouraged other small-business owners to consider BCDC clients for employment. “All they ask for is a chance,” she said. At the same gathering, 22-year-old Lee Williamson of Aurora was presented with the William Usdane Award for outstanding achievement



and exceptional character by Micky Gazaway, NISH South Region executive director. Williamson was one of six Usdane Award recipients nationwide and received \$500 for winning the regional award.

NISH is a national nonprofit agency whose mission is to create employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities. In Washington, it partners with BCDC through AbilityOne, a program that matches Federal contracts with community programs for people with disabilities. For the past five years, Williamson has been working three days a week building tire inflator gauges for the Navy under a Department of Defense contract. He also attends Beaufort County



“Lee was a quiet child growing up,” said his father, Gene. “He is a lot more self-confident and outgoing now, and he gets a paycheck every two weeks.”

Gazaway estimated that 100 people were nominated for the award nationwide. He added that it is unusual for one nonprofit agency to win two awards, especially on first-time nominations as was the case with the Martins and Williamson. Chris Kiricoples, executive director of BCDC, indicated that 55 individuals are involved in the daytime vocational training-service program which includes the adjustment training program and supported-employment program.

“One of the problems is their

experience base is limited and they are not able to work,” Kiricoples said. “The adjustment training program gives them enough exposure and experience so they can pick the (jobs) they like the most. In the supported-employment program, they are placed on a job and are on the employer’s payroll, and we provide an employment specialist. That can last from a few days to a few weeks, depending on the individual. The real benefit for the employer is that we guarantee the job will get done no matter what because the staff member is there to do it until the member has mastered the task.” ■

Christ Prokos
Washington Daily News, North Carolina

Employee, Ricky Gardner, keeps The Meeting Place restaurant clean and ready for business.

(Photo by Beaufort County Development Center)



Anne and Bob Martin (left) look on as Micky Gazaway, NISH South Region executive director, prepares to deliver the NISH Small Business Partnership Award at The Meeting Place.

(WDN Photo/Christ Prokos)

Perspectives

“Quotes” “Quotes” “Quotes” “QUOTES”

“Each day, Americans with disabilities play a critical role in forging and shaping the identity of our Nation. Their contributions touch us all through personal experience or through that of a family member, neighbor, friend, or colleague. We grow stronger as a Nation when Americans feel the dignity conferred by having the ability to support themselves and their families through productive work.”

– President Barack Obama

“We are proud and honored to have NISH as an NDIA member, and admire the AbilityOne Program and their untiring daily contribution to our Warfighters and the organizations that support them. The AbilityOne Program supports NDIA’s mission to advocate the best, most cost-effective systems and supplies for our troops. They have been a major player in supplying a large spectrum of critical items supporting the efficient administration of our military enterprise.”

– Lawrence P. Farrell Jr., President & CEO, National Defense Industrial Association

“AbilityOne is a good choice for us and once we made that choice we have never had to go back.”

Barry Barnett, Director of Contracting at Fort Hood

“Whether it is using a Skilcraft pen, providing office cleaning services at the Pentagon, or signing off on the purchase of military services, the AbilityOne Program has touched my life every day of my career working with the Federal Government. The AbilityOne Program not only provides 'best-value' contracting, it also fulfills a socio-economic mission that is extremely important to me, personally, and to the American public.”

– Shay Assad, Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, Department of Defense

“I feel like now that I have a job and that I've stuck with it, I'm going to go up that corporate ladder. I'm going to make a career out of this. It really excites me and gives me hope that I can go up somewhere.”

Becky Lee Laureano, San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind employee

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- Contract Management Services
- Custodial Services
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- Fleet Management
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- Hospitality Services
- Laundry Services

- Secure Mail / Digital Document
- Supply Chain Management
- Total Facilities Management

Products

- Aircraft and Vehicular Equipment and Supplies
- Clothing, Textiles and Individual Equipment
- Custom Manufacturing, Development & Fulfillment
- Food Processing, Packaging and Distribution
- Medical and Dental Products
- Office Products and Furnishings

AbilityOne enables you to create employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities.



AbilityOne.org



Positive Vibes

By **SUZANNE ROBITAILLE**

The AbilityOne Program is a unique Federal initiative that employs nearly 46,000 people with disabilities in the U.S. The Program uses the purchasing power of the Federal Government to buy products and services from more than 600 community-based nonprofit agencies that are dedicated to training and employing people who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

It's no surprise then, that AbilityOne is the largest source of jobs for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities in the U.S., selling \$2.6 billion of products and services to the Federal Government in fiscal year 2009. The AbilityOne Program operates at nearly 1,000 locations representing 40 government agencies nationally.

Administered by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, an independent Federal agency, the Program operates with assistance from National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH-Creating

Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities.

National Industries for the Blind is based in Alexandria, Va., and works with nearly 90 associated agencies. Headquartered in Vienna, Va., NISH supports a network of more than 1,300 nonprofit agency providers as well as Federal customers. Here are highlights from some of their employment programs.

Department of State, National Passport Information Center



Contact Center Services

Nonprofit Agency: Peckham, Inc.

Contract Start Date: January 2010

After a colossal earthquake struck Haiti in January of 2010, thousands of Haitian-Americans tried to contact the U.S. Department of State for information about their loved ones. Inundated

with calls, the State Department first reached out to a commercial provider of contact center services for help. However, the provider wasn't able to meet the customer's critical timeframe – and the Department of State turned to AbilityOne.

Already, many of AbilityOne's nonprofit agencies offer offsite and onsite contact center operations, including 29 contact center contracts and 33 switchboard operation contracts throughout the U.S. that employ around 1,000 people with disabilities. AbilityOne agencies handle volumes exceeding 17 million contacts per year, 24/7, 365 days per year.

Peckham, Inc., a member of the AbilityOne Network of nonprofit agencies based in Lansing, Mich., took on the job. Peckham mobilized 60 call center employees in one day and was able to get an offsite call center up and running in 36 hours. Peckham



from AbilityOne

staff took calls from U.S. citizens and provided case management that included recording family information and following up with callers once updates were available.

“Because of our existing relationship with the Department of State, we could respond faster and easier to their requirements, says Peggy Gritt, senior program manager, contact center

services, at NISH. “Peckham’s call center agents were already trained and cleared to serve the State Department, which provided tremendous cost and time savings.”

Contact center employees in the AbilityOne Program provide cost savings to customers of \$3,000 to \$5,000 per agent.

CATEGORY	ABILITYONE	COMMERCIAL
Average Speed of Answer	12.2 seconds	29 seconds
Abandon Rate	less than 2%	4%
Service Level	80% of calls answered in 20 seconds or less	80% of calls answered in 30 seconds or less
1st Call Resolution	90.2%	81%
Service Quality Score	95.3%	91%
Customer Satisfaction Score	96.3%	89%
Turnover Rate	10%	31%

Source: AbilityOne case study of contact centers by Opus Solutions May 2006

Naval Medical Center, Portsmouth, Va.



Central Facilities Management

Nonprofit Agency: Professional Contract Services, Inc. (PCSI)

Contract Start Date: April 2010

Number of Facilities Managed: 9

At the Naval Medical Center in Portsmouth, Va., a hospital for active Navy officers and their families, Austin-based Professional Contract Services, Inc. (PCSI) operates the central facilities management program operation valued at about \$17 million and provides jobs for 200 full- and part-time employees. The contract includes three buildings at the main hospital and six offsite patient clinics throughout the Hampton Roads region in Virginia. PCSI serves as the prime contractor with two additional AbilityOne Network agencies: Manassas, Va.-based Didlake, Inc. and Portsmouth, Va.-based Portco, Inc.

PCSI's services include maintaining the center's grounds and providing services like HVAC and security detail. Under the AbilityOne Program, facilities management programs provide more than 1,000 jobs for people with disabilities in the U.S., with total contracts valued at more than \$100 million.

The Naval Medical Center was impressed with PCSI's cutting-edge performance management system used to manage their contract. Another positive influence was PCSI's involvement with veterans; the agency works to recruit veterans with disabilities for its AbilityOne Program contracts.

Out of a total AbilityOne Program workforce of 1,120 people at PCSI, 294 are veterans and nearly all with disabilities. "Hopefully we will inspire

other nonprofit agencies to reach out more to veterans and give back something to those who have sacrificed so much for all of us," says Ace Burt, President of PCSI, AbilityOne Network member.

Fleet and Industrial Supply Center, Jacksonville, Fla.



Shipboard and Shore-based Logistics Support

Nonprofit Agency: The Arc of Virginia Peninsula

Contract Start Date: October 2002

Number of Fleets Managed: 3

Meats, coffee, magazines. All are stocked in port-area stores and on U.S. Navy ships as part of the Navy's shipboard and shore-based provisioning program, which is designed to improve the quality of life for sailors on land and at sea.

The Fleet and Industrial Supply Center (FISC) located in Jacksonville, Fla., provides technical guidance and administrative assistance to forces afloat that help improve the performance of ships' store operations. FISC teams are located in major port areas around the world.

AbilityOne and its nonprofit agencies contracted with FISC to provide provisions at three of its West Coast ports. The prime contractor, The Arc of Virginia Peninsula, which is located in Hampton, Va., subcontracted with Goodwill of Honolulu to provide ship loading at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu. Two other subcontractors, Seattle-based Northwest Center and Roseville, Calif.-based Pride Industries load ships at ports in Bremerton, Wash., and San Diego, respectively. In all, there are 450 full- and part-time employees.

The FISC project is one of the more complex jobs AbilityOne has

taken on. While the teams were ready to assist on short notice, they still had to coordinate a multi-subcontractor approach and meet a dynamic operations schedule that included scheduled and unscheduled deployments, as well as emergency evacuations.

"This is truly a flagship project for the AbilityOne Program," says David McFarlane, operations manager for NISH.

The teams performed admirably, loading more than 14.4 million cases of provisions comprising more than 12,000 Navy shiploads throughout the life of the project. As a result of their hard work, the Navy selected the AbilityOne Program to take over FISC's operations on the East Coast, including ports in Norfolk, Va., Groton, Conn., and Mayport, Fla. The new locations will be served by The Arc, as well as by CW Resources in Bridgeport, Conn., and Challenge Enterprises in Mayport, Fla.

U.S. Army Medical Department, Fort Carson Evans Army Community Hospital, Colorado Springs, Co.



Document Scanning Services

Nonprofit Agency: Goodwill Industrial Services Cooperation

Contract Start Date: October 2010

From creation and storage to hard copy destruction, managing the full life cycle of documents is a critical program for many Federal agencies.

Goodwill Industrial Services Cooperation (GISC) recently secured a contract to provide document scanning services at Fort Carson Evans Army Community Hospital in Colorado Springs, Co., which includes an 85-bed hospital and three adjacent clinics.

Here, four GISC employees will scan soldiers' medical records from paper documents onto a disk, making services faster and more convenient for the troops.

Later this year, Evans will complete construction of a state-of-the-art military treatment facility -- doubling the size of the hospital campus to nearly one million square feet and potentially adding more work opportunities.

"Evans Community Hospital representatives are always looking for new project opportunities for people with disabilities that match one's capabilities to their business needs," says Barry Howard, project manager for NISH South Central region. "They have been one of our greatest advocates and supporters of the AbilityOne Program."

U.S. Department of Commerce, Treasury Department



Base Supply Center

Nonprofit Agency: Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind

Contract Start Date: 2007

2009 Sales: \$420,600

Kenny Fountain is well known throughout the U.S. Treasury Department in Washington, where he's the sole operator of a base supply center on behalf of Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (WSIFB), an associated NIB agency. Fountain, who is visually impaired, has turned the base supply center into a profitable enterprise, with revenue of more than \$420,000 in 2009 -- the highest sales of any WSIFB-run center.

Base supply centers employ more than 300 people who are blind or disabled and sell an array of products at 140 locations on military bases and in Federal buildings around the country

and in Puerto Rico and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

One of the hallmarks of the base supply center program is the SKILCRAFT® brand that is manufactured by people who are blind and significantly disabled. SKILCRAFT® is NIB's trade name for products that range from kitchen supplies and toiletries to furniture and clothing and are sold throughout the base centers.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the AbilityOne Base Supply Center Program, with celebrations taking place on bases around the country. The first center was opened in 1995 at Fort Bragg N.C., by LC Industries.

Federal Agencies and Military Bases



SKILCRAFT® Planet-friendly home-care goods

Nonprofit Agency: Multiple nonprofit agencies in support of people who are blind

The green movement is well underway in the Federal Government. Today, Federal agencies are required to contract for environmentally preferable products and services. All of NIB's associated agencies are greening their SKILCRAFT® products to attract eco-conscious Federal customers.

One of the newest products are soy candles, which are made with bio-based soybean wax and are sold in military commissaries. Soy candles are clean burning, non-toxic and burn 30% to 50% longer than paraffin candles. The candles are made at Industries for the Blind (WIFB) in West Allis, Wisc.

WIFB's engineering staff also developed a device to ensure that the wick is perfectly centered in the candle every time, which is a critical operation for employees who are blind.

Many SKILCRAFT® cleaning and sanitary products, such as carpet cleaners and hand soap, have been redesigned to earn Green Seal certification, which is widely recognized as a mark of environmental responsibility.

More green products for the home and office are in the development pipeline, and will be launched later this year. These include bio-based office products such as glue sticks and shredder oil, as well as bio-renewable home care products including soaps and body wash. ■



Earl McHenry of Industries for the Blind making soy candles.

Suzanne Robitaille
srobitaille@abilityone.org



Back from the Brink

A Veteran's Perspective

By D. DOUGLAS GRAHAM



Alvin Ramlu

Veterans with disabilities face enormous challenges upon reentering civilian life. The AbilityOne Program is a resource for veterans, providing counseling and job-finding assistance when it is most needed. Here are stories of wounded heroes on their way back from the brink.

For Alvin Ramlu of San Mateo, Calif., the agony of war did not end on the battlefield. Specialist 4, Ramlu was sent to Afghanistan in 2006, where his duties included roadside bomb search, and vehicle and buildings inspection. A year later, he was deployed to a convoy of Army engineers on yet another security detail. The engineers were tasked with building roads in remote areas of the country, and it was Ramlu's job to guard their flank.

"We were on patrol in Khost, Afghanistan," he recalls. "As we passed a mosque, we saw a white station wagon headed full-speed in our direction. We realized too late the driver was a suicide bomber, and tried to steer out of his path. But the guy hit the back of my vehicle, and blew himself up. I was thrown, and lay unconscious for maybe thirty seconds. My injuries were not as bad as they could have been, and after a few days in the hospital I was returned to duty."

Though not life-threatening, Ramlu's physical injuries were extensive. He suffered burns, had back and knee wounds and shrapnel lodged in one thigh. Ramlu had also experienced a personality change. He was irritable, argumentative and ready to rumble at the slightest provocation.

Ramlu's condition rapidly declined. He suffered constant headaches, and found prolonged exposure to sunlight, loud noises and humans nearly intolerable. He was diagnosed with brain damage and sent stateside to receive a medical discharge. He then began an employment search, a frustrating odyssey that would drag on for two long years.

The War at Home

In 2007, the U.S. job market was tight, and getting worse. September 2008 brought the Wall Street crash that lit the fuse of America's financial crisis. It was a bad time to need work, and Alvin Ramlu was still looking.

"It was very hard," he remembers. "I was living with my parents, and my wife Elena was constantly shuttling back and forth to Fiji to visit her family. There were troubles in the marriage - and it didn't help that my brain injuries kept me always on edge. In 2008, AbilityOne helped me land a job at the VA hospital in Palo Alto. I work there as a telephone operator, but it isn't easy. My mouth is dry most of the time, and the headaches never go away. Brain damage makes it hard to work forty hours a week. Right now I'm down to ten."

Ramlu copes as best he can against increasingly difficult odds. Ramlu describes his current state as "deteriorating," but he has not abandoned hope. As an AbilityOne Program employee, he is active in the Speaker's Bureau. His message to other veterans struggling with war-related disabilities - "Don't give up."

Down, But Not Out

Between 2001 and 2008, more than 30,000 veterans who served in Afghanistan and Iraq lost limbs or suffered severe burns, blindness, hearing loss, post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries. Many will find their way back to home and meaningful work, living links in a chain stretching back to the beginning of war itself.

George Lewis and Albert Logan are both Vietnam-era veterans with visual impairments who earn their living at Horizon Industries, a manufacturer of paper products with industrial applications. Horizon's mission is to provide



Albert Logan



George Lewis

employment opportunities for people who are blind. Its clients include the US Navy, state and Federal agencies and private industry. Logan works for the company as a palletizer; Lewis as a paper cutter.

“I was stationed in Thailand from 1971-1974,” Lewis remembers. “I woke up one morning, and found most of my vision gone. The Air Force doctors couldn’t figure it out, but I blame Agent Orange. They were spraying the stuff all over Vietnam, and Thailand is right next door. It was hard to get work after the military, but I finally landed here and I’ve been at my job for more than thirty years. You don’t need a war to lose your sight or your limbs. The same can happen if you get run over by a bus. The point is you have to deal with what you’ve got. I have, and so have a lot of guys I know.”

Veterans who were disabled in earlier conflicts overcame their personal obstacles through sheer grit, and the same can

be said of wounded vets of our period. Nathan Short of Austin, Texas suffered injuries while serving as an Army truck driver stationed in Iraq in 2004. His convoy hit a camel on a busy highway en route to Kuwait, triggering a major accident. Short’s truck collided with the trailer in front of him. The impact knocked him out, but his seat belt prevented his being thrown from the cab. Fearful the vehicle might catch fire, Short’s buddies cut the belt, and laid him on the ground. When medics showed up, he asked that they remove the stones he was lying on. There were no stones. Short was feeling the pieces of his shattered pelvis.

“The accident left me with hip, foot, wrist and ankle injuries and also damaged my intestines,” he recalls. “I spent a year in physical therapy, where I learned to walk again, using the brace they put on my right foot. After I received a medical retirement from the Army, I went looking for work. The company I was at before the Army hired me back, but the job lasted only a week. It was assembly work, and that meant I had stand up all day. I just couldn’t handle it.”

Short suffers from a condition known as “drop foot,” a type of nerve damage that prevents him from raising his right foot at the ankle. This disability impacts his life in major ways. It precludes his participation in most sports, but that’s a small inconvenience compared to the mighty limitations it imposes on routines most of us take for granted. Short can no longer dress himself as easily as he once did, nor can he sit or stand for long periods of time.

Short learned about AbilityOne in the summer of 2006. The program started him out as a part-time dispatcher at Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City, but he soon moved up the ladder. Currently, Short works as a quality assurance manager for Professional Contract Services Inc., of Austin, Texas, a job from which he intends to retire.

“AbilityOne rescued me from despair, and that is no exaggeration,” he says. “Today I do a lot speeches promoting AbilityOne because I believe in the program. I’m living proof it can help a person in my situation.” ■



Nathan Short

Doug Graham
 dgraham@abilityone.org
*Editor's note: Mr. Graham served in the
 U.S. Navy from 1976-1980*

Fight proud. Work proud.



“The thing that I really love about my job is that I get to help people. The mail is a real morale builder because it keeps people in touch with home.”

– AbilityOne employee Rosalinde Andrews

The 300 Air Force personnel representing five squadrons stationed at Ft. Hood Army Base, TX are always happy to see Rosalinde Andrews. That’s because Rosalinde delivers their mail and packages from home, connecting America’s servicemen and women with their loved ones around the world.

With a presence on nearly every military installation in the U.S., AbilityOne has the experience, capability and workforce to keep our fighting men and women fed, clothed, supplied, supported and protected. In addition, AbilityOne helps people who are blind or have other significant disabilities join the ranks of independent, productive, tax-paying citizens.

AbilityOneDoD.org



Soldier photo courtesy of U.S. Army.



**Creating Jobs for People Who Are Blind
or Have Other Severe Disabilities**

Every Purchase Creates Jobs



SKILCRAFT is the brand of choice and the AbilityOne Program is the preferred source for federal purchasers.

When you choose SKILCRAFT or other products produced through the AbilityOne Program, your purchase supports the continued employment and training opportunities for more than 42,000 people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

The Program is administered by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, an independent federal agency, with assistance from National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH – Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Severe Disabilities.

Purchasing SKILCRAFT and other products through the AbilityOne Program fulfills the required source provision of the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act.

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Up Close & PERSONAL



Susan Pollack

Q: You have shown your dedication to the AbilityOne Program over the years..... What made you decide to become involved with the AbilityOne Program?

A: I first heard of the AbilityOne Program when I was a contracting intern with the Department of the Navy. Throughout my early career, I contracted for major weapons systems programs and did not have the opportunity to sign a contract with an AbilityOne nonprofit agency. When I started my job in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, I was assigned the AbilityOne Program as part of my procurement policy portfolio. I didn't appreciate then how AbilityOne would change my life. Disability policy and helping people with disabilities have always been important to me because my twin brother has been living with a progressive form of multiple sclerosis for over twenty years. I've seen him work through the various challenges of life, and I've always wanted to do more to improve his life and the lives of others with disabilities from a public policy perspective.

I am very fortunate to work for leaders like Mr. Assad who are committed to increasing business with the AbilityOne Program, and who support innovative procurement policy to facilitate the accomplishment of this mission. It is gratifying to know that DoD's increase in contract awards to the AbilityOne Program has the direct and positive result of increasing job opportunities for individuals who are blind or have other significant disabilities, including our service-disabled veterans who have transitioned to the AbilityOne Program.

Continue on page 24

Susan Pollack is a Senior Procurement Analyst in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics (AT&L), Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy (DPAP); and her procurement policy portfolio includes the AbilityOne Program, Wounded Warriors, Section 508 accessibility standards, socioeconomic programs and military dining policy. As a senior staff member to Shay Assad, Director of Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, Pollack is responsible for advising the Director as well as the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics; and for leading the development of innovative policy within assigned policy areas. She has served in the Department of Defense procurement community for 23 years, having started her civil service career in the Navy Contracting Intern Program at Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command in 1985. She then worked for the Department of the Navy for nine years, and was a contracting officer at the Missile Defense Agency for nine years. She has been assigned to the Office of the Secretary of Defense for more than five years.

Q: What particular success stories stand out in your mind? Can you cite some positive outcomes resulting from DoD working with the AbilityOne Program?

A number of successes come to mind. During the past five years on the OSD staff, I have witnessed an exponential increase in commitment and advocacy of the AbilityOne Program by the contracting senior procurement executives, contracting officers, program managers, and industry. This is the direct result of the initiatives led by Mr. Assad in DoD in partnership with Ms. Ballard of the Committee for Purchase. The involvement and commitment of the DoD acquisition community with the AbilityOne Program is impressive. Under Mr. Assad's leadership, the initiative to increase business with the AbilityOne Program has resulted in a number of actions to increase job opportunities for people with disabilities, including:

- Added language to Procedures, Guidance, and Information (PGI) to include AbilityOne Program in Acquisition Planning: DPAP worked with the Committee for Purchase to add language to the PGI regulations that ensure acquisition personnel include the AbilityOne Program in acquisition plans that require services and supplies.
- Contract Management Support effort (contract closeout): The Department is proud to be partnering with the AbilityOne Program to improve a critical need in the Department – to close out contracts in a timely manner. This initiative is providing quality jobs for people with significant disabilities, to include service-disabled veterans. These employees will help the Department facilitate non-inherently government roles to reduce the significant number of contracts identified for closeout. This effort has resulted in a strategic, long term IDIQ contract for contract closeout, documentation, destruction, and other non-inherently governmental administrative services, which must be used by all DoD buying offices when a determination is made to outsource contract closeout services.
- DPAP/P&R Insourcing Policy Memorandum: DPAP Director co-signed with Personnel and Readiness (P&R) a memorandum that provides guidance on how to consider contracts awarded under the statutory authorities of the AbilityOne Program when developing total force insourcing plans. It provides the necessary guidance to ensure that the AbilityOne Program contracts are not adversely impacted by the Department's in-sourcing implementing guidance.

- May 2010, DoD Procurement Conference and Training Symposium: A forum for 1500 military and civilian members of the DoD contracting community, as well as other Federal agencies and industry representatives. The AbilityOne team conducted 8 one-hour AbilityOne training sessions over the 3-day conference! Ms. Ballard was a keynote speaker at one of the lunches and provided a very inspirational presentation about the AbilityOne Program. Ms. Scottie Knott presented the status of the CMS initiative to a senior leader session which included a testimonial from an AbilityOne employee. AbilityOne also had a vendor display at the conference.
- AbilityOne nonprofit agencies are attending events: Such as Operation Warfighter at Walter Reed National Medical Center and at DoD Hiring Heroes Job Fairs at DoD installations across the country. As a result nonprofit agencies are able to recruit service-disabled veterans.

Q: What does AbilityOne mean to you?

It is truly an honor to work with all those involved with the AbilityOne Program, especially when this Program gives back so much to me personally and to the DoD mission. AbilityOne motivates me to work diligently each day to improve the lives of people who are blind or have other significant disabilities, including our Wounded Warriors and service-disabled veterans.

It's easy to be an advocate for this program!

Stephanie Lesko
slesko@abilityone.gov

AbilityOne Works



“I tell the soldiers, “We support your mission, but you also support ours. You’re helping people with disabilities to find employment.”

—Becky Laureano, AbilityOne Special Order Clerk,
Ft. Hood Army Base, TX.

AbilityOne employee Becky Laureano works alongside our nation’s service men and women, making sure they have what they need to get the job done. Becky is also one of nearly 10 million Americans with a disability, almost 70% of whom are able to work, but unable to find jobs.

For over 70 years, the AbilityOne Program (formed through the Javits-Wagner-O’Day Act) has created employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

AbilityOne works by providing services and manufacturing products for the Federal Government and the Department of Defense. That translates to jobs for more than 45,000 people with disabilities who can depend more on their abilities and less on government subsidies.

[AbilityOne.org](https://www.AbilityOne.org)



FACES

of AbilityOne



Billy Foster
Lead Driver

Billy Foster is an Iraq war veteran and the first to receive the AbilityOne Honor Roll for Veterans with Disabilities award for his outstanding achievements in his work life. Foster serves as lead driver for an AbilityOne Program wheeled vehicle contract at Fort Lewis, Wash. Foster leads a team of four other drivers and keeps track of more than 3,000 vehicles. He has achieved outstanding success, and his prior experience in the Army working with military vehicles helped prepare him for his leadership role on the AbilityOne Program contract. He also interacts easily with warfighters as they come and go from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. His friendly and helpful demeanor displays a willingness to go above and beyond the expectations of a lead driver.



Crescenciano Pelias
Swing Shift Custodian

Crescenciano Pelias provides housekeeping and aseptic cleaning services to the Naval Hospital in Bremerton, Wash. Pelias was recognized as the 2009 national winner of the William M. Usdane employee award because of the dedication and commitment with which Pelias carries out his job. Although Pelias must cope with chronic pain and tremors brought about by the advanced stages of Parkinson's Disease, the quality of his work is perfection personified. Every day, Pelias brings his leadership qualities and positive mind-set to the workplace which brings out the best in his co-workers and has had a lasting impact on how customers view the capabilities of AbilityOne Program employees.



Betty Marroquin
Switchboard Operator

When Betty Marroquin first walked through the doors of Bayaud Industries in 2005, she had been a homeless veteran with a child for some years. She suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), chronic back problems, severe asthma and depression. After receiving services and training from the VA, Marroquin was placed in an AbilityOne Program job at Bayaud Industries as a part-time switchboard operator at a VA Clinic. Later, Marroquin was able to expand her work hours to secure a full-time operator position and she has greatly improved her physical and emotional health. Marroquin maintains a 'never-quit' attitude both at work and home. Today, Marroquin is financially independent and proud to be a contributing member of society. "I no longer doubt my ability to work when at one time I worried that I would never be self sufficient again," Marroquin declared. "This job means the world to me and gives me a sense of worth in ways that cannot be measured."

Since 2002, David Gwin has served as a telephone switchboard operator for NewView Oklahoma (formerly Oklahoma League for the Blind) at Tinker Air Force Base. Many people look forward to hearing "Operator 15" when they call in because of his excellent customer service skills. Gwin is truly a valued team member and has earned respect and admiration from his coworkers, base personnel and customers because of his strong work ethic and personal character. He has received numerous "Profiles in Success" recognitions for exemplary on-the-job performance. In 2009, Gwin received National Industries for the Blind's Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award in recognition of his accomplishments. Gwin was diagnosed with retinal blastoma at age two, resulting in the loss of both of his eyes.



David Gwin
Switchboard Operator



Douglas Goist
Assistive Technology Coordinator

An honor student-athlete in high school and pre-med candidate in college, Douglas Goist was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa shortly after his 18th birthday and lost his sight over the next 10 years. He learned to navigate with a cane, to adjust to daily living challenges and to use assistive technologies. Goist completed Defense Acquisition University's Contract Specialist training through National Industries for the Blind's (NIB's) Contract Management Support (CMS) internship program in 2009 at Fort Belvoir, Va. Goist was then hired by NIB as the Assistive Technology Coordinator for the CMS program. In this position, he advises CMS participants on technical skills training and Department of Defense personnel on Section 508 compliance guidelines.



Ethan Riley
Auto Mechanic

Ethan Riley is happy knowing that “my little part makes a difference somewhere along the line.” As an auto worker for the AbilityOne program at Ft. Lewis Army Base in Washington state, he is instrumental in keeping the Army moving—one Humvee can have 60 or more parts to service and/or replace. Ethan and his fellow AbilityOne team members rely on each other to fulfill their customer’s objectives. “This is a family here. Every day you’re in a potentially dangerous situation, but I’ve never seen anyone injured because of the inability of my workmates. We all watch out for each other. This is the best job I’ve ever had. I showed up here on a Greyhound bus with nothing but a child and a bag of clothes. Less than three years later, I’ve got my own home, my own land, my own family now.”

On Sept. 18, 2004 Williams’ life as he knew it, would never be the same. A suicide bomber attacked his patrol, which was stationed in Baghdad in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He served as a convoy escort and led a team of 14 soldiers who were responsible for escorting dignitaries through the war zone. Williams sustained major injuries in the attack. Today, a piece of shrapnel remains in his head, embedded between an artery and a nerve. As a result of injuries to his leg, Williams uses a cane and is unable to stand for long periods. He has memory loss and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. After 23 years of service, and a year and eight months after the attack, Williams retired from the Army. Seven months later, he secured a job through an AbilityOne contract to monitor security cameras for the airfields at Fort Hood, Texas, ensuring that the runway is safe for aircraft operation. NISH selected Williams as a spokesperson for the AbilityOne Program, and he frequently addresses Federal customers about how the program has affected his life.



Frederick "Will" Williams
Security Monitor

Geraldine Washington has worked as a mail clerk at the U.S. Department of Commerce in Washington, D.C. for almost 10 years. In addition to sorting, "pitching" and metering mail, Geraldine has mastered the computer in order to research where undeliverable mail is to go. "Learning to use the computer has been very good for me," she explains. "Now, I feel like I'm important, and I can type without looking at my fingers." Geraldine exemplifies the reliability of AbilityOne employees by arriving to work half an hour early every day. "I look forward to coming to work every day, and that just makes me feel so much better. The people are my favorite thing because they make you smile. Getting a paycheck is good for me because I can pay all of my bills. I feel more independent now that I can take care of myself. I can do it."



Geraldine Washington
Mail Clerk

Sergeant Jeffrey Mittman joined the U.S. Army in July 1989 and served in Bamberg, Germany as a gunner and a platoon leader's driver. Soon after, he deployed in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In the following years, Mittman was stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky. and in Korea. He later deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. In July 2005, Mittman was severely wounded in Iraq when an Improvised Explosive Device exploded near his vehicle, leaving him without a nose, lips, most of his teeth and the majority of his vision. Mittman has endured more than 40 operations and spent the last four years recovering physically and emotionally. As a participant of the Warrior in Transition Program, Mittman has been detailed by the Army to National Industries for the Blind (NIB). He will move to a permanent position as an NIB employee upon his release from the Army.



Jeffrey Mittman
National Account Manager

Fifteen years ago, when Scott Gibbs docked river barges for a living, he fell into the water and was crushed between two vessels, shattering his back. Gibbs returned to work five years after the accident starting as a custodian at Scott Air Force Base. He was later promoted to crew leader after six months and then to crew supervisor by the end of his first year on the job. Today, Gibbs oversees two Illinois state highway rest stops as well as the recycling contract for Scott Air Force Base near Belleville, Ill. Gibbs manages 21 employees, including nine people with disabilities. Nearly 140,000 travelers annually visit each of the rest stops managed by Gibbs and his team. Gibbs is the first person to transition from being a recipient of rehabilitation services to a prized member of the organization's management team. He was recognized as the national winner of the 2009 Evelyn Villines employee award.



Scott Gibbs
Crew Supervisor

Up Close & PERSONAL



Andrew D. Houghton

Q: Mr. Houghton, during your tenure as a Committee member and Chairperson, how would you describe the level of success of the AbilityOne Program as administered by the Committee for Purchase?

A: Whether you're talking about the Program employees, our customers, or the leadership at every level, the common denominator here is people. The heart and soul of the program is and always will be people.

In my travels of the last eight years, I've visited more than 160 local nonprofit organizations that employ people with significant disabilities, spoken with thousands of Program employees face-to-face and heard their stories, and had them tell me in their own words how much of a difference the AbilityOne Program has made in their daily lives. Statistics are certainly one measure of success, but getting an accurate response straight from the source is undeniable: the AbilityOne Program works.

Through these conversations with AbilityOne employees I've learned how the Program builds economic independence and self-sufficiency for people with significant disabilities. For many of them, things most of us take for granted are unrealistic notions. Through the AbilityOne Program, those notions are becoming realities for more and more people who are blind or who have other significant disabilities.

Recently, while on a tour of a military clothing factory, I asked one AbilityOne Program employee why he liked his job so much. His response: "Owning a house for my wife and I was always a dream. Since I got my job, we were able to by our own home. It is a dream come true."

Andrew D. Houghton is the first private citizen appointed to and the first person with a disability to be elected as chairperson of the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled. He was appointed by President George W. Bush in February 2003, representing the interests of nonprofit agency employees with significant disabilities, and reappointed to serve a second term in May 2006. In July 2006 and 2008, he was unanimously elected by his peers as Committee Chairperson.

Mr. Houghton has broad leadership and experience in the disability arena as a presidential and gubernatorial appointee, and as a successful business consultant to Fortune 500 companies and nonprofit organizations. His accomplishments include the development of domestic and international programs that promote equal employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

With this depth of experience and commitment, Mr. Houghton's expertise has been crucial to the success of the AbilityOne Program during his eight-year tenure.

I met another man who had been working for the same nonprofit for 37 years. His disabilities included blindness and deafness. In his 37 years on the job, he had never missed a single day of work. I asked him what he looks forward to the most at the end of each day. He said, “Coming to work tomorrow!”

Further, if you were to talk with our customers, acquisition officers in the Department of Defense say, or the managers, front line supervisors or CEOs of the local nonprofits that run the AbilityOne Program and service contracts, you would find them to be a unanimously enthusiastic group committed to the goals of the AbilityOne Program. It is quite heartening to see as the Program continues to earn its reputation and grow its customer base. At this point, I’ll mention a few current statistics.

Right now, the AbilityOne Program employs nearly 46,000 employees; pays an average living wage of \$10.82 per hour; and has diversified its products and services to the extent that there are currently more than 3,000 products and services on its Procurement List. We’ve come a long way from the days of manufacturing mops and brooms in 1938.

As great as these accomplishments are, we still have a long way to go. But, I am confident we will get there.

Q: What do you see as some of the major issues facing the Committee and the AbilityOne Program?

A: “May you live in interesting times” is reputed to be the contemporary interpretation of an ancient Chinese proverb. If by “interesting times” you mean to include all the trials and tribulations of daily life, then most of us live in interesting times.

However, times are more interesting for some Americans than for the rest of us.

For people who are blind or who have other significant disabilities, the chances are far greater they will be unemployed than they are for people who have no disabilities; when out of work, they are out of work far longer; and they have far less opportunity for career growth.

Both the private sector and government agencies have to do more with less. They must stretch every dollar to remain competitive yet deliver on their commitments to shareholders and taxpayers alike. At the same time, Baby Boomers are beginning to retire in massive numbers, taking their experience and expertise with them. Who will take their place when successive generations have gotten progressively smaller?

Being discounted in one’s job search due not to just a disability, but to a perceived inability to work is a costly tragedy on a corporate and personal scale.

Our Nation and society cannot afford to ignore the aspirations of its people, nor waste the talents and abilities of any of its citizens, with or without a disability. As I travel the country, I am consistently amazed by the variety of skills and abilities that are available to public and private employers, simply for the asking. The nearly 46,000 people who are blind or have other significant disabilities and are performing work through the AbilityOne Program, are saving the government and the taxpayer – that’s all of us – millions of dollars. People who are blind or who have other significant disabilities manufacture prescription eyewear for our Veterans; sew high performance camouflage uniforms for the military; and provide detailed contract closeout services that free up contracting officers for other priority work. For these individuals, a job is much more than just a paycheck. It’s an opportunity to build skills, befriend coworkers and contribute to the mission of our Federal customers.

As pleased as I am to see the growing number of agencies and organizations participating in and benefiting from the AbilityOne Program, as well as the number of AbilityOne employees now slowly but surely entering the ranks of management and supervision, we have only scratched the surface in maximizing the employment potential of people who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

Q: Any final thoughts to our readers about the AbilityOne Program experience?

On behalf of the Committee, I invite everyone to learn more about the talents and capabilities of the AbilityOne workforce. I encourage each person to seek opportunities to work with us and help us make these “interesting times” a little less, well, interesting. If you are an acquisition officer or influence purchasing decisions in your Federal agency, commercial enterprise, or nonprofit association, you can have a direct and positive influence on the lives of people who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

At the same time, *their success can be yours*. By employing people who are blind or have who other significant disabilities, you can have a significant and positive influence on your organization’s bottom line.

All you have to do is become an AbilityOne Program partner. The choice is yours.

Give us a call or send us an email. We’ll be happy to help you get the process going.

Let’s make a difference together.

George Selby
gselby@abilityone.gov



Providing *Coffee* and *Caring* to Soldiers Overseas

By MARCIA LAYTON TURNER

When Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jesse Jackson and his Army unit ran out of coffee thousands of miles away from home, in Bagram, Afghanistan, Jackson took a chance and sent a plea for more Maxwell House Coffee to CW Resources, Inc., in New Britain, Conn. The response he received was more than he ever expected but reflected the spirit of caring CW Resources is known for.

CW Resources is a nonprofit agency with an AbilityOne Program food co-branding agreement with Maxwell House Coffee. CW Resources employs 47 people with disabilities and seven additional employees in their coffee plant and has been part of the AbilityOne Program since the 1970's.

The U.S. military buys Maxwell House Coffee, as well as Sara Lee Coffee and S&D Coffee from CW Resources. CW Resources has packaged and shipped more than 1.2 million lbs. of coffee in the past 12 months to service members throughout the world. This equates to more than 100 million cups of coffee feeding the troops.

This all started when CW Resources received approval from DLA Troop Support (formerly DSCP) to package coffee in 39 oz. bags. Which brings us back to why Chief Warrant Officer Jackson made contact when his Maxwell House supply was about to run dry.

Reaching Out

"I was kind of reluctant to request the coffee to start with," admits Jackson, but he was desperate. He was out of Maxwell House and didn't know when his next shipment might arrive. And even when he ordered coffee, it could take four to six weeks to receive it. But at that point, on December 27, 2009, there were no coffee shipments en route and less than one bag left. So he drafted a letter: "To whom it may concern." He explained that "we can't get Maxwell House 'Good To The Last Drop' Coffee here 'in country' and I was wondering if there was any way that you all would be able to support our coffee fix. Some guy brought over some Devil Dog coffee and I said no thanks and did a re-brew on used grounds." That was how much he missed his Maxwell House Coffee.

He went on, "We have very limited supplies and resources here and at times they are not real good...We drink your coffee every day and at times during the night. Whatever you can do we will be most grateful." And then he sent it, hoping for, but not really expecting, a reply.

When Alix Capsalors, senior vice president, production and sales at CW Resources received the letter on January 11, 2010, she responded that day and let him know she was shipping him the coffee he missed so much.



Pictured from left to right are SFC Carlton Jones, CW2 Jesse Jackson, Capt. Grantham, Sgt. Jeffery Hassell enjoying their coffee from CW Resources



CW Resources employees show their gratitude to CW2 Jackson and his fellow troops.

Jackson “was completely floored,” he says. “I could not believe what I was reading and I was very surprised that they even took the time to consider our request, much less honor it.” In fact, she shipped him not one bag of coffee, but a full case along with CW coffee cups, which arrived just two weeks later.

Little did he know that the first shipment of coffee was but a taste of what was to come. As Jackson and Capsalors struck up an informal email pen pal relationship, Capsalors and her colleagues had decided to adopt Jackson’s unit. Over the course of the next few weeks, she began rallying the CW Resources team, inviting them to pitch in to send the soldiers a care package, which went out March 9th. Actually, it was not a single care package, but nine boxes totaling over 224 lbs. from its eight locations.

Mail Call

“The highlight of the day is mail call,” says Jackson, but he was unprepared for the show of love and support CW Resources sent their way. It couldn’t have come at a better time.

The day the boxes arrived, “the chow halls were closed and there was a power outage,” Jackson remembers. “We had nothing to eat and could not go and purchase anything because of the power problem.” And then he received an email alerting him he had mail, to which he responded

that he would be over “in a little while.” The response he received back told him, “no, you don’t understand, you need to come now.”

Intrigued, but unable to go pick up his mail because of the power outage he was dealing with, Jackson’s colleague offered to go get it. He returned with nine boxes filled to the brim with goodies. When asked what exactly was in them, he replies, “You would come out better asking what was not in the packages. There were a wide variety of store-bought goods as well as home-baked cookies and brownies. Home made love, as we call them. Snacks, candy, peanut butter and jelly, chips, crackers, and the list goes on and on.” In addition to providing a much-needed morale boost, the boxes of love also provided needed food.

“WOW!!! And that is truly an understatement,” emailed Jackson on receipt of the goodies. “I am glad I am typing this because I would just cry in your face. This is truly a gift to the troops...It was like Christmas in March.”

Those packages were followed by others in the weeks that followed, providing more contact with friends in the states than Jackson ever received. “I have been deployed three times and I have received more [care packages] this deployment than the others combined. Thank you, CW,” he says.

Gaining Momentum

Unbeknownst to Jackson, the employees at CW Resources have been equally impacted by their new connection to the Afghanistan-based soldiers. “Our employees are so honored to be part of the effort,” says Capsalors. At least 80% of the company’s workforce is now involved and supportive of the regular shipments abroad.

One worker collected bottles and took the resulting recycling funds to buy a box of brownie mix to make and send to the troops. Others made 100 friendship bracelets to give to the soldiers to hand out to the locals, to show their good intentions. Jackson saved one for himself, a reminder of the friends he and his fellow soldiers have back in New Britain, Conn.

Although Capsalors expected that the interest in supporting the troops would be short-lived, perhaps even a one-shot deal, the level of commitment and interest is gaining momentum, she reports. And the good deeds “will not stop with Jesse,” says Capsalors. “When he comes home in October, we are going to make contact with his successor and continue caring for our adopted unit,” she says.

For his part, Jackson also intends to continue the long distance connection to fellow members of the military fighting for our country. When he returns to his job in Alabama, he plans to copy the CW Resources model and adopt a unit in Afghanistan, too. ■



Marcia Layton Turner
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Packaging the bags of coffee at CW Resources.

Mission Critical, Mission Accomplished.

AbilityOne coordinates expedited manufacture and delivery of 50,000 new uniforms for troops deploying to Afghanistan

By GWEN MORAN



(U.S. Army photo.)

There are few jobs more critical than manufacturing products that may save Soldiers' lives, so when the United States Army decided to evaluate new camouflage that would better blend into the diverse Afghanistan terrain, everyone involved knew the resulting order would be critical—and big.

Soldiers who are deployed as part of Operation Enduring Freedom need to blend into the country's varied landscapes, including desert, mountain regions, and forested areas, among others, to make them less visible to the enemy and insurgents. The Army evaluated new patterns and colors to be used specifically for uniforms and accessories for Soldiers in Afghanistan. The one they chose, called Operation Enduring Freedom Camouflage Pattern, or OCP, is replacing the traditional Universal Camouflage Pattern (UCP) in this region, says Daniel Purcell, Program Acquisition Specialist with the U.S. Army's Research, Development and Engineering Command (RDECOM) Acquisition Center, based in Natick, Mass., which was responsible for procuring new uniforms for Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier.

Rallying the Partners

The Army needed uniforms and accessories in the new camouflage pattern for troops deploying to Afghanistan. The PEO Soldier Team, comprised of Natick Engineers, Fort Belvoir Program Managers, and Philadelphia Logisticians rallied to design, develop and produce 19 different products for Soldiers. The Army and its contractors developed plans for the new uniforms, and Purcell and his team leveraged the capabilities that NISH, a national nonprofit agency created to support the AbilityOne Program, holds to serve as the initial supply chain manager which would coordinate the manufacturing effort among the AbilityOne Network of nonprofit agencies.



CAMP SHELBY, Miss. — 1st Lt. Dennis Kester of B Co. 1-168 Infantry, tries on a boonie hat at the Army's latest Rapid Fielding Issue (RFI) of the OCP pattern gear Aug. 6 2010. All Soldiers of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division will be receiving the new gear before they deploy to Afghanistan later this year. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ashlee Lolkus)

Purcell says there were several reasons for that decision. First, the uniforms were being produced within a compressed time frame—the first 50,000 uniforms and their accessories had to be delivered in a matter of months versus a typical year or more—so he needed to be sure his manufacturing partners could deliver. Purcell has been working with NISH for more than a decade and the organization has always met its commitments. In addition, because NISH currently holds a contract with the U.S. Army's RDECOM Acquisition Center, Natick, Mass. for Manufacturing and Development services, Purcell could work with NISH and its AbilityOne-participating agency partners to fulfill immediate needs while beginning a longer-term competitive bid process for ongoing manufacturing.

"We told our client, 'We want to meet your needs and we want to give you knock-your-socks-off service. In exchange, they said, 'We'll give you work.' Well, they gave us work, that's for sure," says John Miller, senior team manager of costs and pricing at NISH, with a chuckle.

It took until late March 2010 for the contracts to be completed and finalized so the nonprofit agencies and their small business partners could get to work, but that came with no extension on the deadline. Fifty thousand uniforms in a variety of specific sizes was the minimum the Soldiers needed, so Purcell ordered that amount, and the team immediately went into action.

"You have to go up the supply chain because you need to make sure the material's available", says Chris Stearns, NISH's senior business development manager. "We needed to make sure the Army was involved and that all of our other commercial partners were involved."

Teamwork Gets the Job Done

One of those AbilityOne Program partners was Sherri Scyphers-Hungate, vice-president, Goodwill Industries of South Florida, Inc. in Miami, Fla., which produced the uniform trousers, each of which require 97 operations - the most complex of the three garments produced.

Goodwill Industries of South Florida manufactures combat trousers, coats, dress slacks, garrison caps, the Veteran's Administration interment flag and other items as part of the AbilityOne Program. In order to contract through AbilityOne, participating agencies must maintain 70 percent employees with a diagnosed significant disability. They are trained to operate complex machines and work with a team of supervisors, job coaches, and vocational rehabilitation counselors. According to Hungate, the agency had more than 50 individuals with developmental disabilities working on the production line.



Two types of hats and improved first-aid kit in the new camouflage pattern, OCP.



(U.S. Army photo.)

“The ethics and dedication of people with disabilities surpass those of any other workers,” says Dennis Pastrana, president of Goodwill. “They are very proud, and it gives them a great sense of purpose to serve our men and women in uniform. We had no doubt that they would come through when we told them that the trousers were very important to our Soldiers. And, they did.”

At the same time, another organization, ReadyOne Industries, based in El Paso, Texas, an AbilityOne Program partner that manufactures apparel, boxes, and other items for the United States government, immediately got to work and made the coats. A small business partner, Warmkraft of Taylorsville, Miss., applied a safe and tested insecticide treatment known as permethrin to the garments and arranged for final shipping to the Army. Altogether, eight members of the AbilityOne Program coordinated the process, and as a result this initiative created jobs for 750 people with disabilities.

Keeping so many disparate organizations working together to meet their deadlines required, at a minimum, multiple weekly conference calls to compare notes about each segment. ReadyOne’s President and CEO, Tom Ahmann, says that fabric and trim delays meant that production could not be started until June. Ordinarily, such a job would take six months, he says. And if one partner dropped the ball, the work of all the rest would be for naught.

This would be challenging for any group. However, many of the AbilityOne Program participants have the added element of accommodating their workers who have disabilities. Seventy-five percent of ReadyOne’s team are people with significant disabilities. Manufacturing stations and operations must be modified for each individual’s disability. For example, ReadyOne has 30 workers who are blind who need to be moved to various stations, so a variety of process steps were incorporated to help them do so easily, including taping ropes onto the floor, marking the route they were to follow when changing sites. So, in addition to meeting a highly challenging deadline, such provisions needed to be put in place to ensure that every worker could fully participate in the process.

“It’s not just throwing a machine in there and saying, ‘Well, a person worked on a single-needle machine over in this area, so they can work on a single-needle machine over here. We make accommodations,’” Ahmann says. A staff of rehabilitation engineers examines the accommodations that need to be made. Ahmann says that while a typical sewing manufacturing plant might have 100 employees per supervisor, ReadyOne’s ratio is half of that, with about 50 employees per supervisor.



CAMP SHELBY, Miss. – Soldiers of A Co. 1-168 Infantry load the Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center shuttle bus after receiving the Army's latest Rapid Fielding Issue (RFI) of the OCP pattern gear Aug. 6 2010. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ashlee Lolkus)

AbilityOne Program partner Southeastern Kentucky Rehabilitation Industries, Inc. (SEKRI), a Corbin, Ky. manufacturing firm that employs people with disabilities, was another partner in the process, responsible for making two different kinds of hats, an improved first aid kit, and the advanced combat shirt. SEKRI Interim Executive Director Norman D. Bradley says that it didn't take much prompting to get his team of approximately 650 employees, 75 percent of whom have a significant disability, to commit to hitting the tight deadline.

"With our group, you don't have to do a whole lot because they're very, very dedicated to what they do," he says. "If we just make them aware that there is a special need, particularly if it's one as critical as this fielding, they do whatever it takes to get the job done."

Miller agrees that, beyond the myriad calls, tweaks to the products, production schedules, and long hours, there was something bigger at stake. Once the job was moving forward, he says it was shocking and humbling to realize the gravity of the task at hand. If even one uniform was short in the order, that Soldier might not deploy with the right pieces of equipment.

"It made it crystal clear to us how important what we were doing was. When you're a government contractor, it almost never gets that personal," he says.

Crossing the Finish Line

And the challenges continued until the end. Completed uniform coats had to be moved from El Paso to Taylorsville, Miss. for insect repellent treatment, then shipped to Camp Shelby, Miss., within one week. There was a concern that there would not be enough time to ship via the standard courier. So, the AbilityOne Program had a Plan B and a

Plan C. They ultimately worked with a private trucking company to get the garments where they needed to be on time. However, if that hadn't worked out, they had made an agreement with an employee to personally accompany the garments by plane, ensuring that they reached the base in plenty of time for deployment. This is true commitment to the American Soldiers! Mission accomplished.

Purcell says that this successful run was somewhat of a "stress test" for the system, and he was so pleased that he will place additional orders for some 300,000 more sets of uniforms and accessories to be coordinated and manufactured by the AbilityOne Program. They will be ordered in similar smaller batches to accommodate specific deployments. That also means that Purcell doesn't have to house a great deal of inventory until a long-term contracting solution is found, based on all applicable laws and the Federal Acquisition Regulation.

Purcell says the benefits of smaller production runs lie in being able to change, adjust and tweak patterns, working directly with the manufacturers to make improvements along the way, resulting in a better quality product. Both he and Miller say this effort should also lay to rest any myth that any quality, time, or other concessions need to be made when hiring people with disabilities. The AbilityOne Program is a great example of patriotism and a clear understanding of "One Team, One Fight."

Perhaps no one illustrates that commitment more than Terry Wigfall, who is blind and an employee of Goodwill Industries of South Florida. "I am humbled that I was one of the people selected to produce the new camouflage," he says. ■

The AbilityOne Network partners:

- Goodwill Industries of South Florida
- Industries for the Blind (Greensboro, N.C.)
- Lyons Volunteer Blind Industries
- New York City Industries for the Blind
- ReadyOne Industries
- San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind
- Southeastern Kentucky Rehabilitation Industries, Inc.
- Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind

Small Business partner:

- Warmkraft

750 – number of jobs created for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities



Putting Milk on the Table:

AbilityOne Produces 40 Million
Pounds of Instantized Nonfat Dry Milk

By JENNIFER KUPER

AbilityOne USDA Contract Employs People with Significant Disabilities and Provides Food for People in Need

Through a decade-long contract with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the AbilityOne Program is touching the lives of low-income individuals and families by supplying important staples – instantized nonfat dry milk and bakery mixes – for USDA’s domestic feeding program. Members of the AbilityOne national network of nonprofit agencies manufacture and package the food products following stringent USDA guidelines and commercial industry best practices, and deliver them to state-operated warehouses as well as USDA centralized warehouses. The states and USDA then distribute the products to food banks; schools; programs for infants, women and the elderly; soup kitchens; ministries; Indian reservations; and a wealth of other charitable organizations.

800 Million Glasses of Milk

In fiscal year 2009, the AbilityOne Program produced 40 million pounds of instantized nonfat dry milk – that’s enough to make about 800 million glasses of fluid milk.

The instantized nonfat dry milk is produced by three members of the AbilityOne Network, including Transylvania Vocational Services, Inc. (TVS), Brevard, N.C.; Knox County Association for Retarded Citizens

(KCARC), Inc., Vincennes, Ind.; and CW Resources, Inc., New Britain, Conn. TVS also produces bakery mixes, along with American Manufacturing and Packaging (AMP), Cookeville, Tenn.

“It’s hard to imagine how this can possibly get any better – people with significant disabilities in a very rural place have an opportunity to feed people all across the country,” said Nancy Stricker, chief executive officer of TVS, Inc., which is located about 35 miles South of Asheville. “There are very few employment options here and most of the 75 people with disabilities who we employ for these projects would most likely not be working if they weren’t working for us.”

During 2009, 100 people with significant disabilities were employed for milk packaging.

“We actually employ some of the folks who receive the food assistance,” noted Bobby Harbison, vice president of Industrial Operations, KCARC.

Instantized nonfat dry milk is rich in protein and vitamins, and has a shelf-life of two years. It mixes more easily with water than non-instantized milk, dissolving much like hot chocolate mix in hot water or milk. The nonprofit agencies (NPAs) package the instantized nonfat dry milk in re-sealable



A TVS employee holds bags of milk, ready for distribution.



AbilityOne produced 40 million pounds of instantized nonfat dry milk from July 2009 to August 2010.

pouches displaying the NPA's brand name – Mountain Maid (TVS), River Valley Products (CW Resources) or Wabash Heritage (KCARC). Instantized nonfat dry milk is available in 25.6-oz, 4-pound and 25-kg packages.

AbilityOne follows USDA guidelines including 3A Dairy standards and specific equipment used for processing and packaging. The NPAs are ISO registered 9001:2008 and Kosher-certified. They also participate in the Salmonella Surveillance program, which includes quarterly USDA sampling and testing of environmental and product samples.

From Newborns to Senior Citizens: Impacting Lives

AbilityOne delivered the first bags of instantized nonfat dry milk in March of 2001. Ever since, all of the nonprofit agencies involved have received numerous emails and phone calls from individuals about how this product has impacted their lives. A woman who gave birth to quadruplets shared that she relied on the instantized nonfat dry milk to help her produce the milk to feed her new babies. Another mother shared that her children were able to have milk on their cereal because their family got a bag of dry milk. Here are a few more comments from instantized nonfat dry milk recipients:

- “After Katrina, I was given a few four-pound packages of your dry milk. What a great blessing and life saver... I am a retired senior citizen and have raised all my children

(7) with dry milk and now my grandchildren (18) love it. I most enjoy the convenience of not having to go to the store every day for a gallon of milk while a houseful of my grandkids stay the summer with me.”

- “I am disabled and a friend has given me your instant nonfat dry milk. It is so good.”
- “It has been a great blessing to my family. I cannot always have refrigeration to keep the liquid gallons.”
- “I am 57 and on SSI disability, with a 12 yr. old son in an old cabin. We don't get near enough food stamps to cover our needs. I was given a package of your powdered milk once, and am wondering if you sell it bulk ... We use a lot, and can't afford whole fresh milk.”

Food Insecurity Rises, Need for Nonfat Dry Milk Continues

Although AbilityOne and USDA have touched many lives through the domestic feeding program, much work remains to be done.

According to a report released by the USDA Economic Research Service in November 2009, 14.6 percent of households, or about 17 million households, were food insecure in 2008, meaning families had difficulty putting food on the table at times during the year. This was an

increase from 13 million households in 2007 and represents the highest level observed since USDA began tracking food security levels in 1995. (The 2009 report is expected to release in November 2010.) With nationwide unemployment at 9.5 percent, the demand at food banks is likely to continue at historic levels.

While there is continual demand for instantized nonfat dry milk, the supply of it to nutrition programs has been very unstable. Although AbilityOne produced 40 million pounds of instantized nonfat dry milk from July 2009 to August 2010, production in 2007 and 2008 was only 1.9 and 2.6 million pounds, respectively.

The fluctuations in nonfat dry milk production are due to the fact that the dry milk program is based on price support for dairy farmers. The purchase program for supporting farm milk prices started with the Agricultural Act of 1949 and has been amended several times. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Act) specifies the support prices of purchased manufactured products, including butter, cheddar cheese and nonfat dry milk. When the farmers have a surplus of milk and the price drops, USDA purchases the surplus and provides the instantized nonfat dry milk to charitable organizations. However, when dairy prices surge, instantized nonfat dry milk is in short supply.

Stricker and Becky Alderman, TVS director of operations, recalled a story of a 70-year-old woman who once returned three bags of instantized nonfat dry milk to the local emergency aid because she learned there was no more available at the center. “I think the children need it more... We have three families here; 1 has 11 children, another family has 9... And, I think... the other one has 7,” the woman said in an e-mail to the NPA.

“That’s a heck of a choice to make,” Alderman said.

Despite the limitations due to wavering availability of nonfat dry milk, there is no doubt that this USDA AbilityOne contract is invaluable for people with significant disabilities and low income individuals and families.

“The packaging of instant nonfat milk, in accordance with demanding USDA specifications, further highlights the production capabilities and skills of persons with disabilities. Additionally, this project fosters a sense of pride among our workers in that they are helping to feed those in need,” said Alix Capsalors, senior vice president, Manufacturing, CW Resources, Inc. ■

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Andrzej Juvele of CW Resources.

Up Close & PERSONAL



James Omvig

*vocational rehabilitation programs for people who are blind, and dealing with other civil rights issues affecting people who are blind. Mr. Omvig has written countless articles and monographs on the issue of empowerment, and he has also authored the books *Freedom for the Blind* and *The Blindness Revolution*.*

As a teenager, James Omvig learned to weave baskets and make rugs at the Iowa School for the Blind. At age twenty-six, he became one of Kenneth Jernigan's early students (1961) in the new, adult "Orientation and Adjustment Center" established July 1960 at the Iowa Commission for the Blind in that state's capital city of Des Moines. Jernigan had used the National Federation of the Blind's new "empowerment model" as the foundation for the center and Omvig regards himself as the very lucky beneficiary of this radical new kind of "empowerment" training for people who are blind.

After completing his undergraduate school, he became the first student who was blind ever to be accepted into the Loyola University of Chicago School of Law. He went on to be the first attorney who was blind ever to be hired by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). He worked for the NLRB first in Washington, D.C. and then in New York City.

Eventually he decided to change careers and devoted his time and commitment to administering residential orientation-and-adjustment centers for the blind, improving

In February of 2003, President George W. Bush appointed Mr. Omvig to serve as one of the 15 appointed members serving on the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, the Federal agency which administers the AbilityOne Program. His specific assignment is to represent the interests of AbilityOne Program employees who are blind. In 2007, he was re-appointed by President Bush for another five-year term on the Committee. Mr. Omvig is also currently serving his second term as Vice Chairperson of the Committee, a role to which his peers elected him unanimously.

Q: How would you describe AbilityOne successes and improvements over the years?

A: There have been enormous, positive changes since 1938 when the Program was born. Now, rather than making mops and brooms, most AbilityOne production workers who are blind operate high-tech equipment producing office products; other, more sophisticated items for the government; or uniforms, helmets, and the like for the military. Workers who are blind also perform certain kinds

of services for the government. Some also either work in or manage magnificent Base Supply Stores on military installations.

A few of the more notable policy changes or other events are:

- AbilityOne nonprofit agencies now pay much improved wages and benefits to their employees who are blind, and strive routinely to increase these benefits and to improve working conditions.
- The NIB Board of Directors has established the policy that all employees who are blind (who do not experience serious, multiple disabilities) must be paid at least the Federal minimum wage.
- Most AbilityOne facilities are now modern manufacturing plants and service-contract providers, and are seeking to acquire up-to-date equipment aimed at better working conditions and increased productivity and wages.
- Our nonprofits now work routinely to place employees who are blind outside the AbilityOne Program in competitive employment if they choose this path, and the nonprofits are required by the AbilityOne Strategic Plan to set ambitious targets each year for this objective.
- And both National Industries for the Blind and the AbilityOne Program itself demonstrate understanding of and belief in the importance of upward mobility and promotional opportunities for qualified employees who are blind.

Q. What is a former area of concern that you are pleased is now an area of success?

A: People who are blind are now being promoted into significant management positions. An increasing number are being hired at the executive level at our Program nonprofits.

I have commended the associated agencies for the outstanding progress they are making by moving people who are blind into key leadership positions, but I also offered a caution. I reminded them that, people who are blind have been moved into key positions simply because they were blind, not because they were qualified, and failure was the inevitable outcome. I reminded the agencies that their process must be to hire qualified leaders who happened to be blind.

A year or two ago my wife Sharon and I sat at an NIB annual awards banquet with a blind telephone operator who was

being named employee of the year. He answered phones at the Dover (Delaware) Air Force Base, and he earned \$22 per hour with full benefits. And I have toured many modern industrial plants, including Baltimore's Blind Industries and Services of Maryland and Lancaster's Susquehanna Association for the Blind, which are quite different from the facilities I knew in the old days.

Q. When you toured, did you find anything unique in the current facilities?

A: Perhaps the most intriguing of these is a military warehousing facility that members of the Committee visited in Phoenix in the fall of 2006. It is operated by Arizona Industries for the Blind. Members of the President's Committee (including admirals and generals) were unanimous in their opinion that this was the most impressive warehousing operation they had ever seen anywhere. It was huge, spotless, complicated, orderly, and armed with high-tech equipment which made it possible for employees who are totally blind to go independently throughout the warehouse picking out items of inventory for packaging and shipping by other employees who are blind. Attitudes about the management abilities of people who are blind are shifting markedly.

Also, very recently I had the opportunity to visit and tour Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in North Carolina. It was delightful to see people who are blind performing a relatively new kind of job for us: grinding and polishing eyeglass lenses for American military veterans. Also, at the Winston-Salem facility, it was particularly gratifying for me--since my appointment is to represent the interests of Program employees who are blind--to learn that more than forty employees who are blind are now involved in positions of management and supervision. I am confident that this tremendous progress is also being duplicated in many of our other AbilityOne agencies.

Q: Finally, what do you foresee for the future of the AbilityOne Program?

There is Ms. Tina Ballard! I can only describe it as a consummate joy to have the opportunity to work with her regularly and to watch her almost daily as she gives a new kind of leadership and direction to the AbilityOne Program! Yes, the future is bright with promise!

Stephanie Lesko
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National Treasures



PENTAGON

Photo by David B. Gleason.



WEST POINT



CAPITOL VISITOR CENTER

Photo courtesy Architect of the Capitol.



U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY

We value our national treasures...

Both the beautiful landmarks and the AbilityOne employees that work there.

STATUE OF LIBERTY



JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY



AbilityOne Network

Recent Awards & Recognition



During a conference luncheon on Friday, Feb. 5th at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott, VOLUNTEER Hampton Roads proudly announced **Mr. Thomas Swanston** of Chesapeake Service Systems, Inc. as the honoree of the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Prize. This award recognizes an outstanding nonprofit chief professional in the Hampton Roads, Va. area.



The **PROVAIL** Fabrication Division marked the end of 2009 by celebrating one year without a reportable accident. On August 20, 2010, the Division marked 500 days without a lost-time accident.



The Lincoln Training Center was honored in August 2010 as DiverCities Non-profit of the Year by Rep. Judy Chu (D-Calif.) for its work helping adults with disabilities throughout California find “meaningful” work. The South El Monte-based organization received the award during the first-annual DiverCities Awards ceremony. The awards honor outstanding individuals and organizations that contribute to diversity and minority development in the 32nd District, which Chu represents.

Siskiyou Opportunity workers and the **Caltrans** maintenance crew – who maintain the Weed Airport Rest Area in Weed, Calif. were recognized by Caltrans District 2 Director John Bulinski for their hard work in cleaning and maintaining the rest stop, which is said to be one of the most recognized by the traveling public in Caltran’s District 2.



Seven **Melwood** employees earned **Peer Awards** for their customer service at Goddard Space Flight Center and received plaques at an August ceremony. They are (front row) Kenneth Thompson, Lilian Reyes, Azie Clark, Charles Parrish, and James Mintz. Not pictured: Brandyce Jackson and Hasine Thorpe. At left, joining the winners are Janice Frey-Angel, President/CEO; Earl Middleton, Site Supervisor; at right, Fred Corbin, Operations Manager; and Matt Scassero, Senior Vice President.

DePaul Industries – the largest employer of people with disabilities in Oregon – is the subject of two recently completed academic papers, one of which will be presented at Oxford University in England in September, 2010. Dr. Silvia Dorado, research professor from the College of Business Administration at the University of Rhode Island, has co-written both studies about the unique status of DePaul Industries as a “hybrid organization” that aims to serve both social and profit goals.

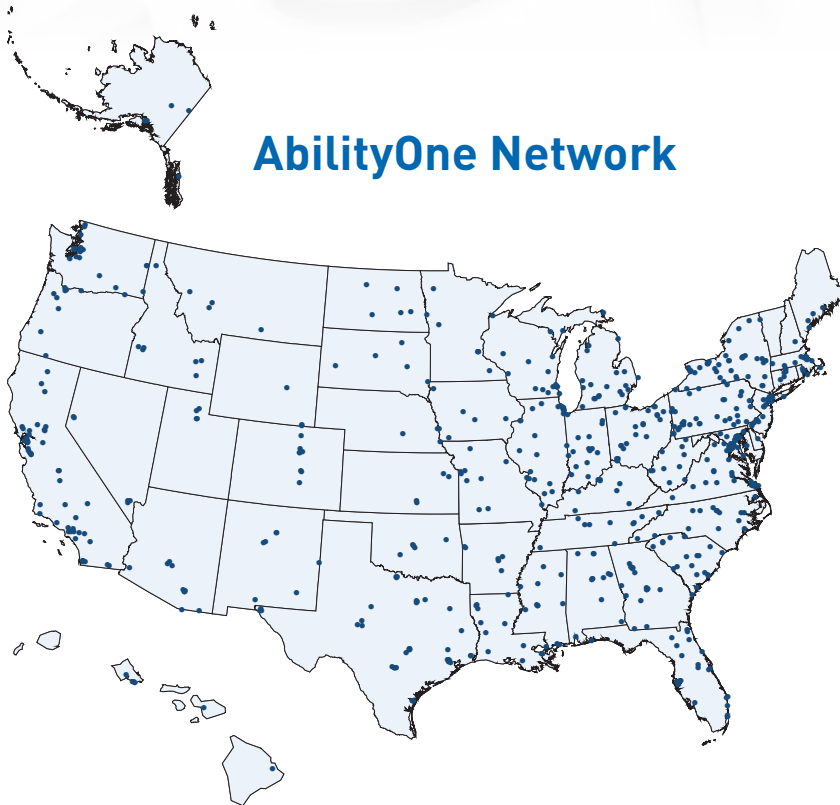


In January of this year, **The Beacon Group's** new building in Tuscon, Arizona was a finalist for a Cornerstone Building Award from the local construction industry. The facility was also honored by the 2010 VP Building Hall of Fame as the *Best of Retro-Fit Category*. This recognition for “Excellent Craftsmanship and Construction” was presented to the J.R. Tuttle Company who provided the metal structure for the building. Seaver Franks Architects designed the structure as an external element that reduced costs and also gave the building its unique modern appearance.



Eastern Carolina Vocational Center, Inc. (ECVC) and **Arizona Industries for the Blind** each received the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Business Alliance Award for Outstanding AbilityOne Program Vendor in August 2010 at the DLA Enterprise Supplier Conference in Columbus, Ohio.

AbilityOne by the Numbers



In a 2009 survey of Federal Customers:

- **82%** stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the AbilityOne Program providing solutions that meet their agency's needs
- **40%** stated the AbilityOne Program contractors were more timely or much more timely in response to their agency's needs
- **89%** stated the quality of AbilityOne products and services was the same or higher than that of other contractors

Facts and Figures

- Employs nearly **46,000** people who are blind or have other significant disabilities
 - An estimated **32,000** of these employees work on DoD contracts to include service disabled veterans who have transitioned to the AbilityOne Program
- Coordinates participation from **600+** nonprofit agencies throughout the US
 - Operates at nearly **1,000** locations representing **40** Government agencies nationally, including operation of **140** base supply centers
- Represents **\$2.6 billion** of products and services purchased by the Federal Government in FY2009

- **69%** of Americans who are blind or have a significant disability do not have jobs
- People with disabilities are the most at risk with regards to employment
- Americans with disabilities want to work and only need the opportunity to make that happen

*U.S. Census Bureau



abilityone.org

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For questions, please contact Helen Purcell (256) 922-8771 or helen.purcell@dau.mil



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