

# ABILITY

# one

AbilityOne PROGRAM MAGAZINE

abilityone.org | 2011-2012

## HIGH ADVENTURE

How the Army Outfits  
its Mountain Warriors

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AbilityOne®

PROGRAM



October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

“Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

—DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



## Dear Friends and Supporters of the AbilityOne Program

An “investment” in each other is an investment in our collective future. When one of us benefits, all of us—society as a whole—benefit.

At the U.S. AbilityOne® Commission, we invest in people who are blind or have other significant disabilities. We do this by creating and sustaining jobs for more than 47,000 individuals, making the AbilityOne Program one of the most successful jobs creation programs in the country. This success is something worth celebrating during **National Disability Employment Awareness Month** (NDEAM). (For more about NDEAM, see the article by Assistant Secretary of Labor Kathy Martinez on page 7.)

Despite the success of the AbilityOne Program, we still have a long way to go in creating jobs for everyone when more than 11 million people who are blind or significantly disabled remain out of work.

That is where you come in.

I urge you to spread the word that it makes *clear business sense* to hire people who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

### CONSIDER THESE FACTS

People with significant disabilities working in telephone “contact centers”—typically high employee turnover settings—are among the most loyal and productive employees one can find.

Through July 2011, AbilityOne Program employees have analyzed and presented more than 14,500 contract

modifications as ready-to-close to government contracting officers and identified more than \$15 million in funds for deobligation/recoupment while achieving a remarkable zero defect rate. (See the article on page 20.)

Witnessing how peers with disabilities in the workplace deal with adversity and overcome challenges *inspires other employees* and enhances productivity and morale.

Veterans who are blind or have other significant disabilities are *fully capable* of meeting and surpassing employer expectations. We must have a shared commitment to giving them that opportunity.

AbilityOne Program employees deliver more than 3,500 products and services, and perform in a wide range of jobs in nearly every state in the Union, Puerto Rico and Guam. *They Can Do!*

It is my hope that you will take these facts and help us put this largely untapped yet highly skilled and motivated workforce on the employment rolls. We *must* make use of the talents that *all* our citizens have to offer.

Thank you for your continued support of the AbilityOne Program.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tina Ballard', written over a light-colored, textured background.

Tina Ballard  
Executive Director and CEO  
U.S. AbilityOne Commission

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AbilityOne magazine is a joint publication under the AbilityOne Program between the U.S. AbilityOne Commission, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH—Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities. Address corrections or additions should be emailed to [customerservice@abilityone.org](mailto:customerservice@abilityone.org). Please put “address” in the subject line, and provide incorrect and corrected address in the body of the message.

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\*Cover photo by Staff Sgt. Brehl Garza,  
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# ABILITYone

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# LINKS



# TO LIFE

BY D. DOUGLAS GRAHAM

AbilityOne® assists the State Department with call volume, connecting U.S. citizens abroad to family, friends and other people ready to assist them. Since the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the highly skilled employees that staff the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) have offered hope in seemingly hopeless situations, most recently to Americans in Egypt and Japan.

“I’m blown away by what AbilityOne employees at the NPIC achieve on a daily basis,” reports Jason Mackie, a liaison officer with the U.S. Department of State Passport Services, the government entity that oversees the NPIC. “They manage major challenges as a matter of course and do so without complaint.”

Two such individuals, Ryan Frasier and Elizabeth Heppler are both Peckham, Inc., contact center employees who perform a public service to American citizens in dire straits in countries overseas. Although helping in a crisis is not part of their daily role, each has been called on in these international situations.

## AbilityOne NETWORK MEMBER

Based in Lansing, Mich., Peckham, Inc., is a member of the AbilityOne Network of more than 600 non-profit agencies whose mission is to provide a wide range of opportunities to maximize human potential for people with disabilities striving for more independence and self-sufficiency.

“We are a Federal contractor operating under the AbilityOne Program,” explains business services director, Matt June. “We provide products and services, apparel work, third-party logistics and call center services. We hold a number of AbilityOne contracts in support of The Centers for Medicare



**This page:** The magnitude 8.9 earthquake slammed Japan's eastern coast Friday, March 11, 2011, unleashing a 13-foot tsunami that swept boats, cars, buildings and tons of debris miles inland. AP Photo/Kyodo News. **Opposite page:** AbilityOne employee assists with call volume.

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Contact center employees at Peckham, Inc., a member of the AbilityOne Network of nonprofit agencies

and Medicaid Services, the Department of Treasury and the Department of State, currently our biggest contract.”

Peckham’s involvement with crisis management services began after last year’s earthquake in Haiti. Working with Overseas Citizen Services (a division of the State Department), Peckham performed contact center services and data entry on behalf of U.S. citizens in that country during the disaster.

“The story here is how quickly we were able to ramp up our support of the State Department in its effort to help Americans stranded in places where terrible events are in progress,” June says. “Our team was fully equipped to assist callers within a

In addition to customer service training, Peckham offers a wide variety of assistive technology including oversized computer monitors enhanced with screen magnification software, headsets for people with hearing impairments, adjustable desks, ergonomic seating and single-handed keyboards with trackball mousing for individuals with limited mobility.

Other supports in place at Peckham include a flexible work schedule and the ability to take breaks as needed so team members can manage conditions that might otherwise preclude employment. Although these supports provide an opportunity for success, the real driving force comes from within each individual.

**“The story here is how quickly we were able to ramp up our support of the State Department in its effort to help Americans stranded in places where terrible events are in progress.”**

few hours of notification. We were ready to start 24/7 operations within a day’s notice of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear aftermath in Japan. And we were just as effective during the chaos in Egypt.”

In each situation, AbilityOne not only performed customer service and phone operation, but also helped track persons unaccounted for via a computer program used by the State Department to manage and maintain information on U.S. citizens overseas. June attributes this success to training and support technologies for facilitating workplace excellence in special circumstances.

“Some of the folks who work here have profound disabilities and are extremely productive,” June explains. “Training and supports help, but at the end of the day it is the fact that our workforce is capable and able to do this work. They are proud of what they do and of the meaningful employment this AbilityOne contract provides. They are ready at a moment’s notice to do even more. We have no problem with crisis staffing. When some extraordinary situation suddenly happens, our AbilityOne employees are eager to step up to help citizens away from home and perform well beyond the call of duty.”

### FRASIER AND HEPLER

“Focus is a problem for me, but working in a highly structured environment like Peckham has made all the difference,” says NPIC customer service representative (CSR), Ryan Frasier. “During our crisis operations, I take calls from Americans overseas on passport issues, help them contact their embassy when they need to, assist people with illness and injuries and connect them with loved ones at home. AbilityOne gives me the opportunity to do my best and provide my fellow citizens with a truly useful service when they need it most.”

According to Frasier, the Egypt effort was very challenging. Basic services were lacking, a situation much exacerbated by political upheaval. Caught in the crossfire of revolution, many Americans had to cope with injuries and medical issues for which immediate aid was not available.

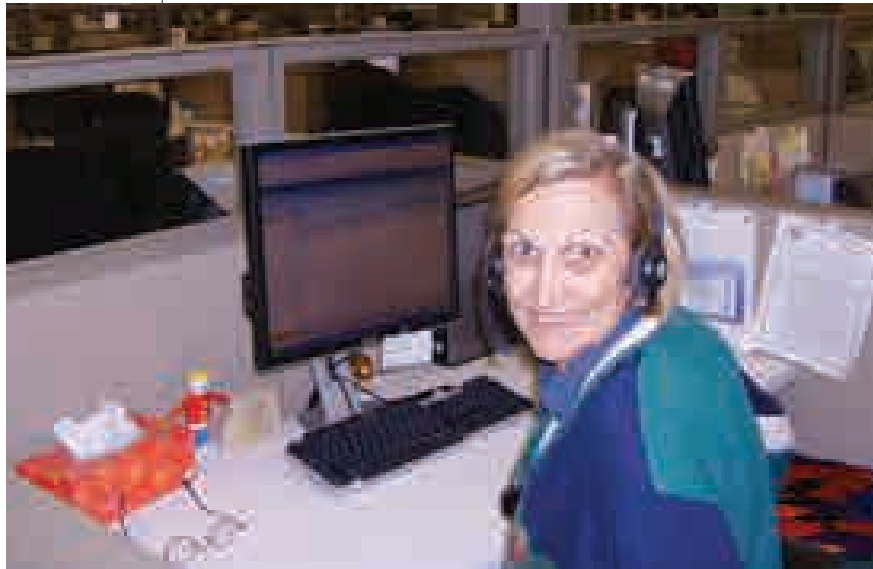
“I got an urgent call from a man whose diabetic father was trapped in Egypt,” Frasier recalls. “He needed meds to stay alive, but had no access to insulin. The caller was desperate to reach the U.S. embassy, so I found him a list of phone numbers. It took only six minutes to provide all the information he needed to make the attempt to help his father.”

Elizabeth Heppler joined Peckham in 2009. As an NPIC CSR, she is often required to perform several tasks simultaneously—speaking to callers, bringing up information on her computer monitor and logging into related databases. Her job is sometimes daunting, she admits, and complicated further still by the trouble she has reading on the fly. But challenges have a way of bringing out the best in people, and in the case of Elizabeth Heppler, they have encouraged her to rely more heavily on the personal assets she brings to work every morning—her intelligence, resourcefulness and knack for organization.

Heppler uses reminder cards to keep work routines on track. She uses scripting when dealing with issues frequently encountered, such as finding the U.S. embassy or helping citizens find their way through language barriers. Using such strategies helped her with the crises in Haiti, Egypt and Japan, each of which came with its own set of difficulties.

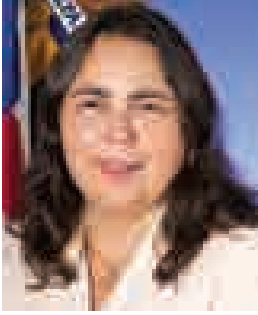
“The Japanese relief effort was well organized, though the nuclear fear was real, and there were many Americans in the country attending school or married to Japanese nationals. Haiti was hardest of all, and the most heartbreaking. There was no food, no water. Everything was a mess. I took call after hair-raising call, one by a man who was trying to reach his wife who was buried in rubble at the time. She did not survive. The Haiti experience was emotionally wrenching, but I eventually fell into a rhythm and got the job done. People were depending on me to assist and that’s just what I did.”

AbilityOne employees in this and other contact centers are efficiently meeting the needs of citizens and government agencies. ■



Customer service representatives, Elizabeth Heppler (top) and Ryan Frasier (bottom)





**Kathy Martinez:** Assistant Secretary, Office of Disability Employment Policy, Department of Labor; Presidential appointee to the U.S. AbilityOne Commission

# Employees with Disabilities Provide Return on Investment

BY KATHY MARTINEZ

Today and every day, people with disabilities add significant value to America's workplaces and economy. Their skills and talents benefit businesses of all sizes across all industries. Through the AbilityOne® Program, these benefits extend to the Federal Government—and thus the nation as a whole.

Each October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is a time when we celebrate the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities. This year's

**When a workplace is welcoming of people with disabilities, employers gain needed skills and varied perspectives on ways to confront challenges and achieve organizational success.**

theme, "Profit by Investing in Workers with Disabilities," focuses on improving employment opportunities that lead to good jobs and a secure economic future for people with disabilities—and America. This theme emphasizes the dividend we

all gain by increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

When a workplace is welcoming of people with disabilities, employers gain needed skills and varied perspectives on ways to confront challenges and achieve organizational success. Individuals with disabilities gain dignity, respect and self-determination. And, most important, society as a whole benefits from a more inclusive culture where every person is valued for his or her contributions.

As the theme conveys, these profits are achieved through investment, but the responsibility rests not only with those writing the checks. Like a lot of people employed through the AbilityOne Program, my life has been profoundly impacted by my blindness. Yet, it's merely one of the factors that shape my identity and the person I am today. And investment has been the critical factor from the day I was born.

From day one, my parents invested belief in my capability, fighting for me to attend our local public school and be woven into the fabric of our community. They instilled in me a love of learning and expectation of work. As I got older, I came to understand the value of their outlay and started reinvesting the



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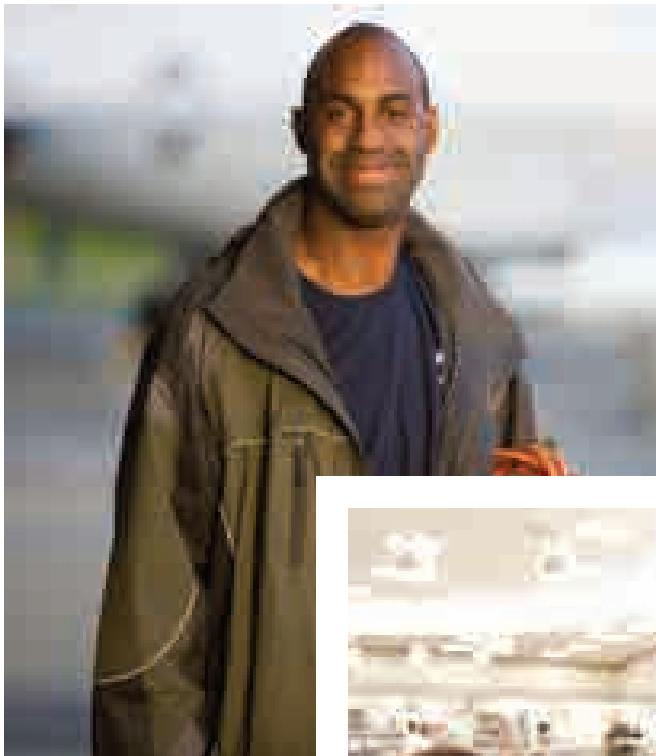
▼ A key component to Northrop Grumman's success is its diverse supply base. A diverse supply base creates an environment of inclusion and promotes innovation and creativity. Ultimately, it reflects and strengthens the communities we live and work in and makes the world a safer place.

dividends in myself, through education and advocacy—and work. Work is fundamental to my life.

Although it has evolved significantly over the years, NDEAM represents early efforts to affirm this intrinsic value of work to all individuals, including those of us with disabilities. Its roots go back to 1945 when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October each year “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” In 1962, the word “physically” was removed to acknowledge

the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to “National Disability Employment Awareness Month.” The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) assumed responsibility for NDEAM when it was established in 2001, and we’ve worked to expand its reach and scope ever since.

Although led by ODEP, NDEAM’s true spirit lies in the many creative observances held at the grassroots level across the nation every year. Employers, schools and organizations of all sizes and in all communities are encouraged to participate in NDEAM. ODEP offers a variety of resources to help them do so. Activities range from simple (such as displaying an NDEAM poster) to comprehensive initiatives for implementing a disability awareness education program. Regardless, all play an important part in fostering a more inclusive America, one where every person is rightly recognized for his or her abilities—every day of every month. ■



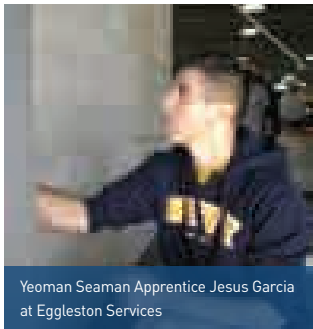
**Above and Right:** Two AbilityOne employees in their workplaces, Travis AFB and Joint Base Lewis-McChord. **Bottom Left:** To obtain copies of the 2011 NDEAM poster and learn more about how to observe NDEAM in your organization, visit ODEP’s website at [www.dol.gov/odep/topics/NDEAM.htm](http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/NDEAM.htm).

# AbilityOne

## CELEBRATES NDEAM



Rep. Susan Davis touring the recruit chow hall of MCRD San Diego



Yeoman Seaman Apprentice Jesus Garcia at Eggleston Services



Judy Erwin, Bonnie Triggs, Kirt Jacobs and Shawn Herbig celebrate 10-year partnership



DLA Director Vice Adm. Alan Thompson and NISH President and CEO Bob Chamberlin

### Navy Volunteers Help Eggleston Renovate New Location

Twenty-one volunteers from the U.S. Navy Commander Second Fleet helped Eggleston Services of Norfolk, Va., renovate its newly acquired 25,000-sq.-ft. facility that will house Eggleston's mail processing, document conversion, shredding and custom embroidery services. The expansion, which is scheduled to be completed this year, will provide approximately 100 jobs for people with disabilities.

The efforts were coordinated by LN1 Patrice Washington after hearing a radio advertisement about NDEAM and wanting to coordinate a volunteer day with a local nonprofit agency.

### Zoom Group Honors Robley Rex Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Zoom Group, Louisville, Ky., and the Robley Rex Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) commemorated NDEAM and their 10-year partnership with a ceremony held on Oct. 13. Zoom Group's AbilityOne® contract at the Robley Rex VAMC employs nearly 40 people with significant disabilities in the laundry center, where 1.6 million pounds of laundry are processed annually for the Louisville and Lexington, Ky., VA medical centers. Kirt Jacobs of Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson's

office read a proclamation from the mayor. Zoom Group also received a congratulatory letter from Sen. Mitch McConnell. Jeff Walz, women's basketball coach, University of Louisville, and Dawne Gee, a local TV news anchor, attended the event.

### Rep. Susan Davis Tours Arc of San Diego's AbilityOne Contract at Marine Corps Recruit Depot

Rep. Susan Davis, D-Calif., visited the Arc of San Diego's AbilityOne food services operation at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD). At MCRD, the Arc employs 275 people with significant disabilities, who serve nearly 18,000 meals a day to Marine recruits. The Arc also provides grounds maintenance services at MCRD. Davis, a longtime supporter of people with disabilities, has advocated for the Arc of San Diego and AbilityOne in Congress and has been named an AbilityOne Champion for her efforts. "It was inspiring to see this fast-paced, valuable program in action during peak lunch hour at one of our nation's largest Marine Corps mess halls," Davis said.

### AbilityOne Fairs Held at Three Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Locations

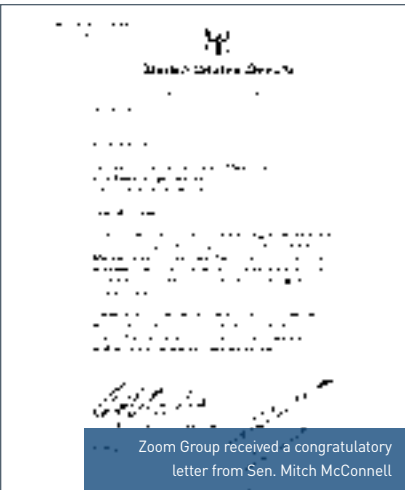
The U.S. AbilityOne Commission, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH hosted

three AbilityOne Day Fairs at the DLA in Philadelphia, Pa., Richmond, Va., and Columbus, Ohio. The fairs are the primary avenues for producing agencies to market their products to contracting and program officers at the DLA locations.

About 60 NIB and NISH nonprofit agencies and community service organizations exhibited their products and services during the DLA Troop Support fair in Philadelphia and attracted 700 visitors from all disciplines within DLA. DLA Director Vice Adm. Alan Thompson and DLA Troop Support Commander Brig. Gen. Scott D. Chambers greeted exhibitors at their booths and recognized the AbilityOne Program during opening remarks. Defense Logistics Agency Aviation hosted its third annual AbilityOne Day at Defense Supply Center Richmond and the DLA Land and Maritime in Columbus, Ohio, held an AbilityOne training session.

### Media Coverage

Carol Carr, president and CEO, the EXCEL Group, Inc., Yuma, Ariz., was published in the Oct. 18 edition of the Yuma Sun. Her article highlighted the AbilityOne Program, the EXCEL Group and NDEAM. To read the article, visit <http://www.yumasun.com/opinion/people-64765-disabilities-fish.html>.



Zoom Group received a congratulatory letter from Sen. Mitch McConnell



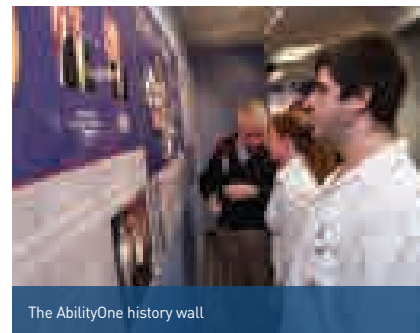
A tree planting at Fort Detrick Base Supply Center in Frederick, Md., operated by Industries for the Blind-Milwaukeee



Julie Higgins, Cheryl Westley and Antonio Bravo



Joey Bolin (center), shown with his parents, received Columbus Community Center's Outstanding Worker of the Year Award



The AbilityOne history wall

The Center for Human Services, Sedalia, Mo., secured a proclamation from Mayor Pro Tem Ronald Duvall, proclaiming October as AbilityOne Month in the city of Marshall. The signing was highlighted in Marshall Democrat-News on Sept. 29 and can be viewed online at <http://www.marshallnews.com/story/1668545.html>.

### Elwyn Hosts Booth at Joint Forces Training Base

Elwyn California staff and a veteran AbilityOne contract employee worked an information booth on Oct. 13 in front of the commissary on the Joint Forces Training Base in Los Alamitos, Calif. The booth provided Elwyn, which performs custodial services at the base, with an opportunity to reach out to customers, meet new tenants and raise awareness of Elwyn and AbilityOne.

### AbilityOne Celebrates 15th Anniversary of Base Supply Centers

The AbilityOne Program celebrated the 15th Anniversary of its base supply centers (BSC) program, which provides mission support at more than 140 U.S. military bases and Federal agencies nationwide and employs more than 300 people who

are blind or have other significant disabilities. The first BSC was opened in October 1995 at Fort Bragg, N.C., by LC Industries, an NIB-associated agency. Sixty-six events were held nationwide, including eight cornerstone events held at the following Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force bases:

- Peterson Air Force Base, Colo.
- Fort Knox, Ky.
- Luke Air Force Base, Ariz.
- Naval Station Great Lakes, Ill.
- Fort Detrick, Md.
- Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C.
- Fort Bragg, N.C.
- Travis Air Force Base, Calif.

### Columbus Community Center Honors Local Businesses and Individuals

Columbus Community Center, Salt Lake City, Utah, marked NDEAM by recognizing local businesses and individuals for their contributions to the organization and people with disabilities. During its annual Dignity through Work Awards program, Columbus Community Center presented its Social Enterprise Award to Skull Candy and its Outstanding Business Partner Award to Pepsi Beverage Company for their ongoing partnerships with Columbus

to provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The Center also honored three individuals with disabilities—Benny Vigil, Joey Bolin and Danny McNeal—as finalists for Outstanding Worker of the Year. Center co-founder Dr. Geraldine M. Clark received the Visionary Leadership Award for her long-time advocacy and contributions for providing educational opportunities for children with developmental disabilities.

### U.S. AbilityOne Commission Hosts Open House

In October 2010, the Commission celebrated NDEAM by hosting an Open House. During the event, Malia Thibado, a student at the Alabama School for the Blind, inspired the audience with her performance of the National Anthem. Four Presidential appointees to the Commission were sworn in and three conference rooms were dedicated to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sen. Jacob K. Javits and Osborne "Oz" A. Day. Other highlights included the unveiling of the AbilityOne History Wall and the presentation of the 2010 Osborne A. Day Award to Master Sgt. Jeffrey Mittman, a U.S. Army veteran who was severely wounded in Iraq in 2005.

# PURSUIING NEW HORIZONS

BY SUZANNE ROBITAILLE

The AbilityOne® Program and its network of nonprofit agencies are finding opportunities like never before in new areas, such as computer recycling and designing shirts for women Soldiers.

The AbilityOne Program, a priority source of supply for Federal customers, has a mission that makes good business sense. Through AbilityOne, the Federal Government buys more than \$2 billion in 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, enabling them to lead more independent lives.

Today AbilityOne is the largest source of jobs for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities in the United States, making it easy for Federal customers to purchase high-quality products and services at fair market prices. Through AbilityOne, more than 47,000 people with disabilities in the United States have jobs.

The AbilityOne Program is administered by the U.S. AbilityOne Commission, an independent Federal agency. The program operates with assistance from two central nonprofit agencies that work with people who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

Last year, AbilityOne was hard at work helping the U.S. Army develop new products, such as an improved

flame-resistant shirt, for military personnel worldwide.

## **U.S. Army Garrison Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington**

AbilityOne expanded hospitality services with the Procurement List addition for food services at the U.S. Army Garrison Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) near Tacoma, Wash. JBLM is the largest military installation in the western United States and supports 100,000 people. Lewis-McChord became an official joint base in October 2010.

This long-standing contract is operated by nonprofit agency Lakeview Center dba Gulf Coast Enterprises, operating the Air Force dining halls. More than 240 employees (110 from Gulf Coast Enterprises and 62 from Tacoma Goodwill) provide meals and food services across 20 dining facilities on the joint base.

The main dining hall, the largest facility on base, houses a state-of-the-art kitchen and feeds 2,400 people in an hour and a half three times a day. Gulf Coast Enterprises also worked with JBLM to revolutionize a new concept in base dining: up to seven battalions

are consolidated into the main dining facility, enabling more troops to be fed at once with a lower per plate cost and the opportunity to secure cook support.

Additionally, AbilityOne nonprofit agency Professional Contract Services, Inc. (PCSI) manages JBLM's First Sergeants Barracks Program, an Army-wide initiative standardizing barracks management across all installations. The 69-member PCSI team is responsible for managing more than 12,000 barracks spaces at the joint base.

The project includes assigning and terminating rooms; identifying, tracking and ordering maintenance requirements; coordinating, moving and handling of furnishings; validating the occupancy rate; and providing support 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

On day one, the PCSI team faced a redeployment of 18,000 Soldiers, the largest on the base since World War II. PCSI was able to successfully complete almost 13,000 room assignments and approximately 30,000 room inspections and respond to about 9,000 room lockouts.

In a recent Contractor Performance Assessment Report (CPAR), the PCSI



**Clockwise from Top Left:** An AbilityOne employee provides food services at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM); Steven Fontaine, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind, sews entrenching tool covers; Wyatt Byers, PCSI, provides services for the First Sergeant Barracks Program at JBLM.

team was rated “exceptional,” which really demonstrates how true partnering between the contractor and the government delivers real value for our Soldiers.

#### **General Services Administration**

The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc., in Seattle, Wash., has a long history of manufacturing products for customers such as the Boeing Company, the U.S. Army and the General Services Administration. In 2010, the Lighthouse began producing a new product for U.S. military members called the Entrenching Tool, or E-tool, a collapsible folding shovel that is used at camps to dig into the ground.

The E-tool manufacturing program has created jobs for 35 people who are blind at both Seattle Lighthouse and Inland Northwest Lighthouse in areas such as machining, small parts assembly and final assembly. Lighthouse machinists

manufacture the E-tool on a punch press using adaptive technology, including oversized computer monitors enhanced with screen magnification software.

In June 2011 the Lighthouse made its first delivery of over 12,000 units, and now the Lighthouse produces 50,000 to 100,000 units a year at a value of around \$2 million.

“Seattle Lighthouse provides the highest quality entrenching tool. Our partnership with them results in a valuable product and provides over 20 jobs for people who are blind,” says Roxanne Moore, contract specialist for the General Services Administration.

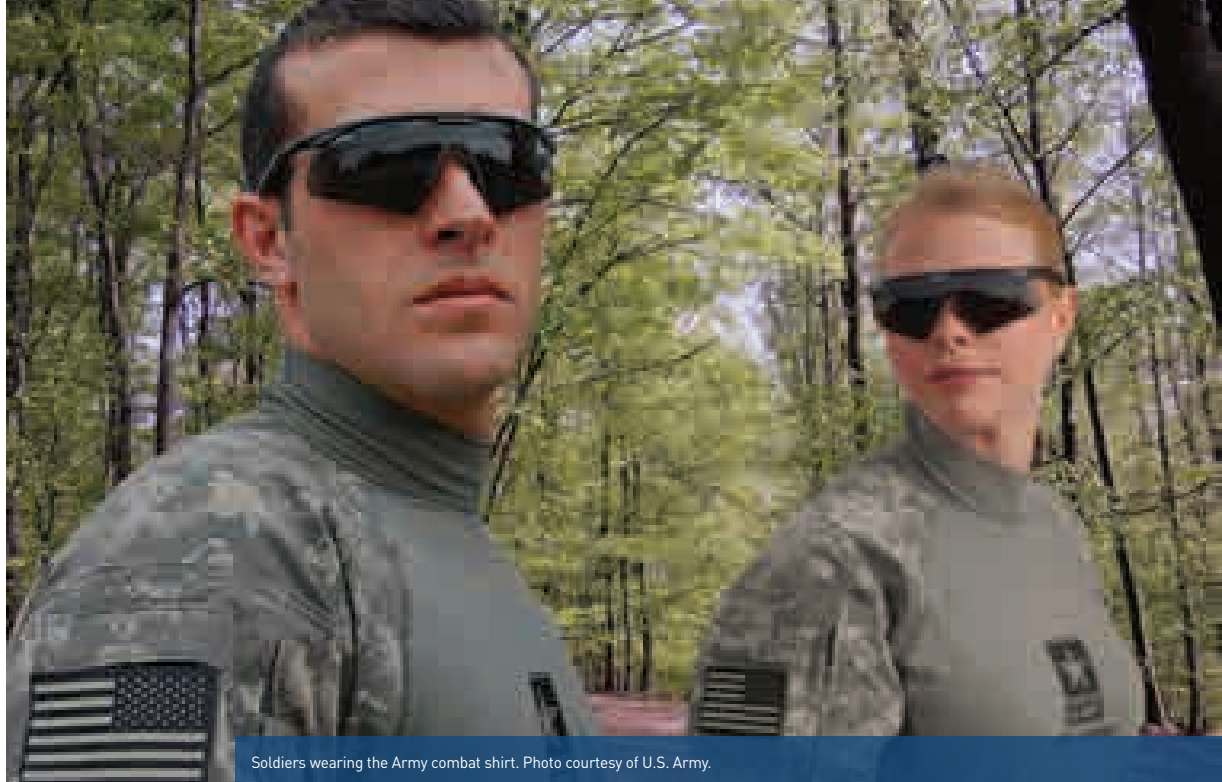
#### **Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Louisiana Recovery Office**

The center of operations for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recovery in the Gulf region is housed in the former Baton Rouge department

store Goudchaux’s. Inside this restored 1930s community landmark, about 600 Federal and state employees work to deliver community recovery programs to eligible applicants affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita and other major disasters.

Now called the FEMA Louisiana Recovery Office and known as a Joint Field Office, the building is kept clean each day by nine employees of UpLifted, a Baton Rouge-based AbilityOne nonprofit agency that provides custodial services including floor maintenance, waste disposal and carpet cleaning.

FEMA, a new customer of the AbilityOne Program, began its contract in March 2011. “So far, FEMA has been very pleased with the results,” says Brad McGuire, facilities manager for the FEMA Louisiana Recovery Office. “The team is well trained, and they



Soldiers wearing the Army combat shirt. Photo courtesy of U.S. Army.

go the extra mile to do their jobs,” McGuire says. “Plus, we’re also getting great value from UpLiftd.”

“Apart from having a fantastic leadership team and crew,” says Nicole Walker, assistant executive director of UpLiftd, success at the FEMA site is due to “a strong quality control plan and open communication with the customer.” She adds, “It’s an honor to work in a building that is so nostalgic to Baton Rouge.”

#### **U.S. Army Installations Fort Meade, Maryland, and Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania**

Located in Maryland’s Anne Arundel County, Fort Meade has the fourth-largest workforce of any Army installation in the United States and has seen tremendous growth because of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure. Through AbilityOne, three nonprofit agencies secured opportunities to provide operations support at Fort Meade and another U.S. Army installation, Carlisle Barracks in southern Pennsylvania.

At Fort Meade, nonprofit agency Skookum Educational Programs based in Bremerton, Wash., provides base operations support for the Department of Logistics (DOL), the organization responsible for logistics relating to vehicles and equipment, supply operations

and personnel property movement. There are 60 Skookum employees delivering base support services, with a five-year contract value of \$20.5 million.

Another nonprofit agency provides similar services at Fort Meade for the Department of Public Works (DPW). The DPW is responsible for constructing, operating and maintaining the garrison’s infrastructure—including its buildings, roads and utility systems—and maintaining the grounds. Melwood Horticultural Training Center, headquartered in Upper Marlboro, Md., employs over 300 employees on base, with a five-year annual contract value of \$84.8 million.

“Our two AbilityOne contractors have gone the extra mile to ensure that this working relationship is going to be successful on Fort Meade,” says John Moeller, Deputy Garrison Commander at Fort Meade. He adds, “I am impressed by the attitude of the AbilityOne management team. It is obvious they want to work with us to make sure this partnership will work.”

Chimes DC in Baltimore operates another base operations support contract for the Carlisle Barrack’s DPW and DOL, with a five-year contract value of \$20.5 million.

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Hunter, Deputy Director, Mission and Installation

Contracting Command, Mission Contracting Office—Fort Eustis, Va., describes the AbilityOne Program as a solutions provider. “AbilityOne is another streamlined approach to meeting our contracting requirements with immediate access to millions of employees and hundreds of contractors. AbilityOne provides a ‘time-saving’ simplified approach, the legal authority and a Commission [the U.S. AbilityOne Commission] all geared towards mission accomplishment.”

#### **U.S. Army Program Executive Office, Product Manager Soldier Clothing and Individual Equipment, Ft. Belvoir, Virginia**

In response to the growing need for supplies for Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, AbilityOne has been working with the Army to research and develop new products that can be rapidly manufactured and delivered to military personnel around the world.

One significant new product is the prototype Army Combat Uniform (ACU) for women, which was created in support of the U.S. Army Program Executive Office (PEO), Product Manager Soldier Clothing and Individual Equipment (PMSICIE) in Ft. Belvoir, Va. The ACU is the working (field and office) uniform for all U.S. Army Soldiers. For women,



the design was altered to fit better in women's hips, mark a bust line and offer more space and elasticity in the waist.

ReadyOne Industries, a nonprofit agency based in El Paso, Texas, produced the women's fit ACU— delivering 1,110 uniforms last year.

“Our relationship with the AbilityOne Program has allowed us to not only expand on the manufacturing and development process, but also qualify new items on the Federal Procurement List, further strengthening and challenging our AbilityOne partners,” says Jeff Myhre, product manager, SCIE Integration Team.

Another product that grew out of U.S. Army PEO Soldier and AbilityOne collaboration is the Army combat shirt, a long-sleeved fire-retardant shirt that can be worn with designated body armor during combat operations.

AbilityOne worked with the Army to improve the comfort and user acceptance of the shirt by reducing the weight and bulk and increasing the moisture-wicking capability. The shirt also has other features, such as cargo pockets, infrared identification tabs and hook-and-loop fasteners for the American flag, making it one of the most complexly sewn products manufactured today.

The project went into production in the summer of 2009 at several AbilityOne nonprofit agencies, including Goodwill Industries of South Florida; Mount Rogers Community Service Board in Wytheville, Va.; SEKRI, Inc. in Corbin, Ky.; the San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind in Texas and Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind in N.C.

In 2010, AbilityOne produced around one million shirts, creating over 500 jobs for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

#### **BAE Systems and Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support, Philadelphia**

AbilityOne provides the Department of Defense with thousands of products for Soldiers through defense contractor BAE Systems and centralized distribution center, Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support in Philadelphia. For example:

At Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind, around 20 employees are responsible for producing entrenching tool covers. Known as E-Tool covers, they hold a shovel for armed services personnel to build trenches for a variety of purposes in the line of duty.

The shovel cover is a component of the all-important Army Module Lightweight

Load-carrying Equipment (MOLLE) system, which also includes a hydration system (a plastic water pack containing a reservoir), bandolier ammunition pouches, load-lifter attachment strap, enhanced suspender assembly, keeper slide adaptor and lashing strap. Ten other AbilityOne nonprofit agencies also supply components for the MOLLE system.

“There is a 37-step process to produce this product,” says Nancy Perkins, president of the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind. The team of employees with visual impairments intermingles with sighted workers to cut

and sew the pattern “to ensure a double check of quality,” Perkins says. Dallas Lighthouse is ISO-certified to meet Department of Defense quality standards and produces tool covers in multiple camouflage patterns.

#### **The State of Nevada**

While looking for new training and employment opportunities that went beyond simple assembly tasks, the Blind Center of Nevada (BCN) accidentally stumbled into the green economy. The center realized that e-waste was becoming a big problem for municipalities. Discarded computer electronics will reach more than 70 million metric tons by 2015 and comprise 5 percent of municipal solid waste worldwide.

Since 2005 the six employees of BCN's Computer Recycling Program have collected used computers, monitors, printers, cell phones and other electronic equipment to refurbish or recycle. Their major customer to date is the state of Nevada, including its congressional offices. This program offers certified data destruction that meets Department of Defense standards.

“We see recycling as the next frontier for BCN,” says Blind Center of Nevada CEO Veronica Wilson says. “Apart from keeping waste out of landfills, [recycling] also provides jobs to underemployed people and creates a revenue stream that supports our other programs.”

Most of the recycling income comes from the center's eBay store, BlindCenterNV, which is used to sell the donated computers that the staff have plucked from the junk pile and refurbished, with the rest generated by scrap sales.

BCN's hard work and initiative are paying off. Today the nonprofit agency has evolved into one of a handful of comprehensive electronics recyclers in the entire state. BCN also won the Best Green Nonprofit Center in Southern Nevada award from *The Las Vegas Business Press* in 2009. ■



Entrenching tool covers

# THE SPIRIT OF GOODWILL

## Soars to New Heights

BY MARIAN EDELMAN BORDEN

The rock legend Billy Joel once said, “Music in itself is healing. It’s an explosive expression of humanity. It’s something we are all touched by.” You only have to hear the opening notes of a concert by The Spirit of Goodwill band to know that music has not only transformed their lives, but touched and changed the lives of their audiences.

The band is composed of people who work at Goodwill Industries of South Florida, Miami, a member of the AbilityOne Network of nonprofit agencies. The 28 members have a wide range of mental and physical disabilities, including autism, intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and visual impairments. Seventy-one percent of band members work on a variety of AbilityOne contracts, including sewing American flags and uniforms for the Armed Forces. It is the first band of its type in this country.

### A MODEST BEGINNING

Part of the Goodwill training curriculum is a music program that helps improve the social and recreational skills of the participants. In 1981 before the band was created, a choir sang at the Holiday Party and at the Annual Business meeting of Goodwill Industries. But in 1996 when Javier Peña joined Goodwill as the music program director, he recognized

that some of the participants had a natural talent to play musical instruments, even though most of them had no previous instruction. The process of developing musical proficiency was lengthy and required personalized instruction, dedication and patience. Music instructors worked one-on-one and tailored the learning style to the needs of each participant. Today, some members of the band can read music, many memorize it and others rely on hand cues to be able to perform. Once each person knows his /her individual part, the group begins to practice, practice, practice to achieve the quality level they’ve all learned to deliver.

In 1998 the band consisted of a vocal group, as well as musicians playing piano, keyboards, drums, bass guitar and different percussion instruments. That year, The Spirit of Goodwill performed at the annual Talent Show held by the City of Miami Parks and Recreation Program for Persons with





The Goodwill Band performing at the NISH national conference May 2011

Disabilities. This was its first public performance—and they were awarded first prize. Over the next two years, a brass section of trumpets, trombones and saxophones was added, as well as some dancers, and the band’s repertoire soared from two songs to a wide range of diverse music styles including jazz, rock and Latin rhythm.

In just a few short years, the band recorded its first CD, with donated time from a local studio. The band quickly began performing locally, with concerts at veterans’ and retirement homes and at civic events.

#### HOLLYWOOD COMES CALLING

In late 2007 a group of independent filmmakers approached Javier Peña and Goodwill requesting permission and cooperation to make a documentary about the band. *For Once in My Life*, titled after one of the band’s signature songs, the film was an

opportunity to reach a larger audience to share the band’s message of hope and inspiration. The Spirit of Goodwill band proves, as Peña explains, “What people with disabilities can do when given an opportunity to develop their human potential.”

The movie focuses on the intense preparation necessary for the band’s performance at the U.S. Mayor’s Convention in June 2008. Interspersed throughout the documentary are the personal stories of some of the band members: Terry Wigfall, who is blind, is the lead singer and saxophone player; Christian Acosta, who has autism and is blind, is the pianist; Nancy Spagnolo, who has intellectual disabilities and is the primary caregiver and breadwinner for her older brother and sister, is the singer; and Melissa Cason, who has Down syndrome and whose mother was told at birth, “She’s never gonna be smart, she’s never gonna walk, she’s always gonna be a little infant

# sustainability

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AbilityOne® employee, Luke Grossman, Norfolk, Va.

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**AbilityOne®**

PROGRAM





The Spirit of Goodwill Band

baby,” plays tambourines and drums. But Melissa and the rest of the band have proven the medical establishment wrong. The movie doesn’t sugarcoat the struggles, pressures and fears of the group, but it does share the excitement, elation and, most of all, pride that every member feels as the band gets ready to perform on a professional stage in front of their largest audience ever—1,000 people, including mayors from 440 cities.

The documentary, now available on DVD and through Netflix, along with a CD with the soundtrack from the movie, has won numerous awards at Independent Film Festivals across the nation, including Winner, Feature Length Documentary at the Port Townsend Film Festival; Audience Award, Best Documentary Feature at the Sarasota Film Festival; Audience Award Winner at the Sonoma Valley Film Festival and Nashville Film Festival. Once known only regionally, *For Once in My Life* has catapulted the Spirit of Goodwill band and its members to national prominence. You can learn more about the documentary at [4onceinmylife.com](http://4onceinmylife.com).

#### WHAT’S NEXT?

As if performing before a huge audience in an opera house wasn’t enough, once the documentary was released, wonderful things continued to happen to

this remarkable group of musicians. In July 2010 three members of the band and Peña visited the White House as part of the Obama Administration’s celebration of the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Members of The Spirit of Goodwill band have learned to overcome the obstacles that are constantly being thrown in their path because of their disabilities. They have bigger dreams for themselves and the band. Pianist Christian Acosta said, “I refuse to give up. That’s the reality. I’m going to show the whole world and let them know how well I play.” Being part of an award-winning band and featured in an award-winning documentary has developed the members’ musical talents, but perhaps even more important, their sense of self-confidence. Nothing seems impossible anymore.

Denise Stroud, who is blind, is one of the band’s singers. She explains, “Out in the world, they look down on us, like we’re nothing. They don’t look at the person; they look at the [white] cane. But when we go and perform on the stage, then the world sees what people with disabilities can do; what potential we have. They’re going to say, ‘man, I’ve got to do better myself because look at those people there with disabilities and what they can do.’” ■



# Filling a Need, Reclaiming Funds

## Contract Management Support Services open doors for an underemployed segment

BY MARCIA LAYTON TURNER

Because of attrition and retirements, thousands of contracting officer positions are unfilled. In the next 10 years, that critical shortage is expected to swell as the requirements to issue new contracts outpace existing contracting staff. As a result, some post-award contracting functions, such as contract closeout receive lower contracting officer work priority, resulting in large backlogs of contracts requiring closeout.

Fortunately, services offered through the AbilityOne® Program are designed to meet the growing need for contract closeout assistance in Federal Government contracting offices and provide upwardly mobile career opportunities to an underserved population. The AbilityOne Program's Contract Management Support (CMS) services provide the adaptive technology, training and qualified manpower to prepare contracts for closure and reclaim unused funding by employing individuals who are blind or have significant disabilities.

### MEETING A GROWING NEED

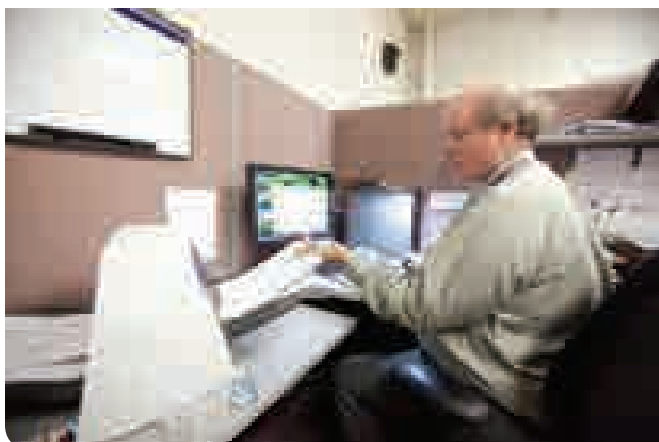
"It was a perfect fit," says Mike Gilliam, CEO of the San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind, of the CMS program. Following a nine-month pilot program begun in October 2009, the Army issued an indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity (IDIQ) contract through the AbilityOne Program for contract closeout support. Through CMS, says Gilliam, "We are now able to offer jobs we couldn't have before, matching the skill sets and the desire for higher paying computer work with an entirely new audience."

Dennis Dapolito, regional executive director of ServiceSource in Delaware, adds, "We are able to market the job opportunities to a population

that perhaps wouldn't be interested in other, more manual-labor jobs."

At the Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired (SABVI), in Lancaster, Pa., another AbilityOne Program partner agency, President and CEO Dennis Steiner says that CMS "has been a huge success for our organization and our people who are blind and visually impaired." It has also enabled the agency to expand its offerings. "This is our first entrée into services," says Steiner, with CMS providing more opportunities in professional, business-oriented employment, supplementing the manufacturing and assembly positions already available at SABVI.

Government customers have also been pleased with the results of the program. "This arrangement with the AbilityOne Program frees up time for our contracting personnel to focus on other important aspects of our operations," says Rear Adm. Mark Heinrich, commander, Naval Supply Systems Command and chief of Supply Corps. "Moreover, the citizens performing these beneficial functions—blind Americans, wounded warriors and service-disabled veterans—are getting the chance to contribute to the nation's defense through this partnership. I couldn't be happier."



#### GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY

One of the challenges that blind and visually impaired employees face is simply finding career opportunities. Many who have high school diplomas and college degrees are unable to find positions commensurate with their education, which partly explains the 70 percent unemployment rate for adults who are blind. However, many could work if more companies were willing or able to invest in the adaptive technologies needed to help employees who are blind to complete work typically done by the sighted. Consequently, individuals who are blind or visually impaired have the education but lack work experience, making it more difficult to secure a professional position.

The AbilityOne Program partners with the Department of Defense's Defense Acquisition University (DAU) to provide the core training courses required to establish a foundation on contract management. National Industries for the Blind recruits motivated individuals who are blind to join its CMS training program. The objective is to assist in the development of high-growth career

opportunities for people who are blind by providing high-level training in contract management.

#### EMPLOYEE SUCCESS STORIES

Five individuals who are blind and visually impaired working in a group in San Diego, Calif., support the Navy contracting office, thanks to an opportunity that originated there. One of those contract closeout specialists is Robyn Dunn. Despite having a four-year degree and internship experience, Dunn had been actively looking for work for some time. When a friend told her about the CMS program, she applied, was interviewed, offered the job and began her DAU training last fall. After being granted a security clearance, which is often a challenge for would-be employees lacking work experience, Dunn started work closing Navy contracts.

An ambitious, highly productive employee, Dunn is working on earning her first-level certification equivalency and plans to continue pursuing second- and third-level certification equivalency as well. Because of her superior skills and on-the-job performance, Dunn has been identified as a group leader, with the potential to manage a new





**This page:** Jaime Cameron, Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired. **Opposite page clockwise from Left:** Annamarie Parker, Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired; Kevin Gregore, Frances Smith and Gerald Gaudreau, ServiceSource.

contracting group if the CMS program is expanded. In addition to being hardworking, Dunn is also grateful for the opportunity to be productive and to contribute. “It makes us feel good to provide a service that is needed,” she says. “It is also the chance to show others that the blind and visually impaired can do everything the sighted can do.”

Another individual who is blind, Ian Thomas, was referred to the CMS program by Lighthouse Central Florida in Orlando, an AbilityOne Program associated agency. After completing DAU training, Thomas learned that SABVI needed a contract specialist on assignment at Fort Bragg, so Thomas relocated to North Carolina. He was so successful in performing his contract closeout responsibilities that he had multiple job offers for positions in the Federal Government at the GS-11 and GS-12 level, both in contract closeout and in other areas. Thomas accepted an offer at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Today he is a writer/editor in the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public

Liaison in Raleigh, N.C., where he recently wrote an article about disability awareness.

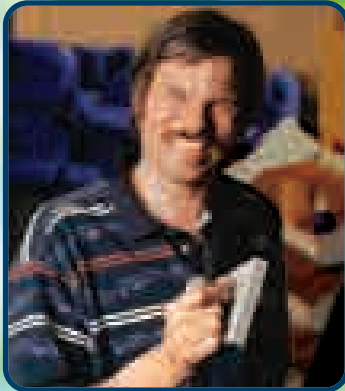
#### OVERCOMING DOUBTS

In fact, echoes Steiner, who is blind, “There may have been some initial doubts about the ability of blind people to do the work. But we have demonstrated that we can do the work, do it efficiently and effectively and provide our customers with a better alternative.” Not only is the CMS program covering its operating costs, which are typically higher during startup, but the program is already generating revenue.

As of July 2011, the end of the first performance year under the IDIQ contract, AbilityOne Program employees have analyzed and presented more than 14,500 contract modifications as ready-to-close to government contracting officers, with none returned for rework, while identifying more than \$15 million in funds for deobligation/recoupment. The associated governmental cost for this work is \$5.63 million. Clearly, the return on investment is significant. “Any situation that benefits the Navy and provides jobs for Americans with disabilities simultaneously is certainly a win-win,” says Heinrich. ■



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# 2011 AbilityOne

## EMPLOYEE AWARD WINNERS

Each year the AbilityOne® Program recognizes its employees' success stories.

### MILTON J. SAMUELSON CAREER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNER

Nina Bektic-Marrero is the supervisor of switchboard operations at the Bronx Veterans Administration (VA) Medical Center in New York.

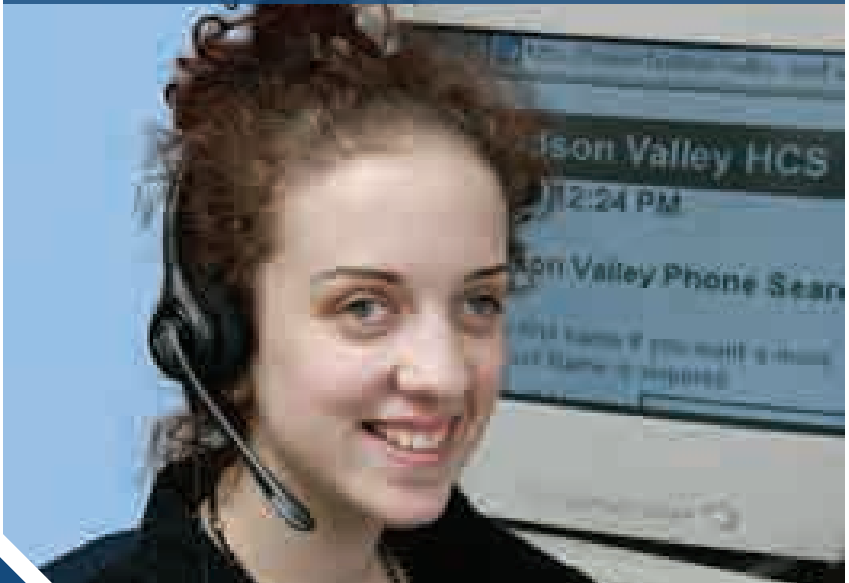
Born in Sarajevo in 1984, Bektic-Marrero developed brain tumors that caused severe damage to her optic nerves. Bektic-Marrero's mother sought treatment in the United States and stayed in this country so that her daughter could attend high school during medical rehabilitation.

Bektic-Marrero came to the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment Inc., headquartered in Binghamton, N.Y., in 2008 and worked as a switchboard operator at the VA Hudson Valley Healthcare Center. Two years later, Bektic-Marrero was promoted to her current position where she has earned her unit recognition from medical center administrators, staff and veterans.

Bektic-Marrero studied at the American School of Athens and received her secondary degree. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from

### NINA BEKTIC-MARRERO

Switchboard Operations Supervisor  
Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment Inc.



### MILTON J. SAMUELSON CAREER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award is presented to an individual who demonstrates career advancement at an NIB associated agency or in the private sector. The award was named for the late Mr. Samuelson, who championed upward mobility and placement programs for people who are blind.

**WILLIAM M. USDANE AWARD**

Dr. William Usdane was a leader in the movement to provide vocational and employment opportunities to people with significant disabilities through his assistance in the creation of NISH. In memory of Dr. Usdane, NISH presents the William M. Usdane Memorial Award each year to an individual with a significant disability who has exhibited outstanding achievement in the AbilityOne Program.



**DAVID OGLETREE**  
Final Inspection Processor  
Vocational Guidance Services

**WILLIAM M. USDANE AWARD**

Early in life, David Ogletree was diagnosed with autism, which made it difficult for him to interact with others, maintain focus and secure and hold steady employment. Ogletree was determined to live an independent life and earn his own paycheck.

Despite the challenges of autism, Ogletree was hired at Vocational Guidance Services (VGS) in the Power Sewing Division. Ogletree quickly overcame the challenges of working in a noise-filled production environment and completed training to advance his skills.

In his current role as Final Inspection Processor, Ogletree is part of a division that produces 100 percent of the slacks for the United States Army, Navy and a vast majority of the Marine Corps—a division of VGS that averages production of more than 500 pairs of slacks a day and 100,000 per year.

Ogletree has been working as final inspection processor for over a year—it is a high profile position that requires responsibility to deliver high-quality products that must meet military standards. Not only has he gained valuable job skills and workplace experience, but also Ogletree has learned the skills to live a balanced and fulfilled life.

Ogletree is a respected and well-liked VGS team member. “David’s smile is always very pleasant, and he’s very in tune to what’s going on all around the workplace,” said Donna Reisz, assistant general manager at VGS. “He’s really stepped up to the challenges of his disability and continued to improve his focus and social interaction. All of us at VGS are very proud of David.”

Bard College, and she is pursuing a master’s degree in public administration at Baruch College. Bektic-Marrero is an advocate for improving opportunities and affecting positive changes in legislative policy for people with disabilities. She is a leader in the Serbian disability community and has been active on her college campuses. While at Bard College, she was chosen to be part of the Trustee Leader Scholar Program where she developed the Visible/Invisible Disabilities Awareness Program (VIDAP). Bektic-Marrero subsequently implemented Citizens’ Association VIDAP in Serbia and served as president of its executive board.

**EVELYNE VILLINES AWARD**

When Lloyd Cole went to Goodwill in 2001, he faced a number of barriers to finding and maintaining employment—his mental disability compounded with living in a homeless shelter.

Cole started as a janitor on the office cleaning crew for the GSA Bolling Federal Building. Over the years, Cole demonstrated he was a dedicated, hardworking and reliable AbilityOne employee, and his hours and responsibilities gradually increased. Having a steady job and a regular paycheck enabled Cole to afford independent, permanent housing.

Seven years after beginning part-time in the AbilityOne Program, Cole advanced into a leadership role with the floor care team at the Bolling Federal Building. In March 2008 he became floor care team leader for the building.

Cole has grown his responsibilities and earned a reputation in the workplace as a leader who enjoys what he does and continually supports those in the disability community who are following in his steps.



**LLOYD COLE**  
Floor Care Team Leader  
The Helping Hand Goodwill Industries

**EVELYNE VILLINES AWARD**

Evelyne Villines is a leading national spokesperson and advocate for persons with disabilities. As a person with a disability, her major objectives have been to remove structural and architectural barriers and to get others to see persons with disabilities as people first. In recognition of her ongoing contribution for the employment of people with disabilities, the Evelyn Villines Award was established.

## AbilityOne HONOR ROLL FOR VETERANS AWARD

Bret DiFrancesco joined the Army Reserves in 1997, serving all over the country before his unit was activated in 2005. During deployment, DiFrancesco was responsible for disarming Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). While on duty in 2006, he was injured as he was securing a blast site in Iraq after an IED exploded. As the second IED went off, DiFrancesco was engulfed in flames and thrown to the ground. Although bleeding and injured, DiFrancesco quickly assessed the attack, picked up his rifle and engaged the enemy. He carried a fellow Soldier who was severely wounded to a collection point before driving to the nearest aid station 30 minutes away. For these efforts, DiFrancesco received an Army Commendation Medal of Valor for saving a Soldier's life and is a recipient of the Purple Heart. DiFrancesco was kept in recovery for a month, but his injuries were extensive, and he sustained ear damage, traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder.

When he first returned home from the Army, DiFrancesco describes feeling "lost" because he was unable to work, and although he received disability pay, it wasn't enough to cover his expenses. It was during this time DiFrancesco went to visit his old unit at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and during his trip, he was introduced to Professional Contract Services Incorporated (PCSI) and was able to secure full-time employment doing light maintenance. DiFrancesco describes this as a life changing event.

"This is when I realized the country I fought for now fights for me." His role at PCSI enables him



**SERGEANT BRET DIFRANCESCO**

Facilities Specialist  
Professional Contract Services  
Incorporated

## AbilityOne HONOR ROLL FOR VETERANS AWARD

The AbilityOne Honor Roll for Veterans Awards recognizes a service-disabled veteran with a significant disability who has exhibited outstanding achievement in his or her work life. This award was established to celebrate the successes of wounded warriors in the AbilityOne Program.

the time needed to go to rehabilitation, offers him the flexibility to work with some of his lingering physical challenges from the war in Iraq and allows him to earn a paycheck necessary to live an independent life.

In his spare time, DiFrancesco is involved in volunteer activities and participates in rehabilitation programs for other veterans with disabilities.

## PETER J. SALMON EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARD

Linda Allen is guided by a strong sense of community and volunteerism. She has logged countless hours volunteering for different causes, whether it is participating in the Austin Right to Life Walk, Juvenile Diabetes Walk and Operation Blue Santa or preparing and serving meals for people displaced by Hurricane Katrina. These activities, coupled with her work at the Travis Association for the Blind (Austin Lighthouse) in Austin, Texas, have earned her the honor of being named Employee of the Year.

Allen was born with retinitis pigmentosa. She attended public school, but moved to Austin to attend the Texas School for the Blind when her condition was diagnosed at age 16. Always involved in extracurricular activities, Allen participated in gymnastics, cheerleading, choir and student council and was a member of the honor society.

In 1987 Allen started at the Austin Lighthouse as a sewing machine operator. Two years later, she accepted a position at IBM and worked as an assembly line operator, builder, packer and oven loader. When IBM laid off many employees, Allen returned to the Lighthouse. Since that time, Allen has worked in the skin-care products, shrink wrap, drill press, leather key holder, Army combat helmet chin strap and trouser belt departments as a sewing machine operator. She is currently a member of the Lighthouse Strikers bowling team. ■

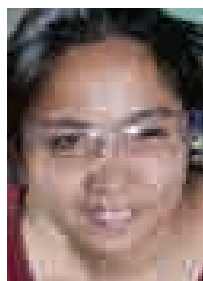
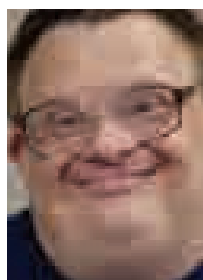
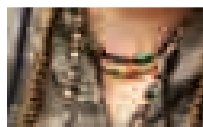
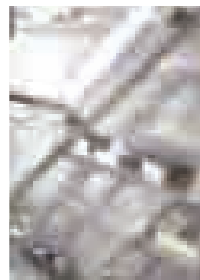
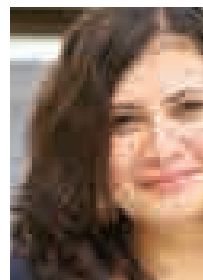
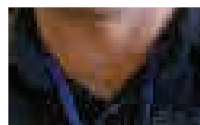
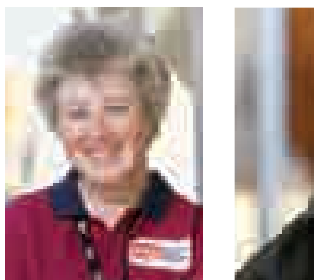
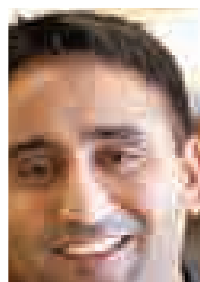
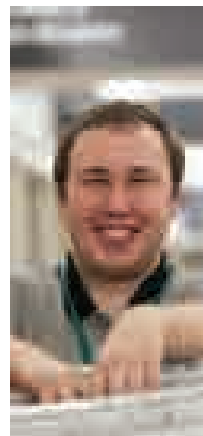
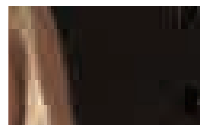
## PETER J. SALMON EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARD

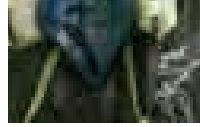
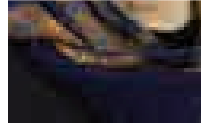
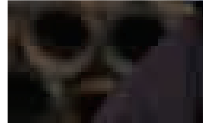
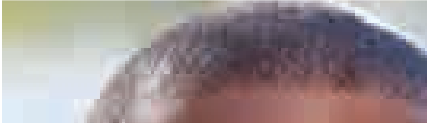
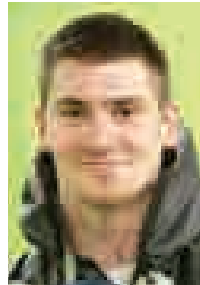
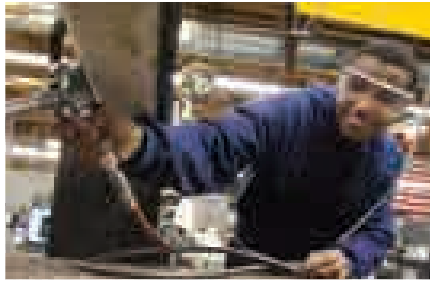
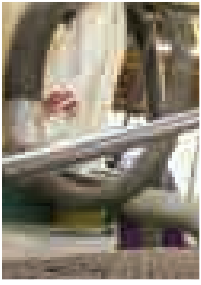
The Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award honors employees who excel in their positions at NIB associated agencies. The award was named for the late Dr. Salmon, who was instrumental in the passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act in 1938 and the formation of NIB.



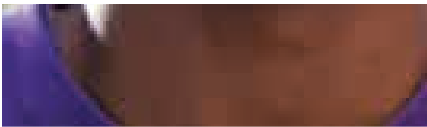
**LINDA ALLEN**

Sewing Machine Operator  
Travis Association for the Blind  
(Austin Lighthouse)

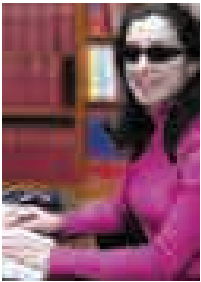




# FACES OF AbilityOne



Providing employment opportunities to more than 47,000 people, the AbilityOne® Program is the largest single source of employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities in the United States.



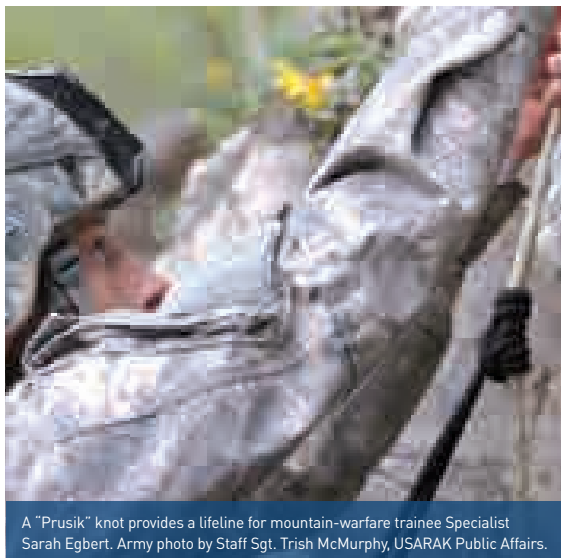
# HIGH ADVENTURE

## How the Army outfits its mountain warriors

BY JEFF ACHEY

**SERGEANT FIRST CLASS** Nathan Chipman's team looked up from their insertion point, high in Afghanistan's Hindu Kush range, and the view of the next day's activities was not comforting. A jagged knife-edge of rock ran steeply up for 1,500 meters to a very lofty, very lonely observation point. Nothing about the ridge looked inviting, and a misstep during the move from point A to point B could mean a plunge over cliff bands and collapsing terraces of loose rock—"high-consequence terrain," Chipman says. True, a Soldier on that ridgetop would have an eagle's-eye view into valleys as far away as the Pakistan border. But hundreds of unfriendly eyes could also see him.

For Sgt. Chipman, an expert rock climber, even the worst sections of the ridge would pose little challenge—if this had been a pleasure climb undertaken with a few buddies. But it wasn't. Almost 100 Soldiers would be making the ascent, fully armed and loaded with up to 90 pounds each. With those weights and numbers, the maneuver would require a disciplined plan and special gear—climbing ropes and the technical mountaineering equipment necessary to secure those ropes to the mountain and Soldiers to the ropes. "It's high adventure," says Chipman of this kind of maneuver. "And you never really know who's watching."



A "Prusik" knot provides a lifeline for mountain-warfare trainee Specialist Sarah Egbert. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Trish McMurphy, USARAK Public Affairs.

"Military mountaineering isn't pretty," says Darren Bean, the retired Sergeant Major (and expert climber) who spearheads the Army's acquisition process for mountaineering equipment. "It's about getting to the top in one piece." The "light-and-fast" ethos of civilian mountaineering doesn't usually apply. Weaponry has to be carried and installed, and posts have to be manned, sometimes for months at a time. It's grueling work that wears on the Soldiers. They don't sleep well at this altitude, and the weather can change from blistering sun to driving snow within hours. "You have to decide not to spend that extra hour in the sleeping bag and get up and do that patrol," says First Sergeant Casey Gomo,

just back from a tour in Afghanistan. "You have to continue to do the hard right, instead of the easy wrong."

"In the mountains, you must fight the enemy and the environment as a team," says Bean.

**SOLDIERS DEPLOYED** in Afghanistan don't pack mountaineering equipment wherever they go. Most military tasks don't require it, and gear would be a burden. So when an operation does involve climbing or negotiating other "technical" terrain—for example, a spelunking-style descent for a Tora Bora tunnel sweep—Soldiers need an equipment drop-off consisting of just the right technical climbing gear, counted, sorted, protected from corrosive agents (battery acid will melt a climbing rope) and ready for rapid deployment.

The fashion-forward colors of civilian climbing equipment won't do, nor will fancy, "one-use" trinkets. And organization is key: a single Soldier left without a climbing harness or a locking carabiner could begin a chain reaction of delays that could jeopardize the mission. So instead of buying and shipping piles of ropes and sling, disparate hardware, and baskets of harnesses, the Army uses special kits that contain exactly the right amount of the right items in tactical colors and nothing extra. Assembling several hundred such kits, though, is





easier said than done. That's where the AbilityOne Network contributes.

The military first experimented with mountaineering kits in the early 1980s. Procurement and quality-assurance problems immediately plagued the effort, and the program was cancelled. Mountain Soldiers were left to obtain their own gear. Quality improved, but every climbing harness buckled a little differently, each manufacturer's carabiner-locking mechanism released with a different thumb

motion—the countless small discrepancies added up to big problems. Sharing equipment was risky, and inevitably, some critical item was missing. A mountain Soldier can jury-rig just about anything, but on an exposed ridge position with enemy fire as part of the equation, that's not the procedure of choice.

**IN 2007, BEAN WAS HIRED** to work on standardizing the equipment and developing new and better kits. He

immediately recruited the 86th Infantry Brigade—the modern incarnation of the famous 10th Mountain Division—and the Army Mountain Warfare School in Jericho, Vt. What gear were the instructors using? What strength-standard certification should be used? What is the weight of the gear? Can materials be obtained in tactical colors? A period of extensive equipment testing and evaluation began. Then Bean tackled the bigger challenge: procurement.

Bean turned to his contracting team at U.S. Army Research and Development Command in Natick, Mass., who contracted with AbilityOne. Pioneer Adult Rehabilitation Center (PARC), a nonprofit agency member of the AbilityOne® Network, was selected to fulfill the contract.

PARC is a spacious, modern facility in Clearfield, Utah, just north of Salt Lake City. Strategically located in an office park between the railroad tracks and I-15, just two miles from Hill Air Force Base, it counts among its partnerships the local school district; the United Way; private businesses throughout the Salt Lake area; the IRS; and the U.S. Air Force, Marines, and Army. Services provided include document management, food service, grounds keeping, custodial services, laundry services, parts sorting, and packaging and shipping. Over 750 people with disabilities are served at PARC, either by being directly employed

or by being supported in their jobs in the surrounding community.

“Darren specified all the materials he wanted,” says Jim Crosby, director of operations at PARC, “and we negotiated the prices for him. We bring the materials here, prep the materials and put them into Pelicans [transport boxes] in the configuration that Darren wants them for the Army.”

Different military operations require different kinds of equipment, so for the Army, PARC actually assembles three kinds of kits:

1. The High Angle Mountaineering (HAM) kit outfits 40 Soldiers with basic personal-safety and climbing gear.
2. The Assault Climbing Team (ACT) kit outfits three elite climbers—such as Sergeant First Class Chipman—with the more specialized items they need to reach otherwise inaccessible locations and properly anchor ropes to rock.

3. The Snow and Ice Mobility (SIM) kit outfits 43 Soldiers with snowshoes, crampons, probes, avalanche transceivers and other tools needed for tactical operations in frozen environments.

Dozens of these kits will soon be available to our mountain troops deployed all over the world.

**KIT COMPONENTS, AVAILABLE** from hundreds of potential sources, currently come from just over a dozen companies, including several small businesses. Selected suppliers must not only produce top-quality products, but also meet a tough delivery schedule, as well as tenets of the Buy American Act. It’s a demanding relationship, but suppliers across the board value their contracts and are impressed with PARC’s efficiency. “They’re very well organized,” says Mark “Goose” Kearsse of Misty Mountain Threadworks, a small North

## SMALL BUSINESSES THAT BENEFITTED FROM AbilityOne

The small world of climbing-equipment manufacturing

From the Pacific Northwest, to the Rocky Mountains, to the Appalachians of North Carolina, these three small businesses span the continent, but have two things in common: they benefit from the AbilityOne Network, ... and they all started in someone’s garage.

**Metolius Climbing** was started in 1983 in a garage on the banks of the Metolius River in central Oregon, the brainchild of climber and inventor Doug Phillips. Phillips started the company in the days when quality climbing gear was hard to come by, and its purpose was simply, in Global Sales Director Chip Miller’s

words, “Ensuring climbers’ safe passage over stone.”

Today, Metolius employs over 40 people at its manufacturing facility in Bend. “The size and location have changed,” says Miller, “but the mission stays the same: to provide safe, quality products for climbers from Smith Rock, Ore., to the Hindu Kush in Afghanistan.”

Metolius was recently awarded the contract to provide spring-loaded camming devices—a form of rock-climbing anchor—for the PARC-produced military mountaineering kits, in part because the superbly crafted units are made right in Bend. “Many

climbers may not care to spend the extra money to know their equipment was made in the USA,” says Miller, “but this message resonates with the military.” Making equipment safer and lighter has been the company mission for almost three decades. “We feel that we can offer the military weight and strength advantages that the current sport market takes for granted,” says Miller.

**Backcountry Access, Inc.** was founded in 1994 by Bruce (“Bruno”) McGowan and Bruce (“Edge”) Edgerly—in a garage, of course—in Boulder, Colo. In 1997 they introduced the Tracker DTS, the

world’s first digital avalanche transceiver, which instantly revolutionized their industry. They now employ 46 people and make a full line of shovels, avalanche probes, backpacks, snow-study kits and other avalanche/snow products. They first supplied equipment to the military in 2000, but the PARC mountaineering kits represent a new opportunity for growth.

“We’re happy that they’ve chosen to use a U.S. supplier for their snow-safety needs,” says Edgerly, adding, “We’re excited to be working with the military on saving lives.”

Founded in 1985 in the Misty Mountain neighborhood



Soldiers on a belaying and rappelling exercise at the Northern Warfare Training Center in Black Rapids, Alaska. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Trish McMurphy, USARAK Public Affairs.

Carolina-based company that specializes in climbing harnesses. “If I have a problem, I can communicate very straightforwardly.”

“It’s a great program,” says Charly Oliver, a sales rep for Petzl America, which custom-makes the kits’ tactical-colored carabiners. Like a number

of Blowing Rock, N.C., **Misty Mountain Threadworks** is housed in a “folksy yet state-of-the-art textile facility.” Misty Mountain’s sturdy, well-made climbing harnesses gained a devoted following among rock climbers, but by the late 2000s, competition from low-cost, foreign-made harnesses had put the company into several years of double-digit losses. When Misty Mountain president and co-owner Goose Kearsse spoke with former classmate Sally McCoy, CEO of CamelBak, about her successes developing hydration systems for the U.S. military, the conversation eventually

led to Misty’s partnership with U.S. Army engineer Darren Bean and the development of the Milroc harness, Misty’s first product for the military.

“Military and tactical climbing harnesses, belts, slings and tethers are a vital part of our future growth,” says Kearsse. In only two years working with the Army, military sales now account for over one-third of Misty Mountain’s total sales, and the company is currently adding to its 10 employees to meet demand. Kearsse predicts military sales will account for as much as one-half of total sales in 2012.

of mountaineering-equipment companies, Petzl is based in the Salt Lake City area, so Oliver has seen the PARC operation firsthand. “These guys work hard,” he says. “They’re motivated and love what they do.” After the first site visit, Oliver says, “We all walked away from there saying, ‘This place is awesome.’”

Any visitor will agree. In the main shipping room, PARC employees are involved in a staggering array of projects. Pallets of cocoa containers sit in one section of the warehouse floor, ready to be shipped, but the Ability-One employee who is shrink-wrapping the order is too focused on his task to answer questions. Not so in the parts-sorting room, where visitors might get a rapid-fire primer on how to distinguish titanium from aluminum from magnesium. Throughout the PARC facility are clever features that help people with disabilities do efficient, productive labor.

Every one of the employees assembling the Army kits has a significant disability, but that seems to have little effect on their job performance. “Our people are very proud of what they do,” says Crosby, “and they’re excited. They’ll do anything—especially for the service man.” Crosby himself takes obvious pride in his work, pointing out the many features of the PARC facility that make his people competitive with employees anywhere. When asked about the challenges of his job, he mentions the tough juggling of time lines and the complexity of meeting all the government mandates, but it’s not a topic he dwells on. He’d rather talk about his people.

“The reward is just letting them work,” Crosby says, “and prove that they have abilities, not disabilities.” The Soldiers flipping open that impeccably packed Pelican box below a rocky ridge in Afghanistan would surely agree. ■

# IN THEIR PRIME

Department of Defense  
prime contractors find  
excellent service, solutions  
with AbilityOne® partners





BY GWEN MORAN

When the United States Undersecretary of Defense issues a memorandum encouraging its prime contractors to work with a service provider, it's a tremendous vote of confidence.

In August 2008 the AbilityOne Program, the largest source of employment in the United States for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities, received such an endorsement when the Department of Defense (DoD) issued a memo urging all of its contracting officials to make a personal commitment to consider AbilityOne-participating nonprofit agencies (NPAs) in the fulfillment of procurement needs.

That memo was the catalyst for today's thriving Prime Contractor Program, headed by Diane Murray, assistant vice president of contractor programs, who joined NISH (a central nonprofit established to help facilitate the AbilityOne Program) in 2010 to develop such relationships. Since the memo's issue, AbilityOne has established strategic relationships with industry giants The Boeing Corporation and Northrop Grumman and is exploring several others. The program has also formalized a mentor-protégé program with Northrop Grumman. In addition, AbilityOne is building strategic relationships with management and technology consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH) in McLean, Va., and Bethesda, Md.-based global security company Lockheed Martin.

#### **PARTNERS IN ACTION**

The first prime contractor agreement was launched in May 2010 at the NISH National Training and Achievement Conference when a Memorandum of Agreement was signed with The Boeing Company. The aerospace giant has had a long-time commitment to supplier diversity and a successful track

record of working with AbilityOne partners, such as Seattle, Wash.'s Lighthouse for the Blind and Center Industries in Wichita, Kan.

Boeing's original involvement with AbilityOne suppliers was in support of Boeing Commercial Airplanes (BCA). The company has been working with AbilityOne partner the Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind since 1952, in what's now known as the "Community Manufacturing Partnership," or CMP. At that time, there were just two suppliers performing about 10,000 hours of work per year, providing products for Boeing and meaningful work for members of the community, says Joan Robinson-Berry, Boeing's director of corporate supplier diversity. Today BCA has 30 contracts with AbilityOne-affiliated suppliers in the Northwest U.S. region for an estimated 689,000 work hours annually. Each year more than two million Boeing parts come from AbilityOne-affiliated nonprofits.

"Boeing has been very satisfied with the performance of AbilityOne contractors. In April 2010 the San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind was named a Boeing Supplier of the Year for the KC-135 sewing work they do for [Boeing]," says Robinson-Berry. "It's extremely important for all Boeing suppliers to provide high-quality products with excellent delivery metrics. We expect the same performance from our AbilityOne nonprofits as we do for all our suppliers."

Such agreements have created other opportunities. For example, in June Boeing's agreement with AbilityOne also led the company to add



SKILCRAFT® as a provider of office supplies made by people employed at NPAs associated with National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH. OfficeMax, which is an authorized AbilityOne Program distributor, now offers Boeing employees the option to select from a catalog of office supplies, including SKILCRAFT® products.

AbilityOne ally BAH has become an important industry partner. BAH vice-president Robin Portman heads up the firm's activities on the Department of Veterans Affairs account. A joint 2010 Veterans Day celebration at BAH's McLean, Va., headquarters showcased past program success and highlighted AbilityOne's wide range of services and solutions. Veterans account for more than six percent of the AbilityOne Program workforce. The AbilityOne Program has partnered with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Compensated Work Therapy Division since 2003 and with the Army Wounded Warrior, Warrior Transition Unit, helping injured Soldiers find employment. Portman says interest among companies in employing wounded veterans is high, and she sees more potential for the firm to partner with AbilityOne on veteran-based and other programs.

The defense technology and aerospace giant Northrop Grumman created a DoD mentor-protégé agreement with AbilityOne partner MVLE, Springfield, Va. "Over a period of two years, the company

will work with MVLE, which provides custodial and food service, outbound mail, digital mail and secure document management services, to obtain necessary certifications and training to create more jobs for people with disabilities," says Tizoc Loza, who manages the Mentor-Protégé program at Northrop Grumman.

"We got the four sectors of Northrop Grumman to sign up and provide assistance, but we are working with them to get some of the specialized certifications necessary to work on some government contracts," says Loza. Northrop Grumman will provide engineering and technical training at both their facilities and in partnership with the George Mason Technical Assistance Center.

#### THE BUSINESS CASE

Beyond the DoD memo and the increasing awareness of supplier diversity initiatives, AbilityOne is a competitive choice with a list of advantages that make a strong business case for choosing one of the program partners. For example, AbilityOne's contact center services are cost-effective and offer a better service level and staffing results than commercial providers. Partner organization employees tend to be loyal to their employers and turnover is low. Murray adds that this loyalty results in a level of institutional knowledge and experience that is exceptional in many of the sectors AbilityOne partners service.

For companies like Boeing, where safety and quality are essential in building aircraft, contractors need to be competitive in both price and performance. Bruce Johnson manages the Community Manufacturing Partnership, which hires organizations that employ people with disabilities. Although Boeing is committed to employing people with disabilities, Johnson says that's not the only reason he has made the choice to work with organizations like CONNECT—a consortium of 14 AbilityOne-affiliated nonprofit organizations in the Seattle, Wash., area.

"It's more about their ability to deliver on time and quickly and at a good cost. We've many times had customers call us at seven, eight o'clock at night needing a part, and we haven't had one of these suppliers yet turn us down in building this part and having it ready to go by the next morning," says Johnson.

AbilityOne NPAs have helped BAH fill a variety of roles, including contract program managers, analysts, accountants, training and program support personnel, document

management personnel, maintenance support and various areas of information technology support.

#### CONTRACTING OPPORTUNITIES

Robinson-Berry says the word is getting out among Boeing's procurement groups about the capabilities of AbilityOne contractors. She says it is more common for Boeing procurement agents to contact her office for help in finding suitable AbilityOne contractors for contracting opportunities. DoD recently honored Boeing with an Exceptional Industry Contribution award for support of AbilityOne. The company has current contracting relationships with more than 20 AbilityOne partners.

Since the mentor-protégé program has launched at Northrop Grumman, the relationship has blossomed. "Our Technical Service sector has brought [MLVE] under its wing and is providing them with training to learn how to write proposals, how we handle pricing and how to become a partner with a major prime contractor. We see this expanding into other areas," says Loza. ■



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# SAVING EACH OTHER

## A dog, a man and a miracle

BY CHRISTINE MCLAUGHLIN

Time was ticking away for Rocky, a one-year old, German Shepherd/Husky mix. He was scheduled to be euthanized at the animal shelter in just one week. At the same time, Jeremiah Gaches, an unemployed U.S. Army veteran with traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) needed significant help getting through his day—the kind that could best be delivered by an intelligent, tail-wagging, four-legged assistant. Both Rocky and Gaches had some good luck last Christmas when they met to be paired as a new team through Project HIRED, a member of the AbilityOne® Network of nonprofit agencies.

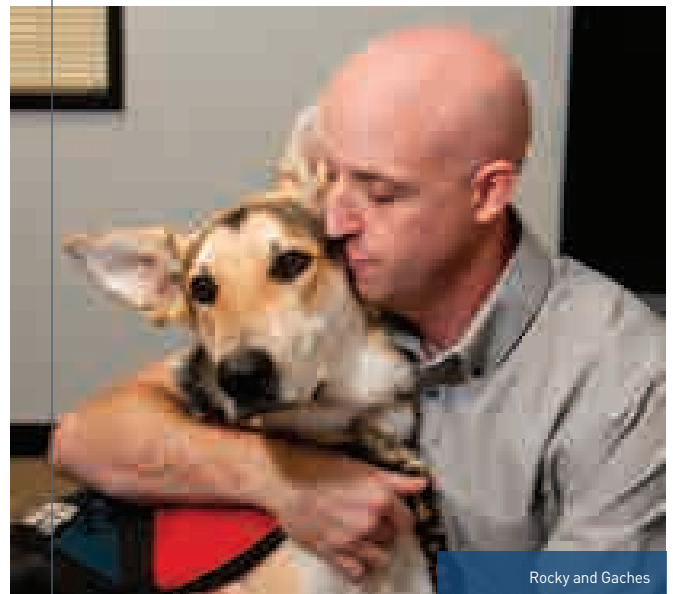
Gaches' physical and emotional experience is not uncommon for returning veterans who have sacrificed and fought bravely for our nation. When these veterans are looking for employment, their challenges can be compounded by misperceptions of potential employers and others in civilian life. Many veterans need extra encouragement and support to get through their day and eventually back to work.

"We were running into a lot of doctors and therapists who were saying that the veterans just weren't ready to get back to work because of [the severity of their] illness and injuries," said Gwen Ford, executive director of the nonprofit agency Project HIRED in San Jose, Calif. "So we decided that service dogs can help with getting them back into civilian life and the workforce. And we've been having a lot of success with it."

In September 2010 Project HIRED established a goal for its new service dog program: increase independence, offer social support and improve employability of veterans with injuries. To be successful, Project HIRED partners with the Silicon Valley Humane Society, which donates the dogs to the program, and with K9 Coach Plus, which offers dog training.

### HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Although most service dog programs provide completely trained dogs to people with disabilities, Project HIRED's program is unique because the veterans don't have to wait the typical five to 13 years for a fully trained dog. Instead, the wait is



Rocky and Gaches



Rocky gets Gaches up and out

usually about only one to two months because the veterans are actively involved in finding, raising and training their dogs to their own specific needs. From the first day of training, the veteran and the service dog must live together. This living arrangement helps the veteran to be engaged in his or her own recovery, boosts personal responsibility and shortens the training

tasks are assigned daily. The combined training lasts for at least a year.

The training is intense and specific, and not just any veteran can receive a service dog. The dogs are provided free to the veterans, but because the dogs are expensive to train—about \$15,000 per dog—a veteran must demonstrate a medical need. (The program operates solely with donations from corporations and

And not just any dog will do. Although the dogs can be any breed or combination of breeds imaginable and are found in animal shelters, their personality and attributes must match the veteran's needs.

#### WHAT THE DOGS CAN DO

These enthusiastic dogs can be trained to do almost anything a veteran needs.

**... one canine is being trained to alert his veteran of his seizures and others are trained to help with physical demands like putting on a prosthesis or retrieving items.**

time while increasing the opportunity for success.

Training sessions range from two to four hours twice a week with a trainer, and homework sessions on specific

individuals.) Therefore, applicants must be assessed by Project HIRED and have medical verification of both their disability and the exact areas where a service dog can help.

For example, one canine is being trained to alert his veteran of his seizures and others are trained to help with physical demands like putting on a prosthesis or retrieving items.

To provide Gaches with needed personal space and security, he has trained Rocky to block groups of people when they get within two feet of him. He has also taught Rocky to check the house to ensure that their home is safe.

“When I would hear a noise in my room, I’d get up constantly and check everything out. So I trained Rocky to search the house. I would hide treats all over the house, and he thought it was a game,” said Gaches, who lives in Lodi, Calif. “He picked it up quickly.” Now he searches the house any time Gaches needs him to.

Gaches has trained Rocky to wake him from a nightmare by turning on the lights rather than by touching him. The light is comforting to Gaches.

#### WHAT THE VETERANS CAN DO

Every day, life gets a little better for Gaches. Already Rocky has helped him learn to go outside again, walk through the streets and brave the crowds in flea markets and restaurants. The more Gaches goes out with Rocky, the more he is inspired to do. Gaches says that Rocky gives him the comfort and confidence he needs.

Gaches’s four-footed helper even assisted him in a recent television interview. “I have TBI [traumatic brain injury], so I don’t think quickly, and the more nervous I get, the worse it gets. So [during the interview] Rocky was sitting next to me. We’d been working on when he notices my anxiety levels are getting too high to jump on my lap. He automatically did it in the interview—jumped in front of the camera and wouldn’t get off my lap,” said Gaches. “From that point, I knew Rocky was going to make it as a service dog.”

In fact, Rocky was recently tested and earned recognition as a certified service dog. In addition, Gaches has been motivated to volunteer with Operation Freedom Paws, a nonprofit group that also helps train service dogs for veterans.

But the progress that Gaches has made isn’t just noticeable to him. “I’m just so proud of him. It’s amazing what

he’s doing now,” Ford says. “It’s a total difference.”

#### WHAT THE AbilityOne® PROGRAM CAN DO

When Gaches is ready to go back to work, Ford explains that he can work in a VA Medical Center call center, a service provided under the AbilityOne Program, and Project HIRED will support him by allowing Rocky to accompany him to work. Gaches will also have a flexible schedule to slowly get him acclimated to the work environment.

For Ford, seeing the impact these dogs have made on the veterans has made it one of the most rewarding programs she’s ever been involved with in her career. “Just to see someone come

out of a depression and light up and tell you about [his] dog. It’s just fascinating,” she says.

The bond that’s developed between Gaches and Rocky is as strong as that of family members, he says. “Rocky is by my side the whole time, 24/7, and we watch out for each other. I’ve never had anything quite like my service dog. It’s a lot stronger of a bond than with a normal pet,” explains Gaches, who’s had mixed breed pet dogs all his life.

Because of this special closeness, Rocky has been nothing short of a life-saver. “Before I had Rocky, I had pretty much cut myself off from the world. I stayed in my room and didn’t ever come out. Rocky is the only one who could actually get me up and out,” Gaches said. “He’s my best friend.” ■





# Veterans Imaging Products, Inc.

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*A Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business  
Owned and Operated by a Level 1 Vietnam Veteran*

**Veterans Imaging Products, Inc.** is a Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (**SDVOSB**) that was established in 1996. Veterans Imaging Products has been recognized by the Committee for Purchase from People who are Blind or Severely Disabled as an

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*VIP distributes a full line of AbilityOne Office Products and Janitorial & Sanitation needs. VIP is also proud to support individuals who are blind or severely disabled by providing jobs through the marketing & sales of AbilityOne Products.*

**VIP is a proud supporter of the National Disability Employment Awareness Month!**



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# AbilityOne

## RECENT AWARDS AND RECOGNITION



Paul Bartlett (center) and Milton Clemmons (right) of ECVC accepted the Gold Award from Brig. Gen. Darrell K. Williams (left), the DLA Land and Maritime commanding officer.

Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Land and Maritime honored **Eastern Carolina Vocational Center (ECVC), Greenville, N.C.**, with a Gold Award for maintaining a 100 percent quality and on-time shipping rating for 2010. During the year, ECVC completed 41,352 shipments of mission critical items destined for military units in the United States and 34 other countries. The contract with DLA requires ECVC to ship on the same day or day following the receipt of order. Paul Bartlett and Milton Clemmons of ECVC accepted this year's Gold Award from Brig. Gen. Darrell K. Williams, DLA Land and Maritime commanding officer.

**AccessAbility, Inc., Minneapolis, Minn.**, received the 2010 Northeast Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce Mid-Size Business of the Year Award. The Chamber's board of directors selects winners based on their commitment to the community, demonstrated business growth and leadership in the business community.

**Industries of the Blind Inc., Greensboro, N.C.**, recently received a Community Stewardship Award from Sage North America, a global supplier of business management software and related products and services. The award honors Industries of the Blind for its use of

Sage products to keep payroll systems in-house operated by employees who are blind, and was presented at the Sage Summit conference in Washington, D.C., in July.

**Christopher Flynt, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (WSIFB), Winston-Salem, N.C.**, received one of three Nancy Susan Reynolds Awards for North Carolinians who improve their communities. The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation honored Flynt with the award during its 25th annual awards luncheon in Raleigh, N.C. Flynt is the director of A Brighter Path, a program he created that provides training, education and social

interaction for people who are blind and visually impaired, both inside the workplace and to the community at large. He



Pamela Wright, NewView Oklahoma, was honored with the Governor's Disability Employment Award of Excellence.

# The official recognition lasts a month.

But our support of AbilityOne lasts 365 days a year.

## Look no further than OfficeMax.

OfficeMax<sup>®</sup> is proud to partner with AbilityOne and support National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Through our ongoing commitment to promote products produced by authorized AbilityOne vendors, we can help federal agencies meet diversity requirements while people who are blind or severely disabled can find meaningful employment.

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### GSA Schedule

Office Supply: GS-14F-0035K

Furniture: GS-28F-0036S

Technology: GS-35F-0110V

**Right:** DLA Director Vice Adm. Alan Thompson; Nina Van Schmus, Cottonwood government contracts manager; and JR Condra, director of Cottonwood Industries. **Below:** DLA Director Navy Vice Adm. Alan Thompson; Sammy Sanderson, Lions Industries for the Blind Inc. skid board department employee; and Ray Amyette, Lions Industries for the Blind Inc. executive director.



overall excellence in superior product quality, on-time delivery, superior customer service, reliability, dependability, consistency and accuracy. The awards were presented at the DLA Business Alliance Awards Ceremony held on June 28 during DLA's Industry Conference and Exhibition in Columbus, Ohio.

teaches the program's participants about self-defense, financial management and use of public transportation. Flynt, who is blind, began working in WSIFB's factory assembly department applying labels to poly-bags about nine years ago.

**Pamela Wright, NewView Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, Okla.,** was honored with the Governor's Disability Employment Award of Excellence for her outstanding achievement as a community access specialist. Wright received the commendation from Gov. Brad Henry and Lt. Gov. Jari Askins on Oct. 6 during the Governor's Disability Employment Awards at the Governor's Mansion in Oklahoma City. Wright, who is blind, first came to NewView Oklahoma for orientation and mobility training about three years ago. Today, she travels independently throughout the state interacting with clients, family members, physicians and community leaders on a daily basis. She maintains case files and

ensures that all clients receive the training necessary to overcome the struggles associated with visual loss.

The Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) recently honored **Lions Industries for the Blind, Kinston, N.C.,** and **Cottonwood Incorporated, Lawrence, Kan.,** with its 2010 Outstanding AbilityOne® Program Vendor Awards. Lions was honored for its performance manufacturing skid boards, which are used for aerial deliveries of critical supplies to troops. Cottonwood was honored for its production of cargo tie-down straps, which are used to secure cargo in HMMWVs and trucks and on pallets. DLA's Business Alliance Awards recognize industry, military and government partners who have demonstrated outstanding efforts to partner with DLA. The awards for Outstanding AbilityOne Program Vendor are presented to AbilityOne Network agencies that exemplify

President Barack Obama announced 15 new members appointed to the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities (PCPID). Among the new members are two leaders of AbilityOne nonprofit agencies—**Carl M. La Mell, president and CEO of Clearbrook, Arlington Heights, Ill.,** and **Peter V. Berns, chief executive officer of The Arc (National), Washington, D.C.** The PCPID provides advice to the President and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, through the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, pertaining to programs and services for people with intellectual disabilities.

**Bayaud Enterprises, Inc., Denver, Colo.,** won a national Community Partnership Award-Honorable Mention from Mutual of America for its work with Denver's Road Home—the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. Denver's Road Home is a call to foundations, corporations, faith



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- FSSI BPA# GS-02F-XA002
- Air Force BPA# FA6643-08-A-0019
- DUNS# 03-806-2712
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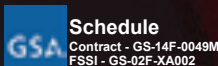
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Bayaud Executive Director David Henninger and Interim Denver Mayor Bill Vidal at the Mutual of America Community Partnership luncheon.

communities and individuals to work with the City and County of Denver and Mile High United Way to end homelessness in Denver by 2015. A full-time, professional staff member from Bayaud works at Samaritan House, Colorado's largest homeless shelter, to help homeless people with disabilities. Bayaud conducts assessments, develops vocational plans, teaches job-seeking skills and provides leads and references.

**Minnesota Diversified Industries (MDI), St. Paul, Minn.,** achieved a noteworthy milestone on April 13 when it produced the 75 millionth corrugated plastic postal tote for the U.S. Postal Service. MDI has produced the plastic totes for the USPS since 1992 through the AbilityOne Program. MDI stopped the line for the milestone tote and everyone on the production line had a hand in its production.

For the third consecutive year, the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) selected **Envision Industries, Inc., Wichita, Kan.,** as the recipient of the overall Food Safety and Inspection Service AbilityOne Program Contractor of the Year award for its business card production. Envision was also awarded, for the first time, the overall USDA AbilityOne Contractor of the Year.

In June, the **West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind, San Angelo, Texas,** began production of the new "Smart Card holder," which will provide additional jobs for West Texans who are blind or visually impaired. The Smart Card holder is one of several security products the Lighthouse produces for the Federal Government. Smart Cards use radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology to store government employees' personal information,

affording them instant access to buildings and computer terminals. The Smart Card holder prevents hackers from accessing this information for malevolent purposes.

**ReadyOne Industries, El Paso, Texas,** entered into a three-year hosting and information technology (IT) managed services contract with OneNeck® IT Services. OneNeck will provide cloud-enabled hosting of their Epicor ERP environment, providing ReadyOne with operating system administration, network management and infrastructure management. The partnership with OneNeck will help ReadyOne focus its IT resources on the implementation of the Epicor ERP system, reducing the time and resources required to expand their IT infrastructure. ReadyOne Industries will also benefit from OneNeck's cloud-based application hosting expertise for end users and external partners by not increasing IT staff to manage their increasingly complex ERP environment. ■



Minnesota Diversified Industries (MDI), St. Paul, Minn., produced its 75 millionth corrugated plastic postal tote for the U.S. Postal Service on April 13.

# Fight proud. Work proud.



Soldier photo courtesy of U.S. Army.



“I feel proud to be a part of the troop deployments and all the other aircraft that support our military operations.”

– AbilityOne® employee Ira Huddleston

Ira works in Airfield Alert Support Services at Ft. Hood Army Base, Texas, and is just one example of how AbilityOne supports the mission of America’s warfighters.

AbilityOne has the experience, capability and workforce to keep our fighting men and women fed, clothed, supplied, supported and protected. In addition, AbilityOne enables people who are blind or have other significant disabilities to be independent and productive citizens.

## By the Numbers...

### Employment for Veterans with Disabilities

**40,000** Number of service members wounded in the global war on terror.

**7,000** Number of those who have significant disabilities.

**500,000** Number of veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

**300,000** Number of veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury.

**1 million** Number of unemployed veterans in the U.S.

**9 percent** Unemployment rate in the U.S.

**32 percent** Unemployment rate for veterans, age 18-24.

**70 percent** Unemployment rate for veterans who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

### AbilityOne Provides Jobs with Real Career Potential

Many returning veterans who are blind or have other significant disabilities bring skills from their military training that can be applied in civilian work.

The AbilityOne Program has a presence on nearly every military installation in the country as well as many other Federal locations nationwide, providing excellent opportunities that call for skills acquired in the military.

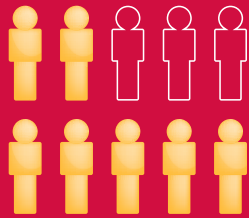
Particular AbilityOne contract growth areas that call for military skills include the following:

- Contract Management Support Services
- Total Facilities Management
- Property Management
- Health IT

For additional AbilityOne employment resources for veterans, please visit [AbilityOneDoD.org](http://AbilityOneDoD.org)

# Do the Math ★

# 70%



of people who are blind or  
have other significant disabilities

## Do Not Have Jobs

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**3,000** of whom are  
**veterans**

AbilityOne is facilitated  
through a network of over  
**600** community-based  
rehabilitation  
centers



 **8 out of 10**  
current Federal customers would  
**Recommend** the AbilityOne Program



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those who understand that by  
celebrating our differences  
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