



# Positive Vibes

By **SUZANNE ROBITAILLE**

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

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

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

Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities.

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

## Department of State, National Passport Information Center

 **Contact Center Services**

**Nonprofit Agency:** Peckham, Inc.

**Contract Start Date:** January 2010

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

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

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

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



# from AbilityOne

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Naval Medical Center, Portsmouth, Va.



### Central Facilities Management

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

**Contract Start Date:** April 2010

**Number of Facilities Managed:** 9

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

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

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

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

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

## Fleet and Industrial Supply Center, Jacksonville, Fla.



### Shipboard and Shore-based Logistics Support

**Nonprofit Agency:** The Arc of Virginia Peninsula

**Contract Start Date:** October 2002

**Number of Fleets Managed:** 3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



### Document Scanning Services

**Nonprofit Agency:** Goodwill Industrial Services Cooperation

**Contract Start Date:** October 2010

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

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

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

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

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

### U.S. Department of Commerce, Treasury Department



#### Base Supply Center

**Nonprofit Agency:** Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind

**Contract Start Date:** 2007

**2009 Sales:** \$420,600

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

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

and in Puerto Rico and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

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

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

### Federal Agencies and Military Bases



**SKILCRAFT® Planet-friendly home-care goods**

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

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

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

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

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

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



Earl McHenry of Industries for the Blind making soy candles.

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