

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **ABILITYONE PROGRAM CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OF SUCCESS**

### **Largest Single Source of Training and Employment for Americans Who are Blind or have Significant Disabilities**

*Year-Long Celebration to Include Commemorative Publication, Microsite and Special Events*

**WASHINGTON, DC**, October 23, 2012 – The U.S. AbilityOne Commission™ today announced the start of a year-long 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration for the AbilityOne® Program and the enactment of the landmark legislation that created it.

“The AbilityOne Program is a shining example of government at its best – bringing together nonprofits, businesses and government agencies to honor our nation’s most treasured resource,” said J. Anthony “Tony” Poleo, Chairman, AbilityOne Commission and Chief Financial Officer, Defense Logistics Agency. “We felt it fitting to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary for an entire year and in doing so, tell the amazing AbilityOne story.” In the coming months, the AbilityOne Program will celebrate its long and proud history, sharing the remarkable stories of its employees, and paying tribute to its partners, while educating the country about the model program.

Under the theme “AbilityOne: It Works!” the celebration begins this week with distribution of the annual edition of [AbilityOne Magazine](#). “In addition to chronicling the history of the AbilityOne Program, the publication highlights some of the employees, advocates, partners, products and services that make AbilityOne a resounding success,” said Tina Ballard, Executive Director and CEO of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission. Throughout the year, a wide variety of AbilityOne success stories from across the country will be shared, an AbilityOne 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary microsite will be launched, and special events will be held, culminating in October, 2013 with a reception commemorating the signing of the original founding legislation.

People who have disabilities are the most chronically underemployed segment of working-age Americans. According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics’ *Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics — 2011*, there are 15 million working-age Americans with disabilities. Many are willing and able to work, yet nearly 70 percent do not have jobs, compared to 23 percent of those with no disability.

The AbilityOne Program can be traced back to 1938, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Wagner-O’Day Act directing the Federal government to purchase products made by individuals who are blind. The act, now known as the Javits-Wagner-O’Day Act, was amended in 1971 to include people with severe disabilities to participate, and called for the provision of services to the federal government.

The AbilityOne Program is a Federal initiative to help people who are blind or have significant disabilities find employment by working within a national network of more than 600 nonprofit agencies that develop and sell products and services to the U.S. government. Today, the Program, administered by the U.S. AbilityOne Commission in partnership with National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH – Creating Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities, is the single largest source of training and employment for Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities, employing more than 50,000 Americans, including 3,300 veterans and wounded warriors.

**ABOUT AbilityOne:**

For 75 years, the AbilityOne Program has created employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities. The program delivers an increasingly diverse array of quality products and services to the Federal marketplace – including SKILCRAFT® office products and medical supplies as well as administrative, help desk, contact center, contract management, custodial, document management, total facilities management, fleet management, food service management, hospitality, grounds maintenance and supply chain management services – provided by Americans who are blind or have any of a wide range of significant disabilities, including veterans and wounded warriors. The AbilityOne Program is administered by the U.S. AbilityOne Commission ([www.abilityone.gov](http://www.abilityone.gov)), an independent Federal agency, with assistance from National Industries for the Blind (NIB, [www.nib.org](http://www.nib.org)) and NISH—Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities ([www.nish.org](http://www.nish.org)). Through the AbilityOne Program, people who are blind or have significant disabilities have greater financial and personal independence, and the opportunity to enjoy full participation in their communities. AbilityOne – It Works. For more information about AbilityOne, please visit [www.AbilityOne.gov](http://www.AbilityOne.gov).

**National Industries for the Blind (NIB) – an AbilityOne Authorized Enterprise**

For 75 years, NIB ([www.nib.org](http://www.nib.org)) has focused on its mission to enhance the opportunities for economic and personal independence of persons who are blind, primarily through creating, sustaining and improving employment. NIB and its network of 90 nonprofit associated agencies nationwide serve as the largest employer for people who are blind by the sale of SKILCRAFT® and other products and services through the AbilityOne Program.

**NISH—Creating Employment for People with Significant Disabilities – an AbilityOne Authorized Enterprise**

Established in 1974, NISH ([www.nish.org](http://www.nish.org)) provides employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities by procuring Federal contracts for goods and services. Headquartered in Vienna, Va., NISH supports a network of more than 1,300 NPAs as well as Federal customers by providing legislative and regulatory assistance, communications and public relations materials, information technology support, engineering and technical assistance, and extensive professional training needed for successful contract management.

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