CABVI Adds 15 Jobs
Agency secures contract for call center services

The Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired of Utica will add 15 new jobs after securing a federal contract worth $653,000 annually to provide call center services.

The contract requires CABVI to establish a call center for the purpose of verifying, tracking and reporting customer compliance with certain federal regulations, according to Rudy D’Amico, President and CEO of CABVI.

“Also referred to as a contact center, CABVI’s center is required to call on clients of the federal government to guide them through a certification process. The clients will be able to call the contact center from anywhere in the country, to fulfill their obligations or receive information from CABVI’s Customer Service Representatives between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. Monday through Friday.

“This contract demonstrates the faith and confidence that the government has in the quality of CABVI’s abilities and workforce,” Mr. D’Amico added.

The addition of the contact center brings CABVI’s total employment number to 200 - an increase of 66 employees since 2005.

Mr. D’Amico offered thanks to National Industries for the Blind (NIB) for their guidance in securing the contract and The Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties, and the New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH), for their financial support of CABVI’s effort.

“When CABVI set out to establish a call center in 2007, as a way to provide training and employment for people who are blind or visually impaired, the Community Foundation and CBVH provided the means to expose our consumers to the competitive field of customer service call and contact centers. The professionals at NIB helped make the concept a reality.”
Employee Spotlight: Darlene Leger

Steve Gannon, Director of Development

Imagine having the will to work, the desire to contribute to society, but no employer willing to take the chance on your talent because you are visually impaired. Blind since birth, Darlene Leger lived that scenario until she moved to Utica from Lincoln City, OR last year to accept a position at the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

“I can’t tell you how thrilled I am. I’ve never felt so blessed,” Mrs. Leger said. “My first paycheck at CABVI – it was the first paycheck I ever earned. I’m making my way. I always believed I could. I just never imagined it would be in Utica, New York!”

With today’s advanced adaptive technology such a scenario seems beyond the pale but it happens – frequently. The unemployment rate for people who are blind or visually impaired continues to be 70 percent in an economy struggling to recover from a deep recession. The Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, like dozens of organizations around the United States that participate in the AbilityOne program, improves job prospects for people with vision loss. CABVI employs 200 people – 78 of whom are blind or visually impaired.

The opportunity to contribute to a cause like CABVI drove Mrs. Leger to make the life altering decision to leave the West Coast, the only home she’d ever known, in 2009. “My family is still in Oregon, my children and grandchildren, but I am happy making friends and packing gloves used at the airports around the country. I’m doing something that helps keep my family safe even though I am 3000 miles away.”

The Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired packages gloves used by the Transportation Security Administration at 460 major airports across the United States. CABVI also produces 32 other lines of products used every day by the State of New York and the Federal Government.

Mrs. Leger has settled into her new routine and is making a new family in Utica. “I just became ‘Mom’ to a beautiful four month old tabby cat named Gabriel. He’s full of energy!”

That “energetic” sentiment can also be said about Mrs. Leger according to her supervisor, Dennis Webster, CABVI’s Vice President of Manufacturing. “Darlene’s good humor is contagious. I don’t know if it is her strong faith or her appreciation of an ‘honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work’. She’s been a welcome addition to our team.

“She says CABVI’s changed her but she’s changed us as well.”

About AbilityOne
In 1938, Congress passed an act creating the forerunner to the AbilityOne Program that enabled agencies serving people who were blind to sell products to the federal government. By 1971, the act was amended to permit people with other severe disabilities to also benefit. The Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled is the federal agency authorized to administer the AbilityOne Program. The Committee is responsible for determining which products and services are suitable to be placed on its Procurement List for the federal government. It also determines the fair market prices for those items.

CABVI has dozens of products on the procurement list including gloves, which the agency sells to the Transportation Security Administration for airport security screenings, and rubber bands to nearly every agency of the Federal Government.

The main criteria for CABVI’s eligibility for participation in the AbilityOne program is that 75 percent of total direct labor hours, actual handling of the product and adding value in the production stream, must be performed by people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.
In Memoriam: Jim Armstrong

Rudy D’Amico, President & CEO

The Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired lost a very important member of its family in November when Jim Armstrong, Vice President of Administration, died after a courageous battle with cancer.

Jim came to CABVI in March 2005. Immediately Jim’s love of people, professionalism and overall good nature endeared him to his fellow employees.

His responsibilities as VP of Administration included human resource management, a task at which Jim excelled. His peers in the profession recognized his abilities as well. The Mohawk Valley Society of Human Resource Management awarded their Lifetime Achievement Award to Jim last year.

One of Jim’s many great attributes was his calm demeanor - his even keel. Jim always spoke the truth and deliberated on tough issues. The employees of CABVI could always count on Jim for his counsel and leadership.

Jim’s great passion, second only to the love for his wife of 49 years, Eleanor, and their beautiful extended family of children, grandchildren and one great-grandson, was golf. Anyone who’s played the game knows it cannot be perfected but Jim was never one to let a day on the course go wasted. He’d been known to say, “It never rains on the golf course.”

At Jim’s memorial service, his beloved nephew Bill Benjamin spoke of Jim’s love for CABVI: the agency’s mission, employees and the consumers we serve. “I think it was the one job in his long career where he felt most fulfilled,” Bill said.

We are fortunate to have had such a kind and generous soul touch our lives. I think I speak for everyone who met and worked with Jim when I say we are all better for having known him.

We will miss Jim.

Blind Curling Coordinator for Canada Conducts Clinic at Curling Club

Laura Yakey, Adaptive Curling Coordinator

The Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Utica Curling Club, hosted an adaptive curling seminar November 5 - 6, 2010 at the Utica Curling Club.

Doris Koop, Canadian Blind Curling Coordinator and her husband Walter, Blind Curling Coach, traveled from Winnipeg, Manitoba to provide guidance and instruction on curling for people who are blind or visually impaired.

The CABVI curlers used the Koops’ instructions and safety tips, and were curling like pros by the end of the day. All CABVI curlers truly enjoyed the training and working with Doris and Walter.

CABVI is grateful to the Utica Curling Club for opening its doors to blind and visually impaired curling and for being wonderful hosts for the curling seminar. If you are interested in learning more about CABVI Adaptive Curling, please contact Laura Yakey, Adaptive Curling Coordinator, at (315) 797-2233 or lauray@cabvi.org.
Volunteers

Marj Tait, Special Correspondent

What does it mean to be a volunteer at the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired?

* To be a part of something that is bigger than self - to know that what you do helps a great, many people,
* To know that your input is meaningful and respected,
* To enjoy each and every day knowing that I’ve helped the CABVI staff help the people who don’t live well live like those who do.

At least that’s what it means to me and I am sure it means to the hundreds of volunteers proudly affiliated with CABVI.

I was honored to be named the CABVI Volunteer of the Year in 2008 and attended this year’s Volunteer Recognition Luncheon in November with great anticipation. You see, I knew who would be named to succeed me and 2009 Volunteer of the Year Marty Jones: The Norman Bramley Golf Tournament Committee.

This wonderful family and their friends have coordinated this event annually since 2000 and have raised over $180,000 for the services and programs of the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This year they raised $11,500. They are beautiful people who started the tournament as a memorial to their father and grandfather. I, for one, am certain he is very proud of them.

CABVI also recognized some special volunteers who devote much time to the central New York community. Dr. Cynthia Parlato was recently named one of three Women of the Year by the Mohawk Valley Women’s Association and Paul Drejza was nominated for the Lutheran Homes Crystal Award. We also paid respects to a dear friend who passed on, John Marchitelli.

While there are many highlights to the annual volunteer luncheon, one of my personal favorites is when the scholarship is presented to a deserving student who is legally blind. This year, CABVI awarded the Excellus BlueCross BlueShield Scholarship to Ashley Chruscicki, a student at SUNY Oswego. She could not attend, as she had class the day of the luncheon, so Marguerite Lynch from Excellus presented the scholarship to Ashley’s mother Diane.

I want to challenge you as a reader of Focus and a friend of the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired: Call Paula Flisnik, Director of Community Services, and offer to volunteer. You will be rewarded beyond your expectations.

Then I will see you at next year’s Volunteer Recognition Luncheon.

Paula Flisnik can be reached at 315-797-2233.
Bramley Tournament

The 11th Annual Norman E. Bramley Memorial Golf Tournament raised $11,500 to support vision rehabilitation therapy programs of the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

In the tournament’s 11 years, the family and friends of Norman Bramley, a Clark Mills resident who lost his sight in the Pacific Theater during World War II, have donated more than $180,000 to CABVI.

At this year’s tournament, held at Hidden Valley Golf Club in Whitesboro, a field of 124 golfers from across central New York participated with more than 20 volunteers making the event a success. A special thanks to the tournament’s corporate sponsors:

NBT Bank
Scalzo, Zogby & Wittig Insurance
ST Med
S.P. Richards, Co.
Kohl’s
Basic Medical
Braden Paper & Packaging
High Five Products
Steet-Ponte Ford
Trenton Technology
Arlott Office Products
Walmart
92.7 The Drive WXUR
1420 AM The Fox WNRS

The dinner itself was a culinary delight - nine courses developed especially for Dark Dining by head chef Jason Monohan and the Yahnundasis staff. It started with plantain topped with peppercorn bacon, drizzled with lavender peanut sauce, found its way to braised short rib over a truffled risotto cake and tempura roasted cauliflower for the sixth course, and finished with creme brulee with a churro topped with Pop Rocks. The 2010 edition of Dark Dining raised nearly $34,000 for CABVI’s vision rehabilitation services.

Debbie Kessler, Chairperson of the Dark Dining Committee, thanked each sponsor, guest and donor for their support of Dark Dining. In addition to NBT Bank, sponsors included: ST Med, Scalzo, Zogby & Wittig Insurance, Walmart, S.P. Richards, Co., Basic Medical, Trenton Technology, High Five Gloves, Alliance Rubber Co., Sempermed, MeadWestvaco, Red Steer Glove Co., McDonald’s, AMD Ritmed, Braden Products, Eye Associates of Utica, WKTV Newschannel 2 and WXUR/ WNRS.
Holiday Appeal

A message from Ed Welsh

A gift to the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired assists over 1300 of your neighbors in central New York receive free services that help them achieve their highest levels of independence:

• The older person who visits the Turnbull Low Vision Center in Utica, or outreach clinics in Madison, Jefferson and Montgomery Counties, for an examination and vision assessment,

• The parents of a child who received training in school by our teacher for the visually impaired,

• The working-age person with a visual impairment who wants employment training, provided by our skilled professionals,

• The person who feels housebound by their visual impairment who receives Orientation and Mobility training to safely navigate in their community.

could not receive our free services. That, we are afraid, would cause many older citizens with vision loss to go without help at a time when we should do all we can to ensure they remain independent, safe and secure.

I contribute annually to the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired because every dollar raised stays in central New York serving people who are blind or visually impaired. As the new Chairman of the agency’s Board of Directors I strongly urge you to join me by supporting this year’s Holiday Appeal. Make a gift on behalf of the elderly friend or loved one who receives services. Make your gift for the child who needs extra help to excel in school. Write a check for the adult who recently lost their vision and looks to us for hope and guidance as they rebuild their life.

I can’t think of a greater holiday blessing than to know that you touched the life of a friend in time of need.

Sincerely,

Edward P. Welsh, CABVI Board Chair
Honorary Chairperson
CABVI Holiday Appeal

To keep every person who is blind or visually impaired in contact with the free programs they need – that is the reason the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired asks for your semi-annual support. Without your generosity consumers in Fulton, Herkimer, Lewis, Madison, Montgomery, Oneida, northern Otsego and Jefferson Counties could not receive our free services. That, we are afraid, would cause many older citizens with vision loss to go without help at a time when we should do all we can to ensure they remain independent, safe and secure.

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Sincerely,

Edward P. Welsh, CABVI Board Chair
Honorary Chairperson
CABVI Holiday Appeal

P.S. I want you to know how deeply grateful we are for your support. Please continue to make a difference to people of all ages right here in central New York who are coping with blindness or visual impairment by sending a gift of $25, $50 or even a special holiday gift of $100. You can use the enclosed envelope or make your gift online at www.cabvi.org - click donations and follow the directions.
Legacy Society

Generous contributors help the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired provide our vision rehabilitation services without charge. Tens of thousands of people who are blind or visually impaired have benefitted from your generosity through the years.

CABVI created the Legacy Society, to honor individuals whose gifts through wills, life insurance, retirement plans and various charitable trusts or annuities have already been received or will someday accrue to the agency.

You can join the CABVI Legacy Society by naming CABVI in your will for a specific dollar amount or a percentage of your net residual estate. If you have a will already an amendment called a codicil should suffice.

Following is sample wording of a bequest codicil:

I give to the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired of Utica, New York, ____ dollars ($_____) or ____% of my net residual estate.

We are deeply grateful to each and every donor for their thoughtful commitment to the future financial well being of the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired. For more information about the Legacy Society, please call Mary Monahan, Public Relations and Development Specialist at (315)797-2233.

Gifts in Memory

August 1 - November 22, 2010

Jim Armstrong
William Albrecht
Law Offices of Semha Alwaya
Deborah A. Ashley
Herb and Hazel Black
Patricia Boulerice
R D Briggs, Inc
Carbone Auto Group
Rudy and Anne D’Amico
P. Daniel and Cindy Freudenberger
Steve and Patty Gannon
Betsy H. Harvey-Minutti
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Donald and Pat LoGuidice
Michael and Ann Matson
Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Maxwell
MV Society of Human Resource Managers
Bette Nobles
Carolyn Procopio
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Pam Senecal
Michael Svennevik
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Utica Job Service
James Wright
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Rudy and Anne D’Amico
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Edward Woroby
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David J. Youlen

Gifts in Honor

Kathy Beaver
Rehabilitation Staff at CABVI
Henry and Ann Coupe
Stephen J Weaver Foundation
David Leahey
George F. Aney
Cynthia J. Parlato
Helen M. Madden
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Current newsletters and annual reports are available in Braille, on disk, audiocassette or our website cabvi.org. If you prefer to receive future editions of our publications in one of these alternative formats, call CABVI at (315)797-2233.