ICBV Office Update

February 14, 2017

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**\*\*1** **Calendar of Events**

**February 15th Wednesday 4:30 pm - 8:30 pm**

Where: ICRE Wood

What: **Karaoke and pizza party**

ICBV will purchase pizzas and a few gift cards to liven things up. We will get donations from our vendors for beverages. ICRE has been going through a lot of changes so come and check it out. This is a great chance to expand our relationship with BBS and make a very positive impact and obviously have some fun. All ICBV board members who can make it are encouraged to attend as well as all blind managers who is interested in helping relationships at ICRE.

RSVP me (Donnie) by Monday the 13th so I have an accurate count.

Thanks, see you there!

Donnie Anderson, Chairman, Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors

**February 23, 2017 THURSDAY and February 24, 2017 FRIDAY**

**National Council on Disability quarterly meeting**

9:00 AM Eastern, 8:00 AM Central, 7:00 AM Mountain, 6:00 AM Pacific

OVERVIEW:

The **National Council on Disability** (NCD), an independent federal agency, will hold its next **quarterly meeting** in Detroit, Michigan on February 23-24. Interested parties are encouraged to join in person, or by phone in a listening-only capacity (other than during the public comment sessions as noted below).

LOCATION:

The Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center, 400 Renaissance Drive, Detroit, MI 48243

CALL-IN INFORMATION:

Teleconference number: 888-417-8525

Conference ID: 9110702

Conference Title: NCD Meeting

Host Name: Clyde Terry

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Anne Sommers, NCD, 1331 F Street NW., Suite 850, Washington, DC 20004; 202-272-2004 (V), 202-272-2074 (TTY) or write: PublicComment@ncd.gov

**April 18-21. 2016**

**NAMA and NFBEI/RSA Training in Vegas**

From Terry Smith, NFBEI - Mark your calendars now! The NFBEI and the RSA Management Group will be conducting a half-day training for Randolph-Sheppard stakeholders in conjunction with the NAMA One Show in Las Vegas April 18-21. The One Show is an amazing 3-day event that includes educational seminars, high profile keynote speakers, and the largest exhibit hall in the industry with literally hundreds of companies showing cutting edge equipment and new vend products. The RSA training will be from noon to 5:00 PM on Tuesday, April 18th.

See the following RSA agenda for their training session on Tuesday April 18, 2017 from 2-5 pm the day before the NAMA show in Vegas starts. Exact location to follow.

Topics will include:

Tips on how to increase your rebates

Latest vending technology

Showcase of new vending equipment available

Showcase of new micro market equipment and technology

Additional NAMA info:

Former First Lady Laura Bush To Keynote NAMA's OneShow 2017

**April 22, 2017 Saturday**

The Illinois Association of Blind Students, the student chapter of the NFB of Illinois, presents a **2017 Student Spring Seminar:** BEATING the BARRIERS

WHERE? Holiday Inn Midway: 6624 S. Cicero Ave., Chicago, IL 60638. To reserve your hotel room, call 708-563-6490. Tell the hotel you are booking with the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois for the special rate of $129 per night (plus tax).

HOW MUCH? The Seminar costs only $15 per person. Financial assistance may be available for attendees outside Chicagoland through the NFBI Chappell-Dennis Memorial fund. Please apply by April 1,2017.

HOW TO REGISTER and/or apply for financial assistance: Please register at the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois web site. Follow the links to Spring seminar.

WHY WAIT? Registration ends April 14, 2017.

Special requests and questions should be directed to Emma Meyer at: MeyerEmma13@gmail.com . Sign up to our free listservs (IL-Talk and IABS-Talk) at nfb.org/listserv for updates and info (or to post questions or comments).

SAVE THE DATE:

**September 12-15, 2017**

**NABM BLAST 2017**

Nashville Airport Marriott Hotel

Tradeshow September 13th

Mark Your Calendars Now!!!!

Visit [www.blindmerchants.org](http://www.blindmerchants.org) for more information as it becomes available. For more information, contact Nicky Gacos at nickycolorado@netscape.net or call him at (908) 464-5359 or contact Terry Smith at terrysmith@epbfi.com or 865-599-7148.

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**\*\*2** **From The Chicago Coalition Against Beverage Taxes**

**DISASTER IN COOK COUNTY.STOP MORE BEVERAGE TAXES IN ILLINOIS - WE NEED YOU!**

As many of you know, the Cook County Board of Commissioners passed a penny-per-ounce tax on sports drinks, juices, teas - even low- and no-calorie beverages. This will result in fewer jobs, lower incomes and higher grocery bills.

Starting July 1, 2017 consumers and small businesses will have to pay the price and bear the burden of Cook County’s budget deficit.

But Cook County isn’t prepared to implement this new regressive tax. The County has been unable to answer basic operational questions and consumers are only months away from seeing dramatic price increases. Cook County residents are fed up about this new tax. Can you imagine if the State of Illinois implemented a tax on top of Cook County? It would be a disaster. Let’s make sure our state lawmakers don’t make the same mistake twice.

The Illinois Senate heard our concerns and decided to remove a proposed beverage tax from the Senate’s budget plan. Now Representative Robyn Gabel has introduced House Bill 2914, which imposes a penny-per-ounce tax on beverages such as sodas, juice drinks, teas and sports drinks.

We strongly encourage you to continue to share your opposition with your lawmakers - visit noilbeveragetax.com to contact your local lawmakers. Also, tell your friends and family to sign up to join the coalition at noilbeveragetax.com. For more information on how to get more involved, email us at info@noilbeveragetax.com Your voice matters. Thank you to those of you who have taken action to stop Illinois from dramatically raising prices on beverages such as sodas, juice drinks, teas and sports drinks.

Email your Illinois lawmakers today – Visit <http://www.noilbeveragetax.com/>

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**\*\*3** From **IAMC; Legislative Report** on the 100th General Assembly

2017 Spring Session February 11, 2017 Prepared by BP Consultants

for IAMC

The Legislative Report below includes legislation from the 2017 Spring Session of the 100th General Assembly. This report has been prepared by BP Consultants on behalf of IAMC.

The General Assembly was in session this past week with the deadline to introduce substantive bills on Friday, February 10th. Both the Senate and House return on Wednesday, February 15th. The Governor is scheduled to give his budget address on Wednesday, February 15th at Noon.

On Wednesday the Senate began voting on their package of “grand bargain” compromise bills to resolve the budget stalemate. The effort was short lived when Republican members did not vote to approve any of the bills. Senate Republican Leader Radogno said that the understanding all along was that no votes would be taken on any of the bills that are part of the package until there was general agreement on all of them. She said that both a school funding reform plan and workers compensation changes are still being negotiated. Senate President Cullerton said that Democrat members were ready to vote on the package, so it was time to start.

The bills that were voted on include:

SB 3 (Senator Thomas Cullerton) – Makes it easier to consolidate smaller units of local government. The bill was approved on a vote of 36-14-7.

SB 8 (Senator Harmon) – Changes state purchasing rules to help streamline them, The bill was approved on a vote of 34-14-11.

SB 10 (President Cullerton) – Helps local governments save money on borrowing costs. The bill was approved on a vote of 36-13-10.

SB 11 (President Cullerton) – Contains pension reform provisions. The bill was defeated on a vote of 18-29-10.

After the defeat of SB 11, the Senate did not vote on any of the other bills in the package. The 3 bills that passed were held in the Senate on a parliamentary procedure. Following the votes Cullerton said that discussions would continue with Republicans.

The revenue portion of the package continues to be negotiated. Earlier in the week the idea was floated to drop the proposed business opportunity tax based on payroll size. Instead, the overall state sales tax rate would drop from 6.25% to 5.75% with the full rate applied to food, medical supplies and drugs (currently 1%). In addition, certain services would be taxed at the 5.75% rate, including car repairs, landscaping, laundry, and cable and satellite.

Legislation to ensure state employees get paid through June 30th passed out of committee on Wednesday. On a party line vote, the House State Government Administration Committee approved HB 1798 (Representative Scherer). SB 1787 (Representative Bourne) would put state workers payroll on a continuing appropriation, similar to legislators and constitutional officers. That legislation is still in House Rules Committee. Both bills are in response to Attorney General Madigan’s lawsuit seeking to overturn a court order that state employees continue to get paid without a budget in place. A hearing on the cast is scheduled for next week. Governor Rauner has said that he will veto HB 1798 if it reaches his desk and that he supports HB 1787.

Democrat members of the Senate Education Committee told Governor Rauner’s education advisor that his administration should draft legislation to reflect recommendations from the Illinois School Funding Reform Commission final report. Beth Purvis, the adviser, countered that the plan should come from the legislature. The two sides agree that the formula for financing public education should be changed to ensure that poorer districts receive more financial support from the state, but there is no agreement on how to accomplish it.

The nonprofit Civic Federation released its proposed 5 year plan for stabilizing Illinois’ finances on Friday. The report said that Illinois’ financial situation is so bad that the state would have to slash spending by more than 26% to balance next year’s budget through cuts alone. The group says the delay in passing a balanced state budget means fixing the problem will take longer and require more drastic measures. The report recommends the state limit spending growth and increase the individual income tax rate from 3.75% to 5.25%.

Upcoming Important Dates and Deadlines:

February 15, 2017 – Next Session Date for House and Senate

February 15, 2017 – Governor’s Budget Address

March 17, 2017 – Senate Substantive Committee Deadline

March 31, 2017 – House Substantive Committee Deadline

April 8 – 23, 2017 – Spring Break for General Assembly

April 28, 2017 – House Third Reading Deadline for Substantive House Bills and Senate Third Reading Deadline for Substantive Senate Bills

May 12, 2017 – Senate Substantive Committee Deadline for House Bills in the Senate

May 19, 2017 – House Substantive Committee Deadline for Senate Bills in the House

Thank you,

Desi Harris

desiharris@msn.com

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**\*\*4** From Tom Cullen, **Cullen & Associates, Session Update** February 12, 2017 (removed duplications of IAMC’s report)

The General Assembly will reconvene this week for the Governor’s budget address on Wednesday, February 15th. This will be Governor Rauner’s third budget address to the Legislature.

Last Friday was the deadline to file substantive bills in both Chambers. As of Friday evening, 3,921 House bills were filed (including 304 appropriations bills), and 2,091 Senate bills were filed (including 108 appropriations bills).

On Thursday, Pay Now Illinois, a coalition of Illinois-based human and social service providers, filed suit in St. Clair County Circuit Court against Governor Bruce Rauner, Comptroller Susana Mendoza, and directors of three state agencies, seeking a preliminary and permanent injunction that would force Illinois to begin timely payments for services performed under binding contracts dating back to the start of the current fiscal year, July 1, 2016. The Coalition believes that precedent has been set with the ruling in St. Clair County that required state workers to be paid. A copy of the lawsuit is here. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4Bi-iePG1O6clIwekZ2dkhpODA4cWhLcWdnUS1VcjZyQ2RN/view>

The House will not be in session Friday.

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**\*\*5 Shared by David Andrews via NFBNet**

The following letter is from researchers at The **Ohio State University** to ask for your input in a **research study**. Any adult, 18 years of age or older, who is blind or low vision, is invited to participate. If you have any questions regarding the study or the survey, contact information for all researchers is located on the first page of the link attached to the invitation letter.

Dear Potential Research Participants,

 As researchers at The Ohio State University, we are examining how individuals who are blind or visually impaired perceive race and culture. It is our hope to use the findings of our study to compare and expand upon existing literature in an effort to understand how individuals who are blind perceive racial diversity.

With race issues so prevalent in the news today, schools increasing focus on multi-culturalism, and teacher training that emphasizes diversity in schools, it is our hope to better understand the perceptions of individuals who are blind within these areas in an effort to improve education and raise awareness of diversity among all individuals, including individuals with vision loss.

We are writing today because we want your voice to impact our work!

Please take the time to fill out our short survey at the link found below:

<https://osu.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_73ZMg0u2dJihjBb>

Thank you for your time and consideration of this project!

Danene Fast and Ann Pilewskie

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**\*\*6** **Shared by Chris Danielsen via NFBNet**

With a new administration in Washington promising sweeping change, many wonder what the prospects for legislative success are in the **rapidly evolving political environment**. Throughout our history, the National Federation of the Blind has worked with political leaders of both parties to craft public policy that helps blind Americans live the lives we want, and our goal is to continue to do so. Judging by the outstanding success last week of our 2017 Washington Seminar, there are plenty of partners willing to work with us and champion our issues, presenting ample and exciting opportunities to make positive change. Read a recap of some of the highlights on the Voice of the Nation’s Blind, the blog of the National Federation of the Blind. The full post is here:

<https://nfb.org/blog/vonb-blog/national-federation-blind-celebrates-successful-washington-seminar>

Christopher S. Danielsen, J.D.

Director of Public Relations

200 East Wells Street, Baltimore, MD 21230

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**\*\*7** From Nama

**NAMA Urges Immediate Action by U.S. Senate on Regulatory Reform**

This week, NAMA joined 615 other groups and associations strongly urging the U.S. Senate to consider and pass the Regulatory Accountability Act of 2017 (RAA), to be introduced by Senator Rob Portman (Ohio). The RAA recently passed the House with a bipartisan vote of 238-183, and now NAMA is urging the Senate to do the same.

The letter emphasizes that NAMA believes federal regulations should be narrowly tailored, supported by strong and credible data and evidence, and impose the least burden possible, while implementing congressional intent. "Passage of the RAA is one of NAMA's top priorities. If signed into law, it would protect businesses in the convenience services industry from overly burdensome regulations at the federal level, adding even stronger protections for entities classified as small businesses." said Eric Dell, NAMA's Senior Vice President of Government Affairs.

For a copy of the letter click here. <https://www.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/documents/files/2.6.17-_multi-association_letter_to_senate_supporting_the_regulatory_accountability_act.pdf>

Should you have any questions, please contact NAMA's Government Affairs Division at edell@namanow.org . Thank you for your continued support of NAMA and the industry.

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**\*\*8** Shared by Nicky Gacos, NABM President

**Uber Service Animal Policy Updates**

State and Federal law prohibits driver-partners using the Uber app from denying service to riders with service animals because of their service animals or otherwise discriminating against riders because of their service animals.

**Driver Partners Legal Obligation**

​Driver partners have a legal obligation to provide service to riders with service animals

Driver partners cannot lawfully deny service to a rider with a service animal because of allergies, religious objections or a general fear of dogs.

Each driver partner has been made aware of their obligation to transport riders with service animals through the technology services agreement they signed with Uber.

If driver partners refuse a rider with a service animal, because of their service animal, that driver is in violation of the law and in breach of their agreement with Uber.

**Consequences for Service Animal Denials**

​If Uber determines that a driver denied service to a rider because of a service animal the driver will be permanently banned from the Uber Driver App.

Uber will make the determination of whether service was denied because of a service animal in a review of the incident

If Uber receives multiple complaints about a driver partner denying service to a rider because of a service animal, that partner will be permanently banned from driving with Uber, regardless of the justification the driver-partner offers. ​

**How to Report a Service Animal Complaint**

To file a complaint from the Uber rider app, navigate to "I want to file a service animal issue" complaint screen which is available through both the trip details screen and the account menu button.

To file a complaint through the Uber website, navigate to the "I want to file a service animal issue“ link or through the "help" link on the Uber website. ​

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**\*\*9 From Hadley School for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

Seminars@Hadley Presents:

Low Vision Focus @ Hadley Presents: **Knitting for Fun and Fulfillment**

Seminar Date: Friday, February 17, 2017

Seminar Time: 12:00 PM CST; 18:00 GMT

Knitting is fun, relaxing and rewarding. It’s a craft you can take anywhere and enjoy while chatting with friends, listening to an audiobook, or just daydreaming! Knitters know the special thrill that comes with holding something they’ve made with their own two hands.

Join Low Vision Focus @ Hadley as Caitlyn Snyder, Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, and Mary Zemlick, Occupational Therapist and Orientation and Mobility Specialist, discuss how to enjoy knitting with low vision. They’ll be discussing equipment and terminology; techniques for rake knitting; knitting in the round; and using straight needles. They’ll also share their expertise on where to find accessible knitting patterns and how to find local knitting groups. If you’ve ever wanted to begin or resume this wonderful hobby, this is the webinar for you!

Ed Haines, Hadley Instructor and member of the Seminars@Hadley team, will moderate this 60-minute discussion. A question and answer session will be included as part of this audio seminar. Register now for Knitting! <http://www.hadley.edu/SeminarDetails.asp?sid=352>

Seminars@Hadley Presents:

Braille and Technology: **A Winning Combination for Life**

Seminar Date: Thursday, March 2, 2017

Seminar Time: 10:00 AM CST; 16:00 GMT

Have you heard that braille is becoming obsolete due to accessible technology? We are here to tell you that is just not true! Research shows that adults with visual impairments who are braille readers are both more employable and successful.

Maybe your vision isn’t as good as it used to be. Maybe you now have very little usable vision or, as some may say, “just enough vision to get you in trouble.” If so, braille will be your buddy in every aspect of life, and technology will add an additional tool to help you live a fuller life.

Join Seminars@Hadley as our panelists discuss how technology and braille work together for a winning combination for life! Special guests Kathy Claus, professional storyteller and author; Kristen Witucki, the curriculum and content editor for Learning Ally’s College Success Program; and Susan Kennedy, a legal assistant and travel blogger, will share how they balance braille and technology in their everyday lives.

Kim Walker, Hadley Instructor, will moderate this 60-minute discussion. A question and answer session will be included as part of this audio seminar. Register now for Braille and Technology! <http://www.hadley.edu/SeminarDetails.asp?sid=353>

ACB Scholarships

American Council of the Blind is offering scholarships ranging in amounts from $1,000 to $4,000 to entering freshmen, undergraduate and graduate college students who are legally blind. Recipients must maintain a 3.3 GPA and be involved in their school and/or local community. The application deadline is February 15, 2017. Visit American Council of the Blind Scholarship to apply or to learn more. <http://usascholarships.com/american-council-of-the-blind-scholarship/?Rj=1>

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**\*\*10** **From Terry Smith, NFBEI**

BLIND ENTREPRENEURS INITIATIVE

**NABM / NFBEI Annual Report 2016**

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Nicky Gacos

As the President of the National Association of Blind Merchants, a division of the National Federation of the Blind, I am so proud of what we were able to accomplish in 2016. Five years ago, we had a vision. There was a void in the Randolph-Sheppard community. We stepped in to fill that void and created the National Federation of the Blind Entrepreneurs Initiative. Our goal was to make a difference in what it means to be a blind entrepreneur in this country. We have far exceeded anyone’s expectations including my own.

When we created the National Federation of the Blind Entrepreneurs Initiative, the Randolph-Sheppard community was fractured. There was no mechanism in place to support our blind entrepreneurs in a meaningful way and to advocate on their behalf. The program was being threatened on multiple fronts. Committees of Blind Vendors felt isolated. State licensing agencies had nowhere to turn for technical assistance on difficult Randolph-Sheppard issues. Training opportunities for blind entrepreneurs and BEP staff were limited.

With the NFBEI, we have changed all of that and I am exceedingly proud of the successes we have achieved in those 5 years. I am particularly proud of our accomplishments in 2016. As your read through this annual report, stop and think about the impact the NFBEI is having. Yes, there are still challenges and it seems we are fighting to protect the priority every day. But we ARE making a difference.

We didn’t accomplish all of this alone. We appreciate the support of NFB President Mark Riccobono and our NFB family. We couldn’t do it without the financial support of those of you who give so generously. We couldn’t do without the SLA’s who subscribe to our services. And we couldn’t do it without the best board of directors we’ve ever had, all of whom are blind entrepreneurs themselves. Thanks to all of you because your fingerprints are on all of our accomplishments.

The news in 2016 was not all good. We all lost a true friend when Charlie Allen passed away. Charlie was a long-time vendor in Kentucky and most recently managed the military dining contract at Fort Knox. He was a Past President of NABM and still served on the board at the time of his death. Charlie and his wife Betty generously supported NFB and NABM. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Betty. We will miss you Friend.

In closing, let me say we look forward to an even bigger 2017. I want to extend a personal invitation to anyone reading this to attend our 2017 BLAST Conference which will be held September 12-15 in Nashville. I can’t promise we will top last year’s Windy City BLAST but we are going to try. You will soon be able to start registering at www.blindmerchants.org.

The NFBEI: Meeting the Challenge in 2016

By Terry C. Smith

It’s hard to believe that it has been 5 yeas since I retired as the Director of Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired. That was a good gig which is why I stayed 28+ years. But I must say that I have enjoyed my association with the National Association of Blind Merchants and the opportunity to lead the National Federation of the Blind Entrepreneurs Initiative effort even more. It is so satisfying being part of a team with everyone pulling together to make a difference. To be able to work on national issues, assist SLA’s with state specific issues, and help individual blind entrepreneurs overcome challenges is such a rewarding experience.

In 2016, the national program faced many challenges. You will read about some of these below. NABM and the NFBEI have stood strong against those challenges. We continue to provide our core services of technical assistance, training, and advocacy. We are proud that 34 states in 2016 took advantage of our subscription service. We are flattered by the confidence they have shown in us and we are happy to count each and every one among our network of states. We look forward to continuing those relationships in 2017.

One of the things I am proudest of is that we are bringing blind entrepreneurs and SLA’s together. Both come from different perspectives but ultimately the goal of having the best program possible is shared by both agency staff and consumers. That’s not to suggest that it is perfect everywhere or there isn’t more work to be done. But it is significant that the NFB, a consumer organization, hired a former agency guy with the expressed goal of working with blind entrepreneurs and agency personnel alike to advance the cause of the Randolph-Sheppard Program.

I am truly blessed to have this opportunity. I want to thank NABM President Nicky Gacos, National Federation of the Blind President Mark Riccobono, and the NABM Board of Directors for allowing me to do what I do. I will continue to work as hard as I can on your behalf. Here’s to a terrific 2017.

Background

The National Federation of the Blind and the National Association of Blind Merchants launched the NFBEI on January 1, 2012. Terry Smith was hired to lead the initiative and he hit the ground running. There were no clear plans in place for the NFBEI. The general consensus was that there was a void after the abolishment of the Blind Entrepreneurs Alliance in 2010 and the Randolph-Sheppard Program needed attention.

As the program has evolved, it now focuses its efforts on 3 distinct areas of importance:

Training

Technical Assistance

Advocacy

As you read this Annual Report, you will note many activities and accomplishments in each of these areas.

NFBEI Funding

The NFBEI is required to generate its own funding. In 2016, it accomplished this through 2 primary sources of funding:

1. State Subscriptions

2. Donations

In 2016, 34 states took advantage of the subscription service. This covered about two-thirds of the budgetary needs of the NFBEI. Donations make up the other one-third. The subscription service has been very popular with the states as evidenced by the number of states currently subscribing. Among other things, the subscription service entitles states to unlimited and free technical assistance; one on-site visit to the state to provide training to the blind entrepreneurs, Committees of Blind Vendors. and/or staff; mentoring, etc. Blind entrepreneurs and other Randolph-Sheppard stakeholders were generous in 2016 with their financial support as well, which enabled the NFBEI to function at full capacity.

DoD Dominates 2016

The Department of Defense dominated our attention in 2016. In June, DoD published proposed rules intended to clarify how the Randolph-Sheppard priority was to be applied to troop dining contracts. In reality, if the rules are finalized, they would effectively eliminate the blind vendor priority for most troop dining contracts. The rules would instead give millions of dollars in new contracts to AbilityOne. NABM is of the opinion DoD does not have the authority to promulgate rules regarding the Randolph-Sheppard Program. Congress only gave that authority to the Department of Education. Furthermore, the proposed rules violate the Randolph-Sheppard Act. NABM and the NFBEI didn’t accept the rules as inevitable. We led an effort to generate as many comments as possible opposing the proposed regulations when published in the Federal Register in June. Our goal was to generate 1,000 comments. Instead, 4,755 comments were submitted and 95% or more opposed the regulations. 4,580 of these were generated from a website created by NABM to make it easy for Randolph-Sheppard stakeholders to let their voices be heard. D.C. insiders say it was one of the most remarkable responses ever to proposed rules. We also created a website whereby stakeholders could send letters to the Secretary of Education urging DoE to oppose the proposed rules. We conducted a virtual fly-in whereby blind entrepreneurs and their teaming partners were able to contact their members of Congress and members of the Armed Services Committee to educate them about the potential impact of the proposed rules. We submitted Freedom of information requests to the Department of Education and the AbilityOne Commission. We got the documents from DoE and were encouraged by their advocacy on behalf of Randolph-Sheppard. AbilityOne has yet to turn over the requested documents. And finally we retained the services of Brown, Goldstein, and Levy to mount a legal challenge to the rules if DoD publishes the rules as final. We raised money from the Randolph-Sheppard community to do so. At this point, the future of the rules is uncertain. President Trump has put a freeze on all new rules. We suspect DoD will continue to work on the rules and be prepared once the freeze is lifted but there is no way to know for sure. What is certain is that the NFBEI’s efforts to generate comments may have prevented these rules from being implemented. Before publishing the proposed rules as final DoD had to analyze each of the almost 5,000 comments and respond to them. That was undoubtedly a long and tedious process and prevented them from being able to finalize the rules as quickly as they had anticipated. We don’t know what 2017 has in store as far as these proposed rules are concerned but NABM and the NFBEI will be monitoring this matter very closely.

2016 Accomplishments

 In 2015, in cooperation with the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired, NABM and the NFBEI launched the first ever on-line entry-level training program for prospective Randolph-Sheppard entrepreneurs. In 2016, 38 individuals from 12 different states enrolled in the training program.

 Conducted 2 Hadley Randolph-Sheppard on the Web webinars including one on the new FDA calorie disclosure requirements.

 Held the largest and most successful BLAST ever in Chicago in May. Over 500 people participated in the conference and the exhibit hall featured over 80 companies displaying their products and services. The Windy City BLAST was the largest Randolph-Sheppard conference ever held anywhere in the country. The Vending Times was so impressed that it ran a featured article about BLAST.

 Presented Congresswoman Barbara Kennelly with the organization’s first-ever Champion Award. Kennelly sponsored the amendment that bears her name that granted a priority to blind entrepreneurs to operate vending machines at interstate rest areas.

 Conducted the second Randolph-Sheppard Emerging Leaders Training in Nashville with 11 graduates from 9 states in the class.

 Contracted with the State of Tennessee to conduct its annual blind vendor conference in September.

 Submitted comments to the Federal Highway Administration regarding potential expanded commercialization of the interstate rest areas and led a successful effort to generate comments from as many rest area vendors from across the country as possible.

 Submitted comments to the Department of Defense regarding the proposed regulations interpreting how the Randolph-Sheppard regulations should be applied to military dining contracts.

 Created a website that made it easy for over 4,500 Randolph-Sheppard stakeholders to submit comments to DoD.

 Sponsored and participated in the National Automated Merchandising Association’s Day on the Hill in July.

 Submitted a Freedom of Information Request to the U.S. AbilityOne Commission seeking communications between the Commission and other entities regarding the proposed Department of Defense rules and/or the Randolph-Sheppard Program.

 Submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Department of Education seeking copies of all correspondence in regards to the proposed DoD rules.

 Sponsored a virtual fly-in focused on contacting members of the Congressional Armed Services Committees to educate them on the real impact of the proposed DoD rules.

 Opposed sugar taxes in several localities most notably Chicago and Philadelphia.

 Facilitated through the National Federation of the Blind national center Avanti Markets in making their self service kiosks fully accessible to blind users.

 Continued to promote inmate commissaries in business enterprises programs.

 Joined over 2,500 other blind people at the annual convention of the National Federation of the Blind in Orlando. The largest number of blind entrepreneurs ever attended the Merchants Division meeting at the convention. There were over 120 people in attendance.

 NABM elected a new board of directors that includes Nicky Gacos as President, Harold Wilson as First Vice President, Ed Birmingham as 2nd Vice President, Sharon Treadway as Secretary, Pam Schnurr as Treasurer, and board members Melisa Smith (TN), Lewanda Miranda (OR), Deb Smith (AZ), Gene Fleeman MO), John Fritz (WI), Lynn Reynolds (NJ), Joe Higdon (IN), and Charlie Allen (KY).

 Facilitated discussions between 5 east coast states with the hope the states can submit a joint proposal to manage the multi-state Marine Corps troop-dining contract. Those discussions continue and we are optimistic that Randolph-Sheppard can get that contract. It would be the first-ever multi-state Randolph-Sheppard contract.

Assisted Congressman Jolly of Florida with a letter that was sent to RSA seeking guidance on how the Randolph-Sheppard Act applies to VA properties. RSA wrote a strong letter in support of Randolph-Sheppard and it is hoped the letter will help create opportunities in VA facilities.

 Advocated on behalf of Randolph-Sheppard with several federal agencies including the General Services Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Postal Service, National Park Service, Department of Education, and the Department of Defense.

 President Gacos completed his first full year on the NAMA Board of Directors and continues to strengthen the relationship between that organization and the Randolph-Sheppard community.

 Made on-site visits to 20 states attending 16 annual blind vendor training conferences, conducted 2 trainings for Elected Committees of Blind Vendors, provided training for business enterprises staff in 2 states, and assisted 2 states in rewriting their rules and regulations.

 Provided expert testimony in the State of Oklahoma versus the U.S. Army federal arbitration regarding the Army’s attempt to break out the dining facility attendant services from the full-food contract.

 Provided testimony in federal court in Topeka in the State of Kansas versus the U.S. Army case seeking an injunction preventing the Army from terminating the existing Randolph-Sheppard contract and awarding the DFA services contract to AbilityOne.

 Continued to support and promote the RSA Management Group which paid out approximately $1.85 million in rebates to blind entrepreneurs in 2016.

 Promoted and participated in the Randolph-Sheppard training presented by the RSA Management Group at the NAMA One Show in Chicago.

 Participated in and presented at the spring and fall meetings of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind including the organization’s Randolph-Sheppard training conference in San Diego.

 Presented to attorneys attending the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation CLE training in Bethesda in April.

Conclusion

So, you be the judge. Are the National Association of Blind Merchants and the National Federation of the Blind Entrepreneurs Initiative making a difference? The National Federation of the Blind believes that low expectations create obstacles between blind people and their dreams. Like the NFB who is committed to raising expectations for blind people so they can live the lives they want, NABM is committed to raising expectations of blind entrepreneurs. We do that through creating opportunities. We do that through training. We do that through advocacy. We did just that in 2016 and we will continue to do that in 2017.

If you are impressed and want to support the continued efforts of NABM / NFBEI, you can do so by donating by going to our website at [www.blindmerchants.org](http://www.blindmerchants.org) or mailing a check to 7450 Chapman Highway, #319, Knoxville, TN 37920. Your donations are fully tax deductible.

I realize you may have donated to our legal defense fund and may think that is enough. Please understand those dollars are earmarked for our legal challenge to the DoD rules and cannot be used to offset our ongoing operational expenses.

If you have questions feel free to call Terry Smith at 865-599-7148 or email him at terrysmith@epbfi.com . Thank you for your support!

The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.

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**\*\*11** From RSA Management Group

RSA Management Purchase Power Deals

Earn Extra Rebates on the following:

NEW DEALS THIS WEEK

FERRERO – FEBRUARY OFF INVOICE PROMOTION PLUS 10% REBATE

Deal Date: THROUGH FEBRUARY 28, 2017

Rebates Products

$30.00 per case Tic Tacs Singles–Freshmints, Orange, Fruit Adventure and Wintergreen

$30.00 per case Tic Tacs Mixers–Cherry Cola and Pina Colada

$9.45 per case Tic Tac Bottlepack – Fruit Adventure, Orange and Freshmint

$24.00 per case Ferrero Rocher 3 piece

AQUAFINA – ORDER THROUGH AUTHORIZED PBC ONLY

Deal Date: THROUGH FEBRUARY, 2017 –DELIVERED BY MARCH 7, 2017

Rebates Products

$1.00 per case 20 oz. Aquafina 24 count

CHEESEWICH

Deal Date: THROUGH MARCH 31, 2017

Rebates Products

$1.44 per case Cheesewich Meat and Cheese Snacks– All Products

STARBUCKS

Deal Date: THROUGH FEBRUARY, 2017 –DELIVERED BY MARCH 7, 2017

Rebates Products

$2.00 per case 13.7 oz. Starbucks Frappuccino – ALL FLAVORS

TAYLOR CANDY

Deal Date: THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2017

Rebates Products

4% per case Taylor Candy – All Products

WOLFGANG PUCK COFFEE PODS

Deal Date: THROUGH MARCH 31, 2017

Rebates Products

$2.00 per case Wolfgang Puck Coffee Pods – All Products

Deals ending in February

FERRERO – FEBRUARY OFF INVOICE PROMOTION

Deal Date: THROUGH FEBRUARY 28, 2017

Rebates Products

$30.00 per case Tic Tacs Singles–Freshmints, Orange, Fruit Adventure and Wintergreen

$30.00 per case Tic Tacs Mixers–Cherry Cola and Pina Colada

$9.45 per case Tic Tac Bottlepack – Fruit Adventure, Orange and Freshmint

$24.00 per case Ferrero Rocher 3 piece

PEPSI ORDER THROUGH AUTHORIZED PBC ONLY

Deal Date: THROUGH JANUARY 31 – DELIVERY BY FEBRUARY 7, 2017

Rebates Products

$1.50 per case 20 oz. Mountain Dew – ALL FLAVORS EXCEPT REGULAR AND DIET

$2.00 per case Lipton Teas – ALL FLAVORS – INCLUDING INNOVATION

$2.00 per case 15.2 oz. Ocean Spray – ALL FLAVORS

$2.00 per case 12 oz. Starbucks Refreshers – ALL FLAVORS

PEPSI INNOVATION PRODUCTS ORDER THROUGH AUTHORIZED PBC ONLY

Deal Date: THROUGH FEBRUARY 28, 2017

Rebates Products

$2.00 per case Kickstart 12 oz. Hydration Raspberry Citrus

$2.00 per case Kickstart 16 oz. Mango Lime

$2.00 per case Propel 20 oz. Watermelon Flavored Water

$2.00 per case Lipton 20 oz. Mango Tea

$2.00 per case Lipton Pure Leaf 18.5 oz. Pomegranate or Mint Flavor Tea

PEPSI – ORDER THROUGH AUTHORIZED PBC ONLY

Deal Date: THROUGH FEBRUARY, 2017 –DELIVERED BY MARCH 7, 2017

Rebates Products

$2.00 per case 20 oz. Wild Cherry and Diet Wild Cherry Pepsi - 24 count

$2.00 per case 18.5 oz Lipton Pure Leaf Tea 12 count– ALL FLAVORS

$2.00 per case 16 oz. AMP 12 count – ALL FLAVORS

AQUAFINA – ORDER THROUGH AUTHORIZED PBC ONLY

Deal Date: THROUGH FEBRUARY, 2017 –DELIVERED BY MARCH 7, 2017

Rebates Products

$1.00 per case 20 oz. Aquafina 24 count

STARBUCKS

Deal Date: THROUGH FEBRUARY, 2017 –DELIVERED BY MARCH 7, 2017

Rebates Products

$2.00 per case 13.7 oz. Starbucks Frappuccino – ALL FLAVORS

Deals ending in March

FRITO

Deal Date: THROUGH MARCH 5, 2017 - DELIVERY BY MARCH 18, 2017

Rebates Products

$1.92 per case Rold Gold and Rold Gold Thins – ALL FLAVORS

PEPSI ORDER THROUGH AUTHORIZED PBC ONLY

Deal Date: DELIVERY MARCH 31, 2017

Rebates Products

$3.00 per case 1L and 700mL Lifewtr 12 ct. – UPC 12000161155 and 12000161162

Deals ending in April

OTIS SPUNKMEYER

Deal Date: THROUGH APRIL 30, 2017

Rebates Products

$1.20 per case 4 oz. Wild Blueberry, Banana Nut and Chocolate Chip Muffin 24 ct.

Deals ending in June

OREO

Deal Date: DELIVERY JUNE 30, 2017

Rebates Products

$0.2 per unit Oreo Chocolate Bar

Deals ending in December

PLANTERS

Deal Date: DELIVERY BY DECEMBER 31, 2017

Rebates Products

$2.88 per case 2 oz. Planters Peanuts

$1.44 per case Planters Trail Mix Nut and Chocolate

SPLENDA

Deal Date: THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2017

Rebates Products

$3.30 per case Splenda 4/400 ct. Sweetener Packets

$3.00 per case Splenda 2000 ct. Bulk and 12/50 ct. Sweetener Packets

$2.60 per case Splenda 12/100 ct. Sweetener Packets

$1.25 per case Splenda 500 ct. Bulk Sweetener Packets

WELCH’S

Deal Date: DELIVERY BY DECEMBER 31, 2017

Rebates Products

$.01 per unit Welch’s, Gummi Factory, Sour Jacks, Sun-Maid, Fisher – ALL FLAVORS

Indefinite End Date

BEANITO’S

Deal Date: THROUGH INDEFINITE

Rebates Products

$1.00 per case Bean Chips and Puffs - ALL FLAVORS

BOLTHOUSE FARMS

Deal Date: THROUGH INDEFINITE

Rebates Products

$1.30 per case Bolthouse drinks - ALL FLAVORS

COLD STONE CREAMERY

Deal Date: THROUGH INDEFINITE

Rebates Products

$1.50 per case All Flavors of Milk Shakers

DAISY’S BAKERY, INC

Deal Date: THROUGH INDEFINITE

Rebates Products

8% per case Individually Wrapped Muffin, Cake, Brownie, Pie, Cookie – ALL FLAVORS

FERRERO

Deal Date: THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2017

Rebates Products

10% per case Tic Tacs – All Products

10% per case Ferrero Rocher– All Products

10% per case Raffaello – All Products

10% per case Nutella – All Products

10% per case Nutella and Go– All Products

JJ’s PIES

Deal Date: THROUGH INDEFINITE

Rebates Products

$1.80 per case JJ’s Bakery Boxed Pies – ALL FLAVORS

J&J FOODS

Deal Date: THROUGH INDEFINITE

Rebates Products

5% per case Kim & Scott’s IW Flavored Soft Pretzels and IW Pretzel Melts

5% per case Mary B’s IW Biscuit Breakfast Melts

5% per case Corazona’s HeartBar Oatmeal Squares

HINT WATER

Deal Date: THROUGH INDEFINITE

Rebates Products

$1.00 per case Hint 100% Natural Goodness Water – ALL FLAVORS

J&J FOODS

Deal Date: THROUGH INDEFINITE

Rebates Products

5% per case Kim & Scott’s IW Flavored Soft Pretzels and IW Pretzel Melts

5% per case Mary B’s IW Biscuit Breakfast Melts

5% per case Corazona’s HeartBar Oatmeal Squares

VITA COCO – ORDER THROUGH AUTHORIZED DPSG ONLY

Deal Date: THROUGH INDEFINITE

Rebates Products

$1.00 per case 11.1 oz. Vita Coco– ALL FLAVORS

$1.50 per case 17 oz. Vita Coco – ALL FLAVORS

WELCH’S FRUIT SNACKS

Deal Date: THROUGH INDEFINITE

Rebates Products

$2.88 per case Buddy Bears, Sour Jacks, Nuclear SQWorms, Sun Maid Chocolate covered Raisins and Fisher Chocolate covered Peanuts.

$1.44 per case Welch’s School Items – ALL FLAVORS

$0.96 per case Welch’s Fruit Snacks – ALL FLAVORS except school items

$0.96 per case Gummi Factory – ALL FLAVORS

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