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**Luminaries in the fields of concessions, business development, and work with the blind are set for Lone Star BLAST, November 18-21.**

**Colorado Springs, Colorado (August 7, 2014):** Today, the National Association of Blind Merchants is releasing its preliminary agenda for Business Leadership and Superior Training, BLAST, 2014 to be held at the Austin Renaissance hotel. The conference begins with State Agency Training at 8:00 a.m. Tuesday, November 18, and wraps up with a special session on the National Federation of the Blind Entrepreneur Initiative Friday morning, November 21. Training for blind entrepreneurs will begin on Tuesday, November 18 at 1:30 p.m. (See details below and act before September 2nd to take advantage of early bird registration rates).

The highly anticipated, upward mobility continuing education event will feature Mr. Mark Riccobono, newly elected President of the National Federation of the Blind, during the Leadership Breakfast, Wednesday, November 19.

The organization has announced that immediate past President of the National Federation of the Blind, Marc Maurer, has agreed to present, “Reflecting the Flame, Passing the Torch” during a special lunch-and-learn, Thursday, November 20.

The group has already announced that Janet LaBreck, Commissioner, Rehabilitation Services Administration, United States Department of Education, will present on Wednesday morning, November 19 as a part of Upward Mobility Training Session 1. Along with the RSA Commissioner, this training session will feature Tina Ballard, Executive Director, US AbilityOne Commission; Terry Smith, Business Opportunity Specialist, National Federation of the Blind Entrepreneur Initiative; Catriona Macdonald, President, Linchpin Strategies, LLC, Policy Advisor, National Council of State Agencies for the Blind.

This year’s awards banquet, Thursday evening, November 20, will be headlined by performer and motivational speaker Scott MacIntyre. As the first blind finalist on American Idol, MacIntyre was called “an inspiration to the entire world through your commitment, through your talent” by former judge Paula Abdul.  In his new book *By Faith, Not By Sight* he writes about how he learned to face his fears and overcome any obstacle to realize his dreams.

During the banquet, Dr. Marc Maurer, NABM President Nicky Gacos, and Scott MacIntyre will hand out the first-ever Entrepreneur of Excellence awards. These prestigious awards are given to blind operators who have completed the prescribed business education curriculum from the Hadley Forsythe Center for Employment and Entrepreneurship.

Expanding opportunities for blind women in Randolph-Sheppard remains a priority focus at BLAST. Thursday afternoon breakout sessions will feature leadership development curriculum designed specifically for women entrepreneurs.

Tuesday, November 18, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., back by popular demand, will be our second State Attorney General Training as well as our second BEP staff training. We will be conducting a full day of training. In the morning, the attorneys and BEP staff will be together. In the afternoon, the attorneys will break out and continue training on vocational rehabilitation issues. The BEP staff will continue to receive training on Randolph-Sheppard issues. Those attending will need to plan on arriving Monday because we start at 8:00 AM Tuesday. If you are a state attorney or BEP staff person, this training is included in your BLAST registration. National Association of Blind Merchants is proud again this year to partner with the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind to provide a forum for exclusive agency training curriculum.

NFBEI is currently seeking 30 protégés to join our new BLAST entrepreneur mentoring program. Protégés will benefit from vocational and leadership skills training and build meaningful career-specific mentorships with the successful blind entrepreneurs. Candidates must be over the age of eighteen, have self-employment as a career goal, be deemed legally blind by a physician or accredited agency, and able to fulfill the training and required attendance at the BLAST Conference this November 2014. Candidates need not have Randolph-Sheppard as a career goal. Young adults in transition or blind or visually impaired candidates with career goals in the area of entrepreneurship will benefit greatly from the leadership training and mentors found at BLAST. Aspiring entrepreneurs and vocational rehabilitation counselors can get complete information by calling 866-543-6808.

This year, BLAST training seminars for blind entrepreneurs will begin on Tuesday afternoon, November 18 from 1:30 p.m. until 3:00 p.m. Additional breakout sessions will run from 3:30 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. Training sessions will include Tom Chepey, owner/operator The Chuckwagon Café, session one “Daily Lunch Plate Specials, Planning, and Cost”, session two “Offering Healthy Choices That Work and Make Money”; The Vending Doctor, Gary Nelson, CEO Liberty Bell Vending; “Keeping Score, Building Business, Practical Hints,” United States Small Business Administration. Additional curriculum is being added, so be sure to check final agenda for continuing education relevant to you. BLAST Welcoming Reception will take place that evening from 6:30 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. sponsored by Coca-Cola. Registered BLAST attendees will enjoy heavy hors d’oeuvres and cash bar. **Note: Remember that your name badge must be worn during all BLAST activities. It is your prepaid ticket which shows that you have registered**. Following the Tuesday evening, November 18, Welcoming Reception and following the Wednesday afternoon Trade show Reception, there will be plenty of time for BLAST participants to enjoy the night life of Austin.

In addition to NFB President Riccobono, the Leadership Breakfast, Wednesday morning, November 19 at 7:30 a.m. will feature other leaders of significance to the blind entrepreneur community.

We are very proud to announce the addition of Laura Stack, The Productivity Pro, to our General Session lineup, 9:00 a.m. Wednesday, November 19. Laura uses both high energy and high content to educate, entertain, and motivate audiences to produce greater results in the workplace. Laura Stack is America’s Premier Expert in Productivity. That high-impact General Session will also include Andy Vuko, Regional Vice President, Arbonne Independent Consultant, and a report from Eric Dell, Senior Vice President, Government Affairs, National Automatic Merchandising Association. We will also hear an address from Lori Salow Marshall, Founder, CEO, BYNDL, “How Mobility Will Change Unattended Retail”.

Wednesday afternoon, November 19, taste and touch the latest and greatest exhibits of business products, food, and technology; sponsored by the National Association of Blind Merchants. This product and services showcase will also feature experts who can answer your specific questions about accessible technology, legal issues, partnering for military and other government contracts, social security, vending, marketing, financial planning, and more. Go to the show! Many food service, vending, and access technology exhibitors will have extraordinary specials available only for this tradeshow. Please support those companies that support the blind merchants of Randolph-Sheppard. Many companies will have drawings for cash, gifts and products. Register at each booth. Stay for the reception. (Note: Your BLAST registration name badge is your ticket into the trade show.)

Thursday, November 20, will be a big training day. The morning General Session will be anchored by a return engagement from Michael Hingson, President, The Michael Hingson Group, Inc. He is back by popular demand to teach “You Can Control Your Own Destiny.” This powerful session will also include a keynote address from Nationally sought after author and trainer Kevin Adams, “Leadership is not for Whiners.” The session will also include a report from Deanna Jones, Randolph-Sheppard Program Specialist, Rehabilitation Services Administration; Scott C. LaBarre Esq., President, National Association of Blind Lawyers; Ben White, President and CEO, Vending Insights; and Colleen Wunderlich, Director, Hadley Forsythe Center for Entrepreneurship.

But wait! There is more! Prior to a power-packed afternoon of breakout training seminars, Thursday the 20th features the previously mentioned lunch-and-learn with presentations from John Murn, CEO, RSA Buying Group; Nicky Gacos, President, National Association of Blind Merchants; and Marc Maurer, immediate past President, National Federation of the Blind.

Thursday afternoon training sessions will include “Vending 101, Doing the Basics One More Time to ensure success”, Gary Nelson, CEO, Liberty Bell Vending with additional vending industry experts. Thursday afternoon training will also feature, “Leadership Through a Heart of Service”, Jim Glick, Training Specialist, National Association of Blind Merchants; “Health, Wealth, and Wisdom, There is Profit in That Thar Network”, Andy Vuko, Regional Vice President, Arbonne Independent Consultant.

Both Tuesday afternoon, November 18 and Thursday afternoon, November 20, will feature practical education on the value of social media and access technologies to profit blind entrepreneurs.

Thursday evening, enjoy a pre-banquet meet and greet reception with Dr. Marc Maurer; American Idol star Scott MacIntyre; Best Selling Author of the acclaimed book *Thunder Dog* Mike Hingson, and other notables. The Awards Banquet will take place at 7:00 p.m., Master of Ceremonies Mike Hooks, Director, Business Enterprises of Texas.

The conference will culminate with a bonus session Friday morning at 9:00 a.m.; “The National Federation of the Blind Entrepreneur Initiative; What It Is, Why It Is Necessary, and How You Give It Power.”

Act now to take advantage of early-bird registration rates. Again this year, BLAST registration will be $200. If you register prior to September 2, 2014 you will be charged only $160. Remember that the BLAST registration fee covers BLAST activities, excluding out of hotel tours or events which may be offered. Your registration fee covers training, training materials, Welcoming Reception, Leadership Breakfast, Trade show and Trade show Reception, the lunch-and-learn as well as the banquet to be held on Thursday evening November 20. Register now at [www.blindmerchants.org](http://www.blindmerchants.org). For questions or assistance with hotel reservations or Lone Star BLAST registrations please call 866-543-6808.

Room reservations at the luxurious Austin Renaissance, 9721 Arboretum Blvd. Austin, TX 78759, are available now at the unbelievable rate of $129 per night plus applicable taxes. Rooms are available from Sunday, November 16 through Saturday, November 22, 2014. Reservations should be made online at [www.blindmerchants.org](http://www.blindmerchants.org). You may also phone the hotel at (800) 468-3571. Explain to the agent that you are registering for BLAST under the National Association of Blind Merchants group.

Austin is the home of the most diverse and lively music scene in the world. NABM invites you to come for the high-caliber training, networking, and Texas hospitality.

**Think national training! Think opportunity! Think Austin, Texas! Think BLAST!**