

National Disability Employment Awareness Month launches at WPAFB

by LaWanda York
Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled

9/24/2008 - **ARLINGTON, Va.** -- To kick off National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the Chairperson of the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, visited Wright-Patterson Air Force Base Sept. 19 - 20 to donate a commemorative brick at the Wright "Flyer" Memorial and to participate in the 12th Annual Air Force Marathon.

Andrew D. Houghton, a Presidential appointee who heads the independent federal agency, decided to enter the marathon to show his personal appreciation of the dedication and support Wright-Patterson has given to the AbilityOne Program for decades.

"Wright-Patterson's support of the AbilityOne Program is an example of dedication to Americans with disabilities," Houghton said. "The base's continuous support of the program allows people with disabilities the opportunity to show both their abilities and capabilities while providing the base with quality services."

The Committee administers the AbilityOne Program, which creates employment opportunities for over 42,000 people who are blind or have other severe disabilities through more than 600 local nonprofit organizations nationwide, Puerto Rico and Guam.

Houghton began the kick-off activities with a visit to The Office Runway, Wright-Patterson's base supply center Friday morning. Operated by Cincinnati Association for the Blind, the store features many items provided by AbilityOne-participating nonprofit agencies, including office and janitorial supplies and computer accessories. The Office Runway provides the program with an additional distribution channel for its products, and Wright-Patterson AFB customers with a convenient way to obtain AbilityOne products they have come to trust.

"I am very impressed with the store; it rivals any retail office store in layout and product availability," Houghton said. "It was great to learn that The Office Runway's AbilityOne product sales are approximately \$1 million per year."

After the visit to the base supply store, Houghton proceeded to the headquarters building of the Air Force Materiel Command where he presented Gen. Bruce Carlson, Commander, with an AbilityOne Program brick to be placed at the Wright "Flyer" Memorial on the base. Houghton said the commemorative brick was a way for the program to thank the Air Force base for its longstanding support.

Joining him with remarks of appreciation were James Barone, Chairman of the Board of NISH, Robert Chamberlin, CEO of NISH, and Steve Brice, Chief Financial Officer of National Industries for the Blind (NIB.) NIB and NISH are two national nonprofits designated by the Committee for Purchase to help allocate federal contracts and provide technical assistance under the AbilityOne Program.

"We do not support the AbilityOne Program out of charity, we support it for the superior services the people provide us," Carlson said. "The people who work under the program are not just employees, they are our friends. They are part of the Air Force family."

Houghton's next visit was to the AbilityOne employees who perform custodial work in the headquarters under a contract held by Goodwill/Easter Seals of Miami Valley. Through his own experiences, he encouraged the employees to continue living the American Dream by reaching for what others may say is unobtainable.

"Twenty-two years ago, while riding a motorcycle, I hit a palm tree and lost the use of my legs," Houghton said. "I did not let my disability prevent me from showing people how capable I am, and look where it has brought me. I am a presidential appointee for the Committee that provides employment opportunities for people like you and me."

Employees proudly told Houghton what they do to keep the headquarters building clean and in working order. They were proud to tell him how many years they have been working for the Air Force through the AbilityOne Program.

His final visit was to TAC Industries, Inc., in Springfield, Ohio. TAC Industries, Inc., provides employment opportunities for individuals to develop marketable skills by completing contract work in partnership with the government and other industries.

"Put Ability to Work for You" is the official 2008 theme for the AbilityOne Program's observance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which is observed in October nationwide. For more information about the AbilityOne Program and its activities celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month across the country, go to www.AbilityOne.gov.



General Bruce Carlson, Air Force Materiel Command commander, and Andrew D. Houghton, chair, Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, unveil the AbilityOne brick to be placed at the Wright "Flyer" Memorial at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. The Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled is an independent federal agency that administers the AbilityOne Program, creating job opportunities for persons who are blind or have other severe disabilities. The Committee's primary means of achieving its employment goal is through government purchases of supplies and services from nonprofit agencies employing such individuals. (U.S. Air Force photo)

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