

## Back to Work Rested and Healthy Thanks to Donor-Supported People First Fund



*Firoz and Humera Pathan are thankful to IFB solutions and the People First Fund*

Firoz and Humera Pathan are so glad to be back to work! The couple faced a terrible ordeal -- both battling COVID-19 at the same time. Thanks to support of IFB Solutions' People First Fund, they came through it with flying colors!

"The Peoples First Fund helped to take away some of the financial stress of being sick," Humera said. "The IFB medical staff called us twice a week to check in on us and offer

advice and support. We felt we were in good hands."

Firoz and Humera were both teachers in India, but during the recession in 2010, they decided to come to America. They had relatives in San Jose. Firoz, who is blind, was recovering from a hip replacement at the time. After five months with no job offers, they had drained most of their savings and didn't know where else to turn.

When Firoz learned about a possible job opportunity at IFB Solutions, he was hopeful. "They were so kind. They knew the cost of flying across the country to interview would be a burden, so they paid my way," he said. "After the interview, they offered me a job sewing. I said, 'Might you have a job for my wife, too?'"

Humera was hired as well and soon transitioned to training employees who are blind or visually impaired. And that was the start of a new chapter in their lives. "For us, it was like 'the American Dream' come true!" Humera said. "We were so excited to tell our relatives the news."

Today, when Firoz and Humera look back over the incredible challenges they faced, they're amazed at what they've been able to accomplish. They were in their 50s, dealing with blindness and health challenges. "But we had each other," Humera said. The couple has enjoyed 35 years of marriage.

Both Firoz and Humera became US citizens in 2015. "We learned to live in a different country with a different culture and language," Humera said. "But we couldn't have done it without the support of this caring community."

# The Dignity of Work

Randy Buckner, Vice President of Operations Support



Manufacturing is in Randy Buckner's blood. The Asheville native spent years honing his skills in manufacturing and plant management. He had even started a business with his brother. Eager to advance his knowledge and experience, he decided to take a side job.

Randy submitted his resume for a job opening at Industries for the Blind (now IFB Solutions) and was immediately scheduled for an interview. "I'd interviewed hundreds of people for my family businesses," he said, "but this was my first job interview!" When he took a tour and watched employees who were blind and visually impaired work, he was very impressed. "Right then and there, I fell in love with the organization!"

This "side job" was only supposed to be a "stepping stone," but it soon became Randy's full-time passion. He closed his own business and never looked back. That was 28 years ago.

"My family taught me to have good work ethic. If you want to eat, you work for it. You support yourself," Randy said. "Many of our employees had never been given an opportunity to work. But they don't want to sit home and try to live off of a government handout. They want to contribute to their families and America through the dignity of work." Transportation is an added challenge. "Some travel by bus more than an hour each way every day but working is important to them."

Under Randy's watch, the IFB Asheville facility has grown from 30 to 130 employees, and most of the work is done by people with vision loss.

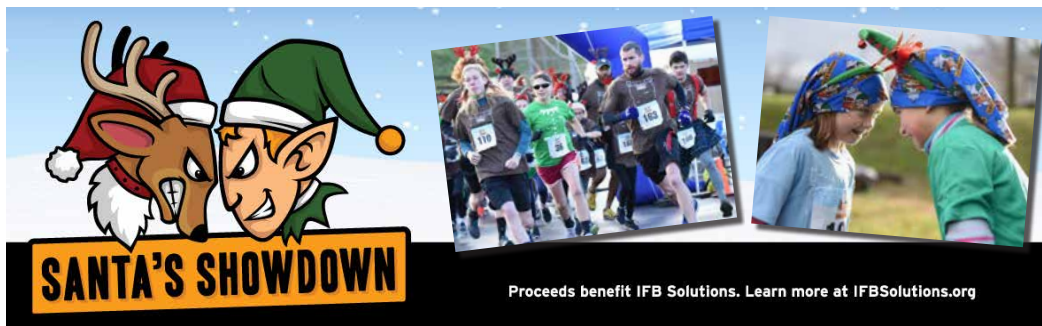
Randy was recently promoted to Vice President of Operations Support. In his new role, he'll help standardize the Quality program throughout all IFB locations, including Winston-Salem, Little Rock, and Puerto Rico. He'll also oversee engineering, handle contracts, and help expand product lines through Manufacturing and Development.

"With today's technologies and the right adaptations and training, people with vision loss can do just about anything a sighted person can do. We like to say, 'Our mission is working!' And I'm as passionate about our mission today as I was 28 years ago!"



*Fire-resistant coveralls for jet airplane fuel handlers will provide 25 sewing jobs for people with vision loss.*

*"I'm excited to bring these opportunities to people and help change their lives." Randy Buckner.*



## **RUN THE TRADITION!**

**Santa's 2nd Showdown 5K  
in Western North Carolina**  
5k runners once again dressed as Elves and Reindeer will again compete to establish North Pole supremacy for the coming year!

**Saturday, Dec. 5, Recreation Park  
in East Asheville, NC**

**Not in Asheville? Run Virtually!**

**[www.IFBShowdownRace.com](http://www.IFBShowdownRace.com)**

# Building Excellence - Shelco, LLC

As one of the largest and most respected privately held independent general contractors in the Southeast, Shelco is not just a builder in the community. The company's leadership makes sure Shelco employees are part of every community they serve. The team takes their mission of "building excellence for our customers, employees, and communities" to heart, staying highly active in local, state, and national not-for-profit organizations.

Over the years, Shelco's steadfast attention to detail has helped IFB Solutions grow training, employment, and services for people who are blind through the completion of several critical infrastructure projects. Our Tracy's Little Red Schoolhouse, the independent learning center for children who are blind on IFB's Winston-Salem campus, is a shining example of Shelco's commitment. Most of the great work Shelco does happens behind the scenes, but the company has been helping IFB remain America's leader in building life-changing opportunities for people who are blind for many years.

Leo Stepansky, a Senior Vice President at Shelco, has been an active IFB Solutions' board member and member and leader of various board committees for years. Leo has made sure that Shelco remains a major philanthropic partner of IFB. His personal contributions are a testament to the company's support and commitment to let employees get deeply involved with the causes they love.

"Shelco and I choose to support IFB Solutions because we truly believe

IFB does a stellar job in fulfilling its mission to not only provide employment for visually impaired individuals, but to create purpose in their lives by arming them with the ability to contribute to the communities in which they live," said Leo.

Shelco was the first for-profit entity that stepped up to help fund IFB Solutions' People First Fund in spring of 2020. The People First Fund has provided support to all IFB employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Shelco's generous gift inspired many others in the community to donate and help sustain jobs for people who are blind directly impacted by COVID-19.

Shelco is humble in their approach and never seeks public recognition for their incredible gifts. But IFB Solutions' Board of Directors and employees believe that Shelco deserves to be celebrated. Thank you Shelco for your years of service to people who are blind!

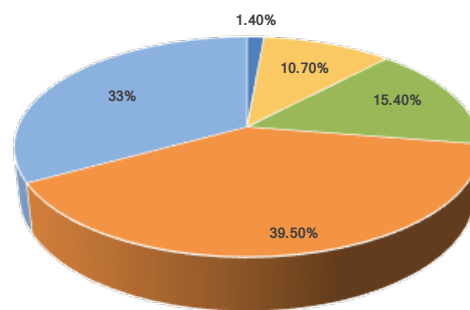


*IFB Solutions Chair of the Board Mark Doughton (far left) and IFB Solutions President and CEO David Horton (far right) present Shelco's Mike Rhodes and Leo Stepansky with the Outstanding Business in Philanthropy Award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals Triad Chapter and the National Philanthropy Day event.*



*Tracy's Little Red Schoolhouse then and now – thank you to Shelco, LLC.*

## CONTRIBUTIONS SPENDING - FY2020



- Support Groups for Employees
- Community Low Vision Centers
- S.E.E. After School, Camps, Activities
- Employment Support (training, transportation, medical, COVID-19 relief, food assistance, upward mobility)
- Equipment and Infrastructure

**Text IFB2021 to 41444 to support!**

# Donors Close the Gaps for Children with Vision Impairments

Every child deserves a good education. But some things aren't covered in the school curriculum, especially for students who are blind or visually impaired. Thanks to the generosity of our caring community, Charlotte-area children are getting the extra help they need.

Kelly Long is a teacher at IFB Solutions Student Enrichment Experience (S.E.E.) After School Program. She's also certified in occupational therapy and helps people with physical, sensory or cognitive challenges address their emotional, social, and physical needs. Kelly weaves some of her professional techniques into fun activities for the students in the S.E.E. Program.

"You could say that a school-aged child's 'job' involves learning through play," Kelly explained. "Sharing toys and taking turns on play equipment develops social skills. Doing arts and crafts or cooking helps them develop fine motor skills and learn independent living skills. We create activities around students' personal interests, so we're building the skills they need to accomplish something they want to do."

Without vision, it can be hard to read facial expressions and pick up on social cues. Overly helpful friends and family unintentionally foster dependence. S.E.E. gives students a chance to forge friendships with peers who face the same vision challenges. Doing brain-teasers and thinking through difficult situations together fosters teamwork.



*Kelly instructing a S.E.E. student in independent learning skills*

Kelly's two daughters attend the program with her. Carly, 12, is visually impaired. She travels independently without assistance but learned to use a white cane from an orientation and mobility specialist at the S.E.E. Program. The navigation skills will come in handy as she gets older and ventures out more on her own.

Older sister Clara, 16, volunteers for the program, leading the students in singing, and helps them compose songs using an app. "Clara's a teen role model who knows what songs are popular with the younger kids," Kelly said. Clara has recently taught herself braille so she can help students with their homework.

Thanks to donors' support for the S.E.E. After School Program and monthly weekend activities, students with visual impairments are bridging the gap to independence!



Thank YOU for making our inaugural walkathon a success! Together we raised over \$40,000 for youth who are blind or visually impaired. Want to keep the momentum going? Sign up as a monthly donor here: <https://ifbsolutions.org/donate/>

- \$10/month – sends two S.E.E. kids whitewater rafting
- \$20/month – funds our annual S.E.E. Youth Bowling Tournament
- \$40/month - funds our VI Field Day, providing a day of adaptive sports for kids who are blind:

**START GIVING THE GIFT OF INDEPENDENCE ALL YEAR LONG TODAY!**