



FALL 2022

# IMPACT

Building life-changing opportunities for people who are blind.

## A Legacy of Life-changing Opportunities IFB's David Horton



**David Horton's favorite part about his work as President and CEO of IFB Solutions is spending time at the organization's three manufacturing facilities.** In fact, the lively leader has struck up many friendships throughout the years both with employees and those receiving care through IFB's low vision centers.

Whether he's chatting with workers on the manufacturing floor, helping with setup at a benefit event or strategizing the company's next big move, Horton and his hands-on approach to leadership have played an integral role at IFB for the last 21 years.

Late last year, Horton announced his plans to retire at the end of 2022 — in a sense ending an era at IFB, where Horton has held the leading role since 2008.

"It's amazing how one day, you're graduating high school, and suddenly you turn around and you're 60 years old. Time really flies," Horton said. "And I still have a lot of things I want to do in my life.

"But IFB is in my blood," he continued. "And even though I may not be here every day, I'm going to show up as much as I can to support this great mission and do what I can to help. We've been around as an organization for 85 years, and I want to lay the groundwork to continue this amazing mission well beyond my retirement."

First joining the IFB team on Aug. 6, 2001, Horton oversaw the company's finances as its controller. Upon taking his first tour of the Winston-Salem facility, "I was taken aback when I stepped out onto that floor," he said. "I saw people who were blind doing a magnitude of operations — all sorts of things that required incredible precision and skill — and I was just blown away.

"Now, 21 years later, I know there's nothing a person who is blind can't do," he continued. "That's one thing that really resonates with me now, when I look back on all my years here: with a bit of courage, hope and adaptive technology, there's nothing you can't do."

When Horton joined IFB, the organization employed fewer than 100 people who are blind. Organization's leadership at the time had a wealth of ideas for how to grow the

business, so they worked closely with former executive chairman Dan Boucher to hire Horton. He helped streamline the manufacturing process to improve cash flow — setting the organization up for future expansion.

"I really didn't have an inkling that I was going to be the president one day," he explained. "But I really developed a passion for the people we serve here, and I saw the way IFB was changing lives for people who are blind or visually impaired."

When Boucher retired in 2007, Horton stepped up to the role with the full support and confidence of the former director, the board, and his team. In the years that followed, Horton more than doubled IFB's sales — from \$80 million to \$200 million annually — and, more importantly, he was able to grow the company's employment to nearly 1,000 positions, with the majority held by people who are blind or visually impaired.

Unwaveringly humble about all he's helped accomplish, Horton explained: "You know, I

**"I think probably one of my biggest accomplishments is that, when I walk out on that plant floor [in Winston-Salem], I see 300 people who are my friends."**

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## Erik Cobham

Ensuring that IFB's mission continues touching lives for years to come

Pictured left to right:

Erik Cobham, LtCol USMC (Ret.),

Vice President, DOD, Avon Protection

David Horton, President and CEO, IFB Solutions



**There are not many CEOs who always put their people first, but that's the kind of leader IFB Solutions found in David Horton.**

There's never been any question in my mind that David's drive comes from a place of compassion. Every year when our annual golf tournament rolls around, David's not the CEO who sits back, holding a drink. He's out there working the event just as hard as everybody else, thanking donors and sponsors and supporting staff with whatever they need. And while that should be the case with every CEO, it's not. David truly is unique.

For 21 years, he's been committed to the success of the organization, ensuring that

IFB's mission continues touching lives for years to come — and his love for the IFB family resonates throughout the entire organization. He sets the tone, and his impact on the company's culture is evident all the way down to the newest employee.

As the incoming board chair, I understand David's passion. You can't leave IFB without feeling inspired, without being a little emotional. But, during his tenure, David's steady hand, confidence, commitment and vision of growth has allowed the organization to touch the lives of so many more people — something that few other leaders of major

organizations have done so consistently well — and that's truly something to celebrate.

When David retires at the end of this year, he will be sorely missed, and he leaves some big shoes to fill. But I'm confident that he's pointed us in the right direction. Congratulations, David, on building an amazing legacy here at IFB. I wish you a wonderful retirement, and I hope you have the satisfaction of knowing that you did it right.

*Erik E. Cobham, LtCol USMC (Ret.),*

*Vice President, DOD, Avon Protection is the incoming Board Chair for IFB Solutions.*

## STORIES OF DAVID HORTON'S CHARACTER AND SERVICE

**"In the past 10 years, IFB Solutions has received NIB's top award 12 times for growing employment for people who are blind, thanks to David's leadership, energy, and dedication. On behalf of NIB, we thank David for his years of service and commitment to the mission — he will be greatly missed."**

—KEVIN LYNCH, President and CEO, National Industries for the Blind (NIB)

**"When the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind (ALB) was in the process of due diligence prior to merging with Industries for the Blind (IFB) in Winston-Salem, it became apparent that no amount of data could replace the need to TRUST in the leadership of IFB. David Horton and Dan Boucher were wonderful and conveyed that level of trust needed. The Arkansas facility is now a thriving plant, thanks to David's leadership. He has proven worthy of our trust!"**

PATRICIA [PAT] SMITH, Ed.D., ALB Board Chair in 2014, IFB Solutions Little Rock Advisory Council Member

**"David has worked tirelessly to expand all areas of our mission from training and employment to the programs and services that we provide to the community. His leadership has helped us grow our business to record sales and kept us as the number one employer of people who are blind in the nation. We will miss David's leadership and his heart for people."**

RANDY BUCKNER, VP of Operations Support

**"David has always worked to collaborate with other organizations that have a mission of building life changing opportunities for people who are blind. He's never been interested in just ensuring IFB's success, but has been passionate about the success of people who are blind across the nation. His recent leadership with the North Carolina Job Alliance will pay dividends for years to come. New jobs will be created for people who are blind working in nonprofits across North Carolina on contracts with the state government."**

DANNY KELLY, Executive VP of Strategy and Programs



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BINGO the BAGS

SEPTEMBER 5, 2023  
LITTLE ROCK, AR



GOLF TOURNAMENT

SEPTEMBER 11-12, 2023  
ARVILLE, MO



**“My kids always knew that, around the Horton household, there’s no such thing as ‘I can’t do it.’”**

David Horton and his family

may not be the smartest person in the world, but I do work hard. And I’m proud of that. I have a sense of urgency, and I deliver people what I tell them I’m going to — or I communicate to them why I can’t. I have a lot of respect for folks, and it’s my philosophy that there’s got to be an answer to everything.”

“Sometimes it may seem like two plus two equals five,” he continued, “but if you’re willing to really dig in, it’s often not as complicated as you first thought. That was my approach when I came in as CEO: we were going to figure things out. And then we started winning.”

When asked about favorite memories throughout his years at IFB, Horton began telling story after story of employees who had overcome what seemed like insurmountable obstacles — employees with whom he’d developed great friendships and cared about deeply. As he spoke of former employees who have since passed away, his voice grew quiet with emotion. And, recalling the time his staff attempted to train him, blindfolded, on sewing machinery, he laughed and said: “I was so afraid I was going to sew my fingers together and be on YouTube.”

In just over two decades, “I went from knowing only one person who was blind to now knowing hundreds or thousands of

**A generous philanthropic supporter of IFB programs, David often quotes his emeritus board member and now friend John Google who once told him that if one has means to help somebody and doesn’t do it, they are failing.**

people here and across the country,” he continued. “And I think probably one of my biggest accomplishments is that, when I walk out on that plant floor [in Winston-Salem], I see 300 people who are my friends. When I hear folks tell me that they’re going to miss me, I know that, even though we’re a business, we’re a business with a heart.”

After suffering a stroke in November 2020, Horton accelerated his decision to retire — though he explained his employees have been a great source of inspiration in the last two years especially, “fueling his fire” by showing him what’s possible in spite of health challenges. Ultimately, though, he hopes to start a new chapter by spending more time with his grandchildren, working on his farm and being more involved in his church, where he is an ordained minister.



Top: An avid runner, David was a regular participant of the A Brighter Path Race.

Middle: Last year, David and his team colored their hair to raise funds for S.E.E.

Bottom: David with a S.E.E. student. He shaved his hair to support a fundraiser for S.E.E. kids.

“IFB has been life-changing for me, and it’s been life-changing for my family,” he explained. “My kids always knew that, around the Horton household, there’s no such thing as ‘I can’t do it.’ ‘Can’t’ isn’t a word that’s in our vocabulary. And while it’s been incredibly fulfilling to know we’ve touched so many lives with our work, everyone that’s come through our doors has touched my life in just as many ways.”



David Horton greets Anastasia Powell and husband Brian Price at the Fireside Fundraiser Gala in 2019. David shaved his head (again!) for this fundraiser for IFB's Student Enrichment Experience Program.

**"For the past 17 years, I observed the drive, determination, and loyalty David Horton has for IFB Solutions. I am grateful to work for a company that has a president who is a compassionate leader and does not mind getting in the trenches with his team."**

– ANASTASIA POWELL, Corporate Culture and Internal Communications Manager

**"Due to my blindness and lack of family assistance, I wasn't personally able to meet the requirements of participating in my home's construction through Habitat for Humanity. I will forever remember how, without hesitation, Mr. Horton put down his CEO hat, rolled up his sleeves, and volunteered with Habitat to construct the walls of my home. Every day I walk through my home I am reminded of his generous effort towards making my dream of home ownership come true."**

–ALANNA RICHARDSON, Packager, Staples Department

**"David is the real deal! Since the merger, our employee retirement program has improved and we have gained additional benefits, including more PTO time than we've ever had. David definitely has a vision for increasing blind employment opportunities and awareness in our community."**

–RON CLEMENTS, Production Assistant, Paper Department

**"Under David's leadership, we have added two new production lines in Little Rock - IWOL and EWOL - which has created a 70% growth in blind employment and a 59% growth overall!"**

–SHERREE DEWITT, Human Resources Manager

**"Mr. Horton is an open, authentic, and humble person who leads and listens to his team. His innate talent for making others feel like they matter captivated me when I had an opportunity to spend time with him at an NIB conference. It was clear that IFB's performance is the reflection of his dedication and love for his work. I wish Mr. Horton the greatest success in retirement."**

–DIANA SOTO, Sewing Machine Operator, ACS (Army Combat Shirt) Department

**"David Horton has a passion for Low Vision Services. At IFB Little Rock, we have been a part of changing many lives through CLVC. Thank you, David Horton, for being the catalyst for change in empowering people who are blind or visually impaired in Arkansas as well as North Carolina! You Rock!"**

–TONI FRASER, Low Vision Associate

**"In May 2007, I had just recently moved from the Dominican Republic and was searching for an opportunity to work in manufacturing in Winston-Salem, NC. After exhausting all possibilities of finding a job and losing hope, I received a call from David Horton that changed the direction of my life forever. 17 years later, now serving as Director of Engineering and Manufacturing, I have had the pleasure of seeing IFB Solutions grow exponentially guided by David Horton's leadership."**

–PEDRO ROJAS, Director of Engineering and Manufacturing



David Horton,  
President and CEO

