



SPRING 2023

IMPACT

Building life-changing opportunities for people who are blind.

Helping Children Thrive: Partnership with Prevent Blindness NC

SHONN REDMOND



There's no more appropriate time to stop in at one of IFB Solutions' Community Low Vision Centers than during Low Vision Awareness Month this February – and, for those in the Winston-Salem area, that means a visit with Shonn Redmond.

As the center's technical support coordinator, Shonn helps people find assistive technology and other devices suited to their individual needs, allowing them to regain independence in day-to-day life. Born with glaucoma and living with low vision himself, Shonn personally tests every device in the CLVC inventory, ensuring that each product meets the center's high standards for quality, practicality and ease of use.

"We understand that being diagnosed with low vision is concerning, but we really want to help people get back to doing the things that they love," he explained. "The Community Low Vision Center can simulate your daily routine to guide you through any

low vision needs that may arise, from finding the perfect magnifier to figuring out how to watch your favorite TV shows again. No matter what vision you have, there is a product available for you."

Shonn has also been integral to the longstanding partnership between IFB and Prevent Blindness North Carolina, visiting schools in communities across northeastern North Carolina that lack access to vision care and assistive services. Several times a year in the spring and fall, he and CLVC ophthalmologist Dr. Dexter Street bring their mobile clinic to schools in remote districts, conducting eye exams on students that struggle with vision to identify and diagnose potential impairments, then offering solutions for students, families and teachers moving forward.

"These are areas that do not have access to doctors within 40 miles," Shonn said. "And I understand how it is for kids to have low vision in school. You have to work a lot harder than most, and it often takes a lot more time to get through things."

While IFB conducts the program's eye exams and provides glasses for students, if needed, Prevent Blindness N.C. provides training for local school screeners and serves as a liaison between IFB and the schools' nurses. According to Prevent Blindness N.C., more than 25,000 preschoolers and close to 350,000 school-age children have visual problems in North Carolina alone — and it's

important to catch these issues early on. When children are better able to see lessons on a whiteboard or read words in a schoolbook, they gain confidence and are more likely to participate in class.

After a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the partnership was revived in 2022, allowing IFB to provide 21 students in the Roanoke Rapids and Halifax school districts — children who could otherwise not access care — with eye exams and glasses. Any students that are identified as having a visual impairment can then visit with Shonn to pick prescription glasses or learn about other devices that fit their needs, whether it's something for school, home or play.

"I'm a big advocate for kids learning to use assistive products as early as possible to make their lives easier," both in the immediate future and further down the road, Shonn explained. "It would've made my life a lot easier if these products had been around back then."

From experience, Shonn said he knows that even teachers with the best intentions sometimes forget to make accommodations for visually impaired students — or, perhaps, the accommodations they make don't work for that particular child. Thanks to a significant donation made in 2022, honoring Ronald G. Sherrill's memory (see story on Page 3), these types of devices are now more affordable than ever to those in need.

"This donation was very needed in the community," Shonn said. "Not only does it help supplement the cost of doctor visits at the CLVC, but also the cost of some of the higher end products we offer. If someone can't afford a device that would help them with work or school, we can now offer it to them at a lower cost."

Ultimately, Shonn said he's glad to be part of an organization that helps children thrive in a way he would've appreciated as a child himself. "It's a big, emotional moment for parents to watch their kid reading for the first time," whether it's thanks to a pair of prescription glasses or with help from an assistive device, he said. And once they get the help they need, "they start catching up on work a lot easier, because they're not struggling just to see the assignment. They can spend less time on schoolwork and more time just being a kid."

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BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

DAN KELLY

From an impressive gold medal-winning Paralympic swimmer to CEO of IFB Solutions, Dan Kelly is living proof that the sky's the limit for people with differing abilities. The first person who is blind to lead the nonprofit in its 85-year history, Dan took the reins from now-retired CEO David Horton at the end of 2022, beginning a new era for an organization that employs more than 330 people who are blind or visually impaired.

Dan, who has been blind since childhood, first joined IFB in July 2007 as the organization's general manager of operations, having previously worked for National Industries for the Blind in Arlington, Virginia. After a series of promotions throughout the years, with his most recent role being executive vice president of strategy and programs, Dan was announced as IFB's next President and CEO.

"There's a phrase that I love that's pretty common in the disability community: Nothing about us without us. I think that's really a key phrase as we make this transition," Dan said. And with a long career that's been "100 percent focused on creating jobs," he said he feels primed to continue his predecessor's legacy of increasing opportunities for people who are blind or visually impaired, both in IFB's home communities and beyond.

"Everything we do is to create that next job for people who are blind, whether it's making gear for the Army at our manufacturing facilities or through our Workforce Services division, where we place people into call center operations in a work-from-home model," he continued. "We're a very diverse organization, but our unifying message is that we're going to do whatever it takes to put another person to work and reduce the 70% unemployment statistic" among the community of those who are blind and visually impaired.

After receiving a Master of Business Administration from George Mason



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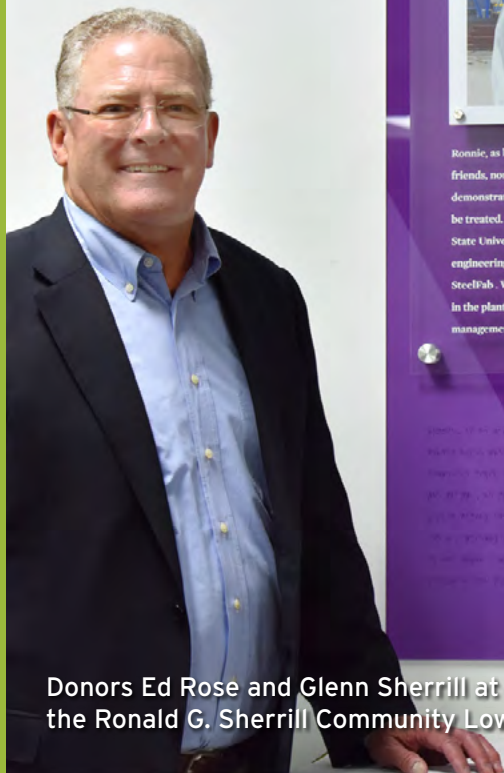
University, Dan continued seeking opportunities for higher education, further improving his skills through the National Industries for the Blind's business leadership programs, provided by the University of Virginia Darden School of Business.

"I have always been passionate about this type of work" and about the mission of IFB, in particular, he said. "It's an honor to be the first blind individual in this role, and though it's hard to beat all that David Horton brought to this organization and its employees, I hope I bring passion and strategic focus that sets IFB up for future growth and success."

In his personal life, Dan enjoys spending time with his family — his wife, Karen, and two children, a son and daughter, ages 13 and 15, respectively. And, in addition to becoming the next CEO of the nation's largest employer of people who are blind or visually impaired, Dan holds one other claim to fame: From 1989 to 2002, "I had the tremendous honor to travel internationally as part of the U.S. Paralympic swim team — to Barcelona in 1992, Atlanta in '96, Sydney, Australia in 2000 — gathering up five gold, seven silver and five bronze medals for the U.S. over a 13 year career. To be standing on a platform as the prime minister of Australia puts a gold medal around your neck, while the U.S. National Anthem plays — to represent your country at that level of competitions was just incredible."

As he continues transitioning into this new role over the next few months, Dan said, above all, he hopes that the public takeaway from his leadership position is that people who are blind are capable of achieving anything that they want to achieve.

"There's no reason why a person who is blind couldn't become the president of any organization," he said. "But I hope that the community sees my success as the organization's success too — in that we are continuing to expand opportunities for people who are blind and breaking that glass ceiling for people with disabilities."



Donors Ed Rose and Glenn Sherrill at the renaming of the Ronald G. Sherrill Community Low Vision Center.



LIVING BY THE GOLDEN RULE: Ronald G. Sherrill

If you've visited IFB Solutions' Winston-Salem Community Low Vision Center in the last year, you may have glimpsed a new name in high-contrast print above the center's double doors. In the lobby, Ronald G. Sherrill's portrait smiles at visitors from a commemorative Brailled plaque.

For nearly 40 years, Ronald — better known as Ronnie to friends, family and colleagues — served as the chairman and CEO of Steelfab, a Charlotte, North Carolina, business founded by his father in 1955.

"He was a very hard worker, strong when he needed to be," said Ronnie's son, Glenn Sherrill. "But he really lived by the golden rule: Treat people like you want to be treated. He was kind and witty — a fun person to be around."

Though he was nearsighted his entire life, Ronnie's vision drastically changed in his mid-50s, after a series of detached retinas left him blind in one eye.

Despite the challenges, "he never complained; he never felt sorry for himself," said Ed Rose, one of Ronnie's longest and closest friends. "I've never had the pleasure of knowing anybody with a more positive attitude in my life — about business, about life, about people. He loved being able to help people in whatever way he could."

Ronnie passed away in 2021 at age 72, and it wasn't long before Ed hatched a plan to honor his friend's legacy.

Ed was first introduced to IFB through his company, Shelco, a construction business founded in Winston-Salem, which has worked with IFB on various projects throughout the last 20-25 years. Inspired by the organization's mission, Ed became a regular donor. He still fondly remembers calling Ronnie several years back to ask if he'd like to contribute to transportation costs for children in IFB's S.E.E. program in Charlotte. Ronnie immediately jumped on board, ready to fund multiple vans himself, if needed. Ed laughed while thinking back to the memory, as he had only been asking for partial funding of one van.

"After Ronnie passed, I got a call from another one of my very best friends, Mark Doughton, the former chair of IFB's board," Ed continued, "and he shared with me how much money IFB needed to complete the services expansion program at the Winston-Salem Community Low Vision Center. I thought, 'What a great way to help IFB and also honor Ronnie.'"

Ed called Ronnie's son, Glenn, and pitched the idea.

"He said: 'Hey, I want to take you up to Winston-Salem to meet with IFB.' And, immediately, I said: 'Done. Let's do it.'" Glenn recalled. Upon entering the facility, "I was just overwhelmed. I didn't know IFB existed at the time. So, to walk through that facility and see over 200 people who are blind or visually impaired hard at work in just this one location alone — talking to them and seeing how these jobs IFB created for them saved their lives — it

just really resonated with me. It was something my dad would've loved to have supported."

With approval from the Sherrill family, including Ronnie's wife, Paulette, and his brother, Don, and with support from additional friends and corporate donors, IFB's Winston-Salem clinic reopened on April 27, 2022 as the Ronald G. Sherrill Community Low Vision Center. The name and plaque were unveiled at a dedication ceremony the same day.

Not just about the naming rights, the significant donation made by Ronnie's family and friends paved the way for life-changing opportunities in the Triad and beyond, allowing IFB to expand its financial assistance program for those receiving services through the CLVC, including help with the purchase of assistive technology and household devices, from talking watches to magnifiers.

Glenn expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to help more people in the community through his father's memory, especially those who may be experiencing life-altering vision loss later in life, just like his dad.

"He was a very, very humble man. He did not seek the spotlight whatsoever," Ed explained, adding that Ronnie may even have been a bit "embarrassed" to receive such prominent recognition. But, he continued, those who seek no recognition often deserve it the most. "If he were to look down from heaven right now and watch the people at IFB earning a living, I just know he'd open up his checkbook too."



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"I enjoy the opportunity to work with people that are coping with changes in their vision."
– Grant Weathers, Low Vision Services and Outreach Coordinator

"I appreciate the Community Low Vision Center because it has all types of devices that will help you be independent and continue your everyday life."
– Sharon Washington, CLVC staff member



"The Low Vision Center puts right at my fingertips the equipment that I need to use in my home and things that I just want. I like purchasing from the Low Vision Center because they have devices that are more suited to my needs and help me live independently as a visually impaired person."
– Pamela Barnes, Sewing Machine Operator, Little Rock, AR



Toni Fraser and Pamela Barnes

"My job has empowered me to help people who are experiencing vision loss. It is fulfilling to be able to help someone through what I live through every day."
– Toni Fraser, Low Vision Associate

