

CREATIVITY & INCLUSION

**LET'S CONNECT**

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# IMPACT

FALL 2024



**meet**

ALINA  
GARCIA  
RAVELO

**recruiting**  
HOW IFB CREATES JOBS

*empowering through*  
**innovation**



## letter from the editor

Dear readers, our mission is to create jobs and provide career pathways for people who are blind, ensuring that no one is left behind.

In this edition of our newsletter, we explore how IFB is not just creating jobs, but also empowering individuals through innovative training and adapted workstations. These tools are designed to maximize our employees' potential, allowing them to excel in roles that might otherwise seem out of reach.

Your continued support makes it possible for us to break down barriers and create meaningful, sustainable employment for people who are blind. Thank you for being a part of this vital mission.

Warm regards,

Anastasia Powell

Training new employees to use these adapted workstations is a comprehensive process, involving close collaboration between Ed's team and the training department to tailor methods to suit blind and visually impaired employees. Timothy Jones, a sewing machine operator in the Army Advanced Combat Shirt department, exemplifies this success. Refusing to let blindness hinder him, Timothy became the first blind employee at IFB to successfully run a single-needle machine for making collars. This achievement is a result of the training team's diligent efforts to convert jobs for people who are blind, and employees honest feedback and solutions which helps improve and adapt workstations for future use. "Staying informed about the latest technologies and best practices is vital, and overcoming challenges with patience and persistence is a testament to the team's dedication," explains Denesha Scales, an IFB trainer. Through these collaborative efforts and a focus on individual needs, IFB continues to empower its employees, ensuring they can work independently and productively.



Timothy Jones uses an adapted single-needle machine for making collars

Alina Garcia Ravelo inspects military-specified laser cut fabric.



## meet alina spotlight

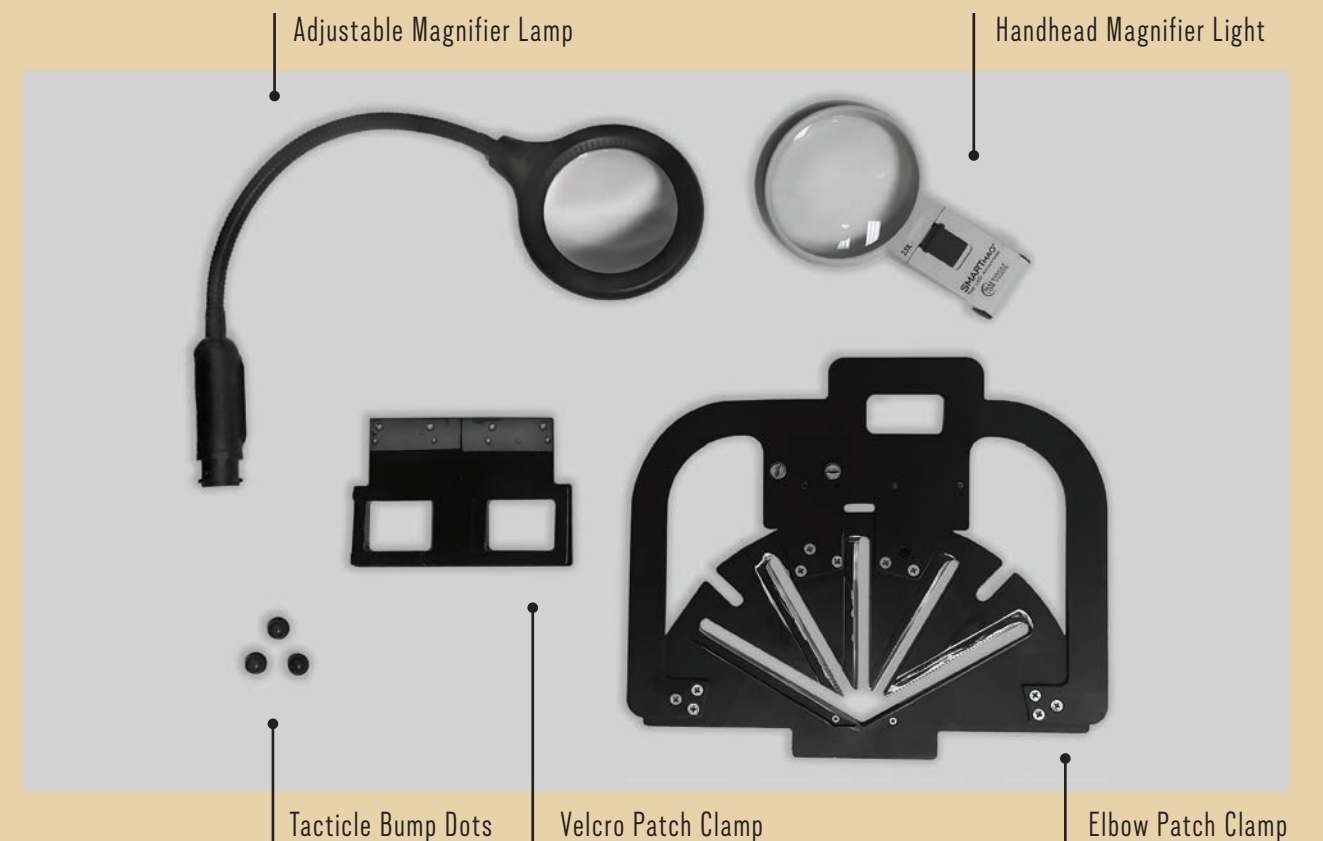
### Maximizing Opportunities for Employees Who Are Blind Military Markets Business Line

At IFB Solutions, the commitment to creating employment opportunities for people who are blind is more than a mission statement—it's a daily practice, embodied by dedicated leaders like Alina Garcia Ravelo, the first plant manager who is blind at IFB's Asheville facility. Alina's journey and the work being done in the Military Markets business line

highlight how IFB maximizes work hours and opportunities for its employees who are blind.

Alina, born with low vision, recently celebrated her three-month anniversary as the plant manager at the Asheville facility. Her journey to this position is a testament to the power of hard work

### ADAPTED WORKSTATION TOOLS



DAILY PRACTICE

INNOVATION

# empowering through innovation

## REFLECTING ON HIS WORK - ED SYKES

*It means a lot to me to create job conversions because as an engineer, it is a vital part of my job to be creative and open-minded. Nearly four out of ten of our employees who are blind have never had a job, pushing me to look beyond numbers and graphs to creating an accessible work environment that will give employees the confidence they need to do the job with quality and efficiency.*



Ed Sykes and his team collaborate on plans for a new military product.

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## TRAINING CONVERSION COSTS

### Training and Adapted Workstations

At IFB, creating job opportunities for people who are blind or visually impaired is a mission that requires creativity, innovation, and a deep commitment to inclusion. Edward Sykes, Senior Manager of Engineering and R&D, and his engineering team have been at the forefront of this effort, transforming workstations to meet the unique needs of each employee. Ed has been with IFB for nearly a decade, and his dedication to adapting jobs for the blind is unwavering.

Whether it's space for guide dogs, magnifiers, or specialized lighting, each setup is tailored to ensure

comfort and efficiency. A recent example is a 10' x 12' workstation designed for an automatic sewing machine that performs 132 bar tacks in one cycle, significantly boosting productivity by allowing the operator who is blind to load materials and manage the machine with ease. This demonstrates the commitment to reducing downtime and increasing efficiency. Key features of adapted workstations at IFB include guides and jigs for precision, push-start safety buttons for automated machines, magnifiers, bright focus lamps, and braille or bump dots on raw material bins.



and perseverance. Alina is a role model, demonstrating that with determination, the possibilities are endless. Reflecting on her role, she shares, "It means that I am part of something big, this is an opportunity for me to give back. I am legally blind and 10 years ago someone gave me the opportunity to have a job. As part of the IFB team, I am able to do the same now."

The Military Markets business line, particularly the packaging and assembly department, provides essential work opportunities outside of sewing operations, creating workforce entry points for employees who are blind or have low vision. This department boasts nearly 100% blind direct hours, with all jobs adapted to be blind-friendly. Alina ensures that every task is designed to be accessible, allowing employees to maximize their work hours effectively.

Employees sort, assemble, label, and package various products such as ice trays, glasses, and plungers. Each workstation is equipped with necessary tools and materials. A flag system allows employees to request help, and specialized tables suit individual needs. The 5S methodology—Sort, Set in order, Shine, Standardize, Sustain—is rigorously followed.

Productivity in the Military Markets is balanced with accommodations and support. The department has a daily production target, and tasks are adjusted to match the abilities of individual workers. Assistive technologies, magnifiers and guides enhance job performance, creating an environment where employees thrive.

Reflecting on success stories, Alina shares how Tony and Brandy Brake, formerly from Georgia moved to Asheville to work at IFB. Tony, who

had to quit his job as a restaurant manager due to vision loss, is now an Assembler-Packer II, while Brandy, a former stay-at-home mom, is pursuing a degree in Medical Coding and Billing. While working at IFB, Krista Hornbuckle states "getting back in the workforce and learning new skills with no vision was very scary. But the military markets department was a great way to ease me back into the workforce building my confidence to do other things."

Alina's story and the work in the Military Markets business line emphasize IFB's dedication to empowering blind individuals through meaningful employment. By creating an inclusive and supportive work environment, IFB maximizes work hours for its employees and nurtures a sense of community and accomplishment.

# recruiting

## How IFB Creates Jobs for People Who Are Blind

In a world where employment opportunities for blind individuals can be limited, IFB Solutions stands out as a beacon of hope. Brent Burkholder, IFB Solutions HR Project and Recruitment Manager, knows firsthand the challenges faced by individuals who are blind. Born premature at 26 weeks resulted in his vision loss and created obstacles in his life.

Despite earning a master's degree, his vision loss limited his job advancement opportunities. Determined to lead a full and independent life, Brent found a program that led him to employment at IFB Solutions.

IFB's recruitment team is dedicated to matching candidates with positions suited to their skills, driven by a passion to ensure blind individuals have access to fulfilling careers. Brent's approach to recruitment is multifaceted, utilizing online and community resources to attract candidates for manufacturing and work-from-home jobs. Each candidate undergoes job-related assessments and on-the-job training to ensure they are well-prepared. This thorough evaluation process helps match the right candidates with the right positions, setting them up for success.

IFB Solutions is committed to being an employer of choice for blind individuals, offering work-from-home call center positions that allow people to stay close to their communities and family support networks. They also provide manufacturing jobs in sewing, packing, and assembly for those entering or returning to the workforce as a person new to blindness.

IFB Solutions prioritizes accessibility and support for all candidates and employees. New associates undergo extensive training, including comprehensive onboarding and mentorship. Both work-from-home and manufacturing environments are equipped with necessary tools and accommodations, such as accessible platforms, appropriate software, and machine modifications. This dedication to accessibility and support helps individuals thrive in their careers and enriches the entire IFB team. "More than half of IFB's blind workforce had to relocate to find employment. I am proud to work for an organization that focuses on what we can do rather than what we can't," Brent shares, underscoring how IFB fosters a community that values and uplifts individuals who are blind.



### REFLECTING ON HIS WORK - BRENT BURKHOLDER

*As a blind individual, I uniquely relate to prospective employees I can connect with on a different level. I can be empathetic, yet very clear about IFB's hiring requirements.*

## ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS AND DEVICES

