

A leader in building life-changing opportunities for people who are blind.

FALL 2019

Changing Veterans' Lives Through Opportunity

IFB Solutions recognizes that veterans are a source of untapped potential. **Our organization is on a mission to embrace, support, and fully utilize our veterans' skills.**

Veteran Scott Smith is a fine example. After serving in the Navy for eight years, Scott worked as a welder for General Electric in South Carolina. But his life changed suddenly when he lost his vision due to optic neuropathy.

"I was devastated," Scott said. "I was forced to re-evaluate my future." He was unable to find any type of work, until a vision rehabilitation counselor told him about IFB Solutions.

For the past five years, Scott has been working in the Optical Department, making eye glasses for veterans. "I'm third generation military – mostly Navy," he said. "It's in my family's blood. And it gives me a sense of purpose and tremendous pride knowing I am making a contribution to our country's veterans." **Scott is among 40 IFB employees who are veterans.**

Scott met his co-worker Rick Gaefe through a Veterans' Support Group for IFB Solutions employees in Winston-Salem, NC. "I started the veterans' group because we needed a place for veterans to connect and help each other in the



workplace." Through his time in the Army, Rick was stationed in Germany for three years. When he returned home he worked as a paramedic, but his career was cut short when he started to lose his vision. Throughout his time at IFB Solutions Rick has been stationed in almost every department.

"The way a lot of veterans at IFB Solutions feel is that we went into service to fight for our country, and now we are helping our armed forces in a new way through what we make each day."

IFB Solutions understands that veterans are eager to contribute their talents in service to our country. The organization is committed to finding ways to offer more of them the opportunity to change their lives through gainful employment.





Message from the CEO

Before I came to IFB Solutions, my only experience with a blind employee was a worker who had been shot in the face with a shotgun. He was the best production employee we had. In his spare time, he repaired lawn-mowers. I was impressed by his abilities and work ethic. **I've continued to be impressed by how a job creates an opportunity for someone to help themselves.**

Back in 1988, Congress declared **October as National Disability Employment and Awareness Month** to call attention to the needs and contributions of workers with disabilities. At IFB Solutions, we do this every day and have been doing so for the past 80 years. We have grown tremendously and are now the **largest U.S. employer of people who are blind.**

How can we do this? Innovation. **We take pride in making jobs "blind-friendly"** through adaptive technologies and on-the-job training. We also benefit from diversity. Low- and high-skilled opportunities enable us to offer immediate employment as well as room for growth and advancement.

If you walk into one of our facilities, you might see people making or packaging anything from bedding, textiles, household cleaning products to office supplies. Our people have even made high-velocity parachutes for cargo drops in Afghanistan.

When I first came to IFB Solutions 19 years ago, we had around 70 employees who are blind or visually impaired. Today, we have almost 500, and we're growing. In each of our three facilities in Winston-Salem, Asheville, and Little Rock, our mission is focused on employment, training, and services to level the playing field for people who are blind or visually impaired. Our employees have the best attitudes – they really appreciate what they do. That just fuels my fire.

Our mission also extends to the surrounding community. I like to say that **we serve people from 3 to 103!** Children enjoy our camps

and after school programs. The 103-year-old is a woman who was losing her vision, her hope and her sense of independence due to macular degeneration. Her 83-year-old daughter brought her to us, and we were able to help her with some vision aids. She left a happy camper!

We depend on a supportive community of generous donors and dedicated event volunteers to make our work possible. And that includes you. So, join us in commemorating National Disability Employment and Awareness Month. And **thank you** from all of us for supporting our efforts.

Warm regards,

David Horton
President and CEO

Stay in touch!

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for more information about our 2020 campaigns and events such as *Did you Know?*, Dining in the Dark and Bingo for Bags.



@IndustriesForTheBlindSolutions



@ifbsolutions

Thank you to everyone who came to play bingo with us on September 19, 2019!



Why I Give: Tevin Price



Tevin Price recruits employees for IFB Solutions.

For Tevin Price, giving is personal. The 26-year-old is a recruiter in the IFB Solutions Human Resources Department. And he is visually impaired.

Tevin was born with a rare eye condition that left him with only



As a child, Tevin participated in our programs.

low vision in one eye. He can recognize colors and figures, but has problems seeing at a distance.

Growing up, he was mainstreamed into public schools. His elementary school contracted with IFB Solutions (then known as Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind) to accommodate his educational needs. **In the ninth grade, he was among the first students to attend a Student Enrichment Experience (SEE) Camp sponsored by IFB.**

“I was primarily raised around kids with vision. I knew I was a little different from my classmates,” Tevin said. “SEE Camp helped me realize things about myself. It was fun, but also, the counselors were teaching us the skills we needed to prepare for the school year and for our future.” Tevin and his peers were introduced to techniques and new technologies that would make life easier.

After graduating from college, Tevin decided to get some work experience and accepted an internship at IFB Solutions. He was offered a permanent position in 2015. “It has been the best decision of my life so far,” he said. “I’d love to stay in HR and be what I call a ‘creator of opportunity for independence and employment.’ I’m also finishing a 15-month business management training program. All these doors have been opened from just my being here.”

Although Tevin has more vision than some, working around people who are blind has given him a different perspective on adaptations. “Even though I have some sight and can get by with a magnifier, I do experience eye fatigue. I’ve been challenged to learn how to use JAWS.” People who are blind use computer screen reading software that converts text to audio. “I’ll do anything I need to do to get the job done and make it easier on myself. You can’t just take your lemons and make lemonade,” he joked, “you also have to learn to make lemon-pepper chicken.”

Tevin decided to become an IFB Solutions donor and give back to the organization that has been such a big influence in his life. **“It’s ‘paying it forward’ for me,” he said. “I want to make sure the services I received from IFB are available for the next person down the line. I want to close the employment gap for people who are blind or visually impaired so more of them can reach their potential.”**

IFB's SEE Day Camps and After School Programs Change Lives



Hayes enjoys SEE After School programs.

Children learn a lot from interacting with their peers, **but social interaction can be a challenge for a child who is blind. IFB Solutions' Student Enrichment Experience (SEE) day camps and after school programs offer a solution that's fun.** They give children who have impaired vision or additional disabilities an opportunity to develop social skills, gain confidence in new abilities, and make friends with others who are like them. For Hayes of Charlotte, these programs are crucial, because she's the only student in her class who is blind.

Hayes is smart, independent, and active. The 11-year-old uses a white cane to navigate her public school on her own. While her classmates use pencil and paper, she uses a braille or technology.

In her spare time, she plays the piano and ukulele, and sings. She doesn't let her blindness get in the way of doing what she wants to do.

So far, the biggest challenges for Hayes involve social interactions and dealing with misperceptions about blindness. She has trouble joining in on conversations in the noisy cafeteria. Without the ability

to make eye contact, making new friends can be a slow process.

Most students don't have any experience being with someone who is blind. They react by avoiding her or feeling sorry for her. Others try to help her to do things she is capable of doing herself. For example, someone may take her hand to help her go somewhere. She's had to learn to set boundaries and advocate for her independence.

When Hayes was in the first

grade, her teacher of the visually impaired told her parents about IFB's SEE After School and Camp programs. "We've been going to the Asheville Camp program ever since," her mother Jennifer said. The family stays over in Asheville for the two-week program, returning home on the weekends. Hayes also attends SEE After School Program in Charlotte.

"At school, Hayes knows she's different from her classmates, but at SEE Camp, it feels like family. She fits right in," Jennifer said. "And when they play sports, she has a real chance to compete, because the players with some vision wear blindfolds. She loves playing kickball and goalball. **It's been great for her. We have been so lucky to find them; we really have.**"



SEE Adventure Camp participants whitewater rafting in Western North Carolina.