

# IMPACT

A leader in building life-changing opportunities for people who are blind in North Carolina, Arkansas, and beyond



WINTER 2020

## 80 YEARS OF HISTORY



Employees stand in front of Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind building dedicated by Helen Keller.



In 1940, a small workshop was established known as the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind. In 1945, Helen Keller dedicated a new Little Rock facility and services expanded.



In 1966, groundbreaking commenced on the present site at 69th and Murray streets.



In 1976, the paper department makes its first Stenograph notebook.



In 2001, the Lighthouse started production on its first complex textile item, an U.S. Army T-shirt, significantly increasing employment opportunities available for people who are blind.



In 2014, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind joined Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind.



In 2015, the Little Rock Community Low Vision Center (CLVC) was established. It exists to help foster greater independence in people with vision challenges using technology and training.



In 2016, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind and Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind rebranded under a new name IFB Solutions to unify its diverse operations in the marketplace and community.



In 2019, IFB's Wellness Center was created to provide employees with easier access to health care professionals. A doctor and a nurse now assist employees with anything from monitoring their blood sugar and blood pressure to guiding employees through the pandemic.



In 2020, IFB remained open during the pandemic as an essential business that provides products to the Department of Defense. IFB's People First Fund created as a response to the pandemic supported IFB employees who were sick, furloughed or had to take care of loved ones.

**THANK YOU TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS IN 2020 AND BEYOND!**



# Loyal Donors Helped Make Us Who We Are Today



*Curtis Chase, Director of Operations in Little Rock*

Back in 1940, Reverend Jeff Smith, a Methodist minister who was blind, had a dream. With \$100 in seed money and help from friends, he turned a two-room building in Little Rock into a workshop named Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind. In those early days, the work consisted of making brooms and caning chairs. It offered a space where people with sight loss could apply their talents, support themselves financially, and contribute to their community.

Five years later, the legendary Helen Keller dedicated the enterprise. It embodied a core value she had learned from personal experience: “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Independence and interdependence create community. Building on that

dream, generous donors funded the construction of a new factory in Little Rock. Blind and visually impaired workers were hired and trained to work with adaptive equipment. By 1976, they were awarded government contracts to produce notebooks and pistol belts used by military personnel.

Today, IFB Solutions is a leader in employing and empowering people who are blind or visually impaired. By offering competitive wages and benefits, employees can support themselves and their families.

But for IFB employees, it is more than a job. There is a sense of pride that is best revealed when a member of the military tours the factory. “Our employees roll out the red carpet,” Air Force veteran and Director of Operations at IFB Little Rock,

Curtis Chase explained. “They may have never been able to serve in the military because of their vision loss, but they are proud to be making products that serve our troops. It provides a sense of purpose.”

As the Little Rock facility celebrates its 80th anniversary, Curtis is celebrating 20 years with the organization. “After serving my country in the Air Force and being in the sewn product industries for 43 years, I couldn’t have found a more gratifying career than making jobs accessible for people with vision loss,” he said. “I believe in our mission. I see what it does for our employees. Many of them have been turned away from other jobs because of their vision loss. IFB helps their talents flourish.”

*Thanks to the loyal support of our caring Little Rock community, we are growing that dream. You have helped make us who we are today.*



## **HOLIDAY CARDS**

These special cards were made by kids who are blind in our S.E.E. program. Proceeds benefit services that teach independence to our amazing S.E.E. summer campers in Winston-Salem, Charlotte, and Asheville, NC as well as Little Rock, AR.

Purchase yours today at [ifbsolutions.org/see-holiday-card-fundraiser](https://ifbsolutions.org/see-holiday-card-fundraiser) or call Eric Hughes at 501.492.7509



# What's Next? IFB Solutions Walking Track

## Sponsorships & Naming Opportunities Available



*Employees browsing food options by Avenue C*

In 2020, IFB Solutions celebrates 80 years of serving people who are blind in Arkansas! To welcome in the next 80 years of service to the community, IFB is focused on putting people first. And *people first* means starting with a 2020 focus on our employees' health and wellbeing.

This October, IFB Solutions partnered with the Avenue C Marketplace to bring healthier food options to our staff. To make it affordable, IFB Solutions subsidizes 20% of the food cost for all employees.

For people who are blind, it is a challenge to find a safe place to walk and become more physically active. Not all gyms are accessible. Braille isn't displayed consistently on gym equipment or recreationally facilities. The cost of a membership is high and transportation can be difficult to navigate.

"While accessible games and sports such as goalball, beep baseball, golf or blind bowling exist, many people are not drawn to these sports naturally or might have no access to such resources. Instead, they reserve to either stationary equipment or no exercise at all. As a result, people who are blind or low vision

are more likely to have various health challenges related to lack of exercise," said IFB Solutions' nurse Barrett Norton.

According to CDC, physical activity such as walking can help improve health even without weight loss. People who are physically active live longer and have a lower risk for heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, and some cancers. Improving spaces and having safe places to walk can help more people become physically active.



*R.N. Barrett Norton monitoring the health of IFB employee Greg Miller*

To help our teammates become more physically active, the IFB Solutions leadership team is planning for the best 80th birthday present possible. A walking track that is currently being planned will provide an easily accessible and safe place for people who are blind to get out and get moving.



Creating the walking track is a multi-stage project. It will include creation of a **walking path, benches, sensory gardens, and a shaded picnic area** for our employees to enjoy during their breaks or after their shifts. The track will be both white cane and guide dog friendly.

### **IFB Solutions Walking Track:**

- Circular Walking Track
- White Cane and Guide Dog Friendly
- Benches Along the Track
- Shaded Picnic Area

**Sponsorships and Naming Opportunities for the walking track are available.** For information about how to **donate to any of our health initiatives**, please contact Little Rock Development and Awareness Manager Eric Hughes: [ehughes@ifbsolutions.org](mailto:ehughes@ifbsolutions.org) or (501) 492-7509.

**Text IFBwalk to 41444 to support the Walking Track project!**

# No Obstacles with the Help from the Community

## Low Vision Center

I'm Toni Fraser, the low-vision associate at IFB Solutions Community Low-Vision center (CLVC) in Little Rock. I am so proud of the work we are doing to help individuals in our community gain back their independence.

A few months ago, a young man who had only been visually impaired for less than two years due to a brain injury walked into my community low-vision center. He was seeking help but was worried about whether he could afford adaptive technology with his limited social security income. He told me that he missed being independent and the ability to read on his own. I was able to approve him for assistance through the CLVC's Recycle for Sight program, a program funded by our donors to make adaptive vision aids affordable to any Arkansas resident facing vision loss. I was able to provide him with an Acrobat CCTV, a device that magnifies print materials to bring back his ability to read again. After training him to use the device, tears came to his eyes. He said to me: "I never knew! Now I can read my mail! I can read books again!"

Before he left that day, I told him about other local resources in the community that would be of great benefit to him. With tears in his eyes and big smile on his face, he picked up his things to leave and said, "I just don't know how to thank you. I've been visually impaired for less than two years, and in thirty minutes you have helped me regain my independence!"

It is moments like these that remind me why the position as the low vision specialist at IFB Solutions



*Low Vision Associate Toni Fraser demonstrating how to use a CCTV to Patricia Miller.*

interested me in the first place. I had worked in a few different departments throughout my nine years of employment at IFB. When I was offered the position in 2017, I was a little nervous. I was afraid of the obstacles that could come my way. IFB encouraged me saying that no obstacle is too big for me to overcome. So, I gladly accepted! And now, I am so honored to be that catalyst for people like this young man. Being visually impaired myself, I want everyone to know that there is



*Low Vision Associate Toni Fraser helps Patricia Miller select a new white cane.*

life after visual impairment.

The Community Low Vision Center exist to help foster greater independence. Our approach is to make any task simpler for those with vision loss. From mild impairment due to early stages of macular degeneration to total blindness, we have adaptive aids and assistive technology for everyone. Using technology and training, the CLVC helps people accomplish all kinds of tasks, from household chores to communicating via phones and computers and everything in between. The final objective is to help put independence within reach.

If you know someone who is blind or visually impaired looking for assistive technology or to get connected with community resources, have them contact Toni at the Community Low Vision Center: [tfraser@ifbsolutions.org](mailto:tfraser@ifbsolutions.org) or (501) 492-7516.