



# THE BISM GRAPEVINE

## BISM PRODUCES PROTECTIVE MASKS FOR U.S. MILITARY

By ROB ENNAMORATO & MICHAEL GARNTO

Blind Industries and Services of Maryland is playing an important role in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beginning in April, a group of dedicated BISM sewing associates started producing protective masks primarily for the Air Force. We are also producing protective masks for federal agencies, Maryland agencies, AbilityOne Base Supply Centers, BISM associates, and others. The response to this critical protective product has been outstanding in a time when many people are taking extra measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The protective masks are a cotton blend, washable, reusable and are offered in tan/blue and camouflage. BISM is using the extra fabric from garments and uniforms we normally produce for the branches of the U.S. military for the masks. Our sewing associates started out producing 500 masks per day and are currently producing approximately 2,000-3,000 protective masks per day. We have shipped over 70,000 masks and will eventually produce hundreds of thousands of protective masks for our customers!

From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, BISM has been designated as "critical infrastructure industry" by both the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the State of Maryland and our manufacturing plants have remained open.



# BISM ASSOCIATES NOMINATED FOR ANNUAL NIB AWARDS

By **ROB ENNAMORATO**

We are pleased to announce the BISM nominees for the National Industries for the Blind (NIB) 2020 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award and the Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award: Congratulations to Joint Base Andrews Base Supply Center associate Keith Tyson (Salmon Award) and Salisbury Cutting associate Randy Holmes (Samuelson Award)!

The announcement was made at the February BISM Board of Trustees meeting. Randy and Keith are planning to attend NIB's Training Conference and Expo (currently scheduled for October 12-16) and will be recognized with the other award nominees from across the country!



(From left): BISM Board of Trustees members with NIB award nominees; NIB award nominees Randy Holmes and Keith Tyson.

# HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS PARTNER WITH BISM FOR DESIGN CHALLENGE

By **ANICA ZLOTESCU**

Have you ever used a trash bag that has a rip in the seam or a big hole? In BISM Hagerstown, associates operate a machine that manufactures trash can liners. In an effort to improve this operation, students from Poolesville High School worked with BISM to develop a device for the SourceAmerica Design Challenge that allows associates to test trash can liners to ensure they are produced with good quality and won't break. The challenge of this project was not only to create this device



but to make it accessible using non-visual techniques so that a blind or low



vision associate can use it successfully. Hagerstown associate Dan B. worked closely with the Poolesville team on their design.

Poolesville High School has partnered with BISM in previous years for the annual SourceAmerica Design Challenge. The ultimate goal of the contest is to harness engineering ingenuity to improve the workplace goals of folks with disabilities. Thank you to Poolesville's Pavin, Pascal, and Parth for their hard work and for developing an outstanding device for BISM!

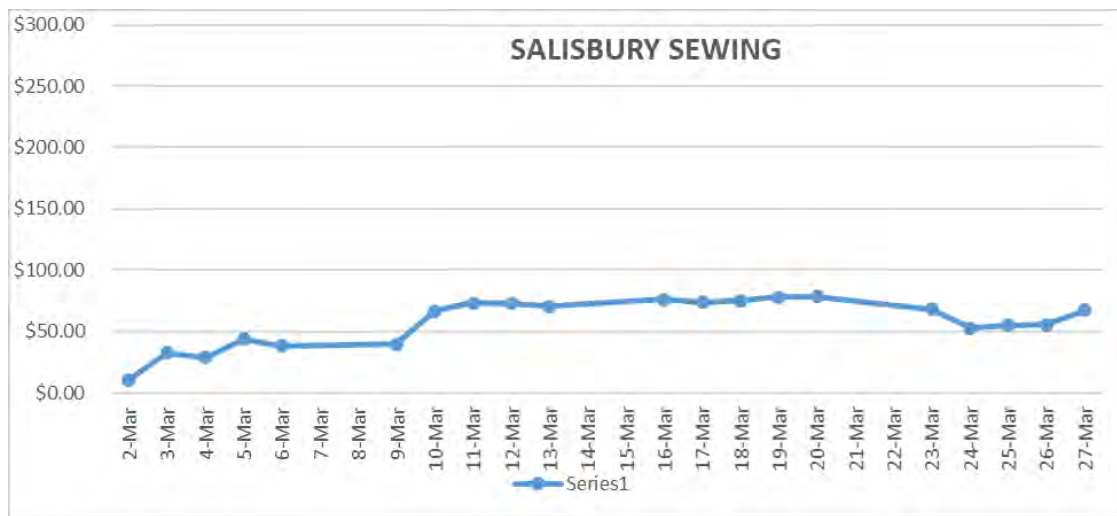
# SHARING THE GAINS OF IMPROVEMENT

By MICHAEL GARNTO & TONY RODRIGUEZ

BISM's pilot Gain/Share incentive program was launched in late January for the Salisbury sewing operation. The purpose of the program is to reward associates for performance which exceeds our initial plan or budgeted efficiency. Performance is reported daily, either adding or subtracting dollars from the incentive account. The Gain/Share measures cumulative performance for a full quarter (January-March, for example) at which time a quarterly payout is reported. Associates receive a payout based on the team's performance and their individual attendance during the quarter. All associates share in the gain, regardless of their role in the production process.

The Gain/Share incentive plan has had a positive effect in Salisbury. Monthly efficiency improved from 72% in January to 84% in March. The monthly improvements generated the following monthly outcome for the Gain/Share incentive plan: January -\$2,295; February +\$3,150; March +\$6,416. The net result of this improvement for the quarter was a total of \$7,271 in the bonus pool. Based on this bonus pool total, it was projected that the Salisbury sewing operation would earn a base payout of \$73 per associate before adjustments for attendance at the end of the quarter. Based on these results, we are excited for the potential in future quarters.

In late March, we rolled out the Gain/Share program at our Raleigh division, effective April – June. The Gain/Share program was then rolled out at our Baltimore and Cumberland sewing operations. Stay tuned for additional developments!



## TWO DEDICATED BISM ASSOCIATES RETIRE



Congratulations to BISM Baltimore associate Henry Cousin on his retirement in January. Henry, who worked at BISM for 22 years, was an important and well-liked member of our shipping/receiving department. We wish Henry the best in all future endeavors!

On March 17, Rehabilitation department associate Sue Schaffer retired. Sue, who helped recruit students to our programs, worked at BISM for over five years and helped Rehab staff individually and pushed the group to new levels. The ideas, mentorship, and friendship are what make Sue so special and we wish her the best!



## BISM WELCOMES GUESTS FOR TOURS



BISM is always proud to provide tours to groups and dignitaries! BISM was honored to welcome representatives from Korean companies and agencies to tour our Baltimore headquarters on December 10 (left). Our tour guests were interested in BISM's manufacturing, the AbilityOne program, potential business opportunities, and training programs.

BISM Baltimore welcomed Girl Scout Troop #649 on January 8 (right) for a tour of our manufacturing and



training divisions. The Girl Scout troop was most interested in meeting two Guide Dogs, Barlow and Orna, who were on hand for the tour. The girls learned all about the Guide Dog program from Baltimore associate Ruth, who had Barlow by her side during the work day (until Barlow's recent retirement).



BISM was honored to have Jorge Delgado (R), who is running for election to represent Maryland's 1st Congressional District, tour BISM's Salisbury Northwood location on January 19 (left). BISM President Fred Puente and COO Michael Garnto hosted the tour.

Members of the Maryland Green Purchasing Committee visited

BISM Baltimore headquarters for a tour on February 24 (right) to learn about all the different products we offer the State of Maryland. BISM Director of Sales and Marketing Gregg Kalifut led the tour, and our guests were able to see how our Maryland Pride copy paper, Jan-San products, and personalized notepads are produced by blind and low vision Marylanders. BISM is proud to be a provider of Green products for the State of Maryland.



## BISM BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBERS VISIT ANNAPOLIS

BISM Board of Trustees members Tyrone Bullock, Melba Taylor, Shirley Mowery, and Christopher Berry (right) were nominated to serve another term on our Board at the Senate Executive Nomination Committee hearing in Annapolis on February 3. The four Board of Trustees members were introduced and briefly spoke at the hearing.

The 2020 BISM Board of Trustees is Dr. Walter Brown, Chairman; Dr. William Hadlock, Vice Chairman; Melba Taylor, Secretary; James Berens, Treasurer; George Littrell, Vice Treasurer; Donald Morris, Chairman Emeritus; Christopher Berry; Tyrone Bullock; Norman Conway; James Deremeik; Shirley Mowery; Alfred D'Agostino, Ph. D. (Adjunct); Pamela Goodman (Adjunct); and Timothy Meagher (Adjunct).



# JOHNS HOPKINS STUDENTS DEVELOP PROJECTS FOR BISM

By ANICA ZLOTESCU

During this academic year, two groups from Johns Hopkins University (JHU) developed engineering projects at BISM to help improve accessibility and safety for blind and low vision manufacturing associates.

A team from JHU's Department of Engineering Senior Design course (right) partnered with BISM to develop technology that alerts forklift drivers to pedestrians in the projected path of the forklift. The students worked with BISM associates to understand a forklift operator's needs, duties, and how the sensor device could seamlessly integrate in a forklift.



The device was designed to use sensing and computer technology to specifically identify people within the projected path and alert the forklift driver and nearby pedestrians.

The students presented updates on their design throughout the year and received feedback from a variety of BISM associates, including forklift operators. In the spring, when students typically test and tweak their solution, the students were prohibited from accessing their college campus and lab resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This challenged the students to work remotely under a unique set of circumstances, so students tweaked their design virtually and shipped items to BISM for installation on a forklift.



A team of students from JHU's Multidisciplinary Design course (left) analyzed touchscreens from the perspective of a user who is blind to better understand the obstacles and develop solutions. It is difficult to avoid touchscreens because we encounter them in our everyday life. Touchscreens present a challenge to someone who is blind because they often lack any tactile landmarks or audible information. The students brought their knowledge and expertise to tackle the challenge of making touchscreens BISM has on manufacturing equipment accessible to blind and low vision associates.



While the students used a specific touchscreen, their solution was developed in such a way that it can be used on several manufacturing interfaces and is not a solution for just one machine. The students focused on BISM Baltimore's Ream Wrapper Machine in the Sheeter operation. The machine uses a touchscreen to alert the operator to problems and allows the operator to input data into the machine. The students developed a device and corresponding computer code for an operator to access the same

information from the machine and a means to input data. This device can also connect with a braille display. Due to BISM's mission and nonprofit status, JHU's Department of Mechanical Engineering absorbed the costs of materials related to the projects. Thank you to Awoe, Brandon, Charlie, Colin, Eyan, Lucas, Madeline, Mitchell, Rena, Seena, and Willa for their dedication and enthusiasm!

## REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT COOKS UP GOOD TIMES

By ANDY MCIVER & AMY CROUSE

The Rehabilitation department staff and students put their Independent Living classes to good use with a variety of culinary events in February.

Salisbury seniors and staff were hard at work on February 12 making peanut butter fudge and peanut butter kiss cookies for a Valentine's Day fundraiser (right). Students packaged the treats in Valentine's bags with braille cards.



BISM CORE student Erika (left) completed her large meal requirement on February 20. Staff, students, guests and their taste buds were treated to a meal consisting of green chicken chili, southwestern style salad and her fresh jalapeno honey cheddar cornbread, which had been the talk of the department from Erika's testing phase right up to the large meal. Way to go Erika!

Seven teams, which included 35 students and staff, participated in the BISM Rehabilitation and Training department's 2020 Chili

Cook-Off during the final week of February (right). Each team presented their custom created chili to a panel of five esteemed judges, who were thoroughly impressed and enjoyed sampling the chili. Congratulations to Team Jalapeno Face for taking the title! Team members Shaun, Liz, Belen, Nikki, and Steve will have their names added to the Wooden Spoon of Distinction.



## BISM ASSOCIATES SHOW GENEROSITY DURING HOLIDAYS

BISM associates and students showed how generous they are by providing much needed cheer during the holidays. BISM Baltimore "adopted" a large local family in need to make their holiday memorable (right). Due to the incredible generosity of BISM associates and friends, plus others from the community, we were able to deliver an oversized individual gift bag of requested items and gift cards to each member of a family of 10.



Our BISM Raleigh Activities Committee (left) coordinated a holiday food drive during the month of December and was able to aid local ministries in providing meals for families in the Southeast community.



Seniors Achieving Independent Living (SAIL) staff and students traveled to the Ronald McDonald House in Baltimore to deliver stuffed Christmas stockings for the families of sick children. BISM participants filled the family cubbies with stockings that included games, stuffed animals, candy, and much more.

## ABILITYONE BASE SUPPLY CENTERS CELEBRATE ANNIVERSARY



The AbilityOne Base Supply Center (BSC) program is celebrating its 25th Anniversary in 2020! BISM owns and manages seven BSCs on federal and military installations (APG North, APG South, DIA, Dover AFB, Ft. Knox, JB Andrews, JBAB) and they are an integral part of our organization.

Since 1995, the BSC program has supported the armed forces and employed thousands of blind people across the country. The BSCs are proud to sell SKILCRAFT products, which are produced by blind and disabled people.

## BISM ASSOCIATE PROFILE — HEATHER HARRIS



When I first started working at Blind Industries and Services of Maryland in 2007, I was 20 years old. I had just left my first job and my first position at BISM was an Administrative Assistant for Arhea Lazzelle in the paper department. One of my first tasks was to work with associates on the floor completing various jobs so I could understand what went into the manufacturing process. My next position was an Administrative Assistant in the Baltimore warehouse, which consisted of various shipping/receiving tasks.

I moved to the Human Resources department in January 2011. Because of the relationships I developed on the production floor, associates felt secure in coming to me with problems. After Tony Warner was hired as the Human Resources Director, I became the HR Compliance Administrator and decided to go back to school to pursue my Associate's Degree in Psychology. I graduated from Community College of Baltimore County in 2016. With the encouragement of Tony, I decided to enroll in the SHRM-CP (Certified HR professional) course to obtain my HR certification. After a few months of class and a lot of studying, I managed to pass the exam in December 2016.

The following year, I decided to pursue my Bachelor's degree at University of Maryland Global Campus. At this time, I worked full time at BISM, part-time at a local funeral home and eventually decided to start a family. I graduated on December 14, 2019 with my major in Psychology and minor in Human Resources Management.

My time spent in various departments at BISM has enabled me to form bonds with our associates, understand all aspects of our business, and have a better understanding of HR metrics that define an organization. Thanks to Arhea for giving me a chance, thirteen years ago!

## KEEP UP-TO-DATE ON BISM NEWS VIA EMAIL

In an effort to better distribute BISM information to associates who do not have a bism.org email address, we offer the opportunity for associates to receive internal BISM "Everybody" emails to their personal email address.

Personal email addresses will be kept confidential and will only be used to share information about BISM. Interested associates can provide their personal email address to their supervisor or they can send it to Rob Ennamorato at [rennamorato@bism.org](mailto:rennamorato@bism.org) or call Rob at 410-737-2615 to submit their information.



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**Raleigh**

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919-516-9320

**Salisbury**

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**Salisbury Cutting**

1303 Old Ocean City Rd.  
Salisbury, MD 21804  
410-749-4305

**AbilityOne BSC Stores**

APG North - 410-297-4950  
APG South - 410-676-0564  
DIA - 202-562-1790  
Dover - 302-736-3506  
Ft. Knox - 502-942-9690  
JBAB - 202-561-6245  
JB Andrews - 301-599-0316

**BISM Beverage**

888-928-3767

**ShopBISM.com**

877-647-4611

[www.bism.org](http://www.bism.org)

**CATCHING UP/UPCOMING EVENTS**

**MTA Tours Continue At BISM Baltimore**

Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) bus drivers and supervisors toured BISM Baltimore on December 12 and February 27. Hundreds of MTA staff have toured BISM over the past few years to learn more about BISM and how to better communicate with blind and low vision customers.

**Popular Open Mic Night Returns**

Open Mic Night returned on February 22 to BISM Baltimore and featured a night of entertaining performances, socializing, food and fun.

**Veteran Receives Pillow From BISM Raleigh**

BISM's Raleigh location, who produces pillows for federal customers, received a letter from a military veteran in February. The veteran, who had slept on a BISM pillow while in the military, stated that it was the most comfortable pillow he had ever used and had helped with his sleep apnea. The associates produced a pillow for the veteran and shipped it to him.



**NATIONAL DISABILITY  
EMPLOYMENT  
AWARENESS  
MONTH**

*Customer  
Appreciation*

**ABILITYONE BASE SUPPLY CENTERS**

Operated by Blind Industries & Services of Maryland

**SAVE THE DATES IN 2020**

Ft. Knox	Thursday, 15 October
JBAB/NRL/DIA	Wednesday, 21 October
JBA	Thursday, 22 October
Dover	Tuesday, 27 October
APG South	Wednesday, 28 October
APG North	Thursday, 29 October



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