

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)— October 2009

“Expectation + Opportunity = Full Participation”

“I call on all Americans to celebrate the contributions of individuals with disabilities to our workplaces and communities, and to promote the employment of individuals with disabilities to create a better, more inclusive America, one in which every person is rightly recognized for his or her abilities and accomplishments.”

— President Barack Obama

By Gisele McAuliffe, contributing feature writer

In October, the Federal Government and Nonprofit Agencies (NPAs) across the U.S. promoted the benefits of the AbilityOne Program during special events to mark National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). This month-long celebration was designated by the President and Congress to help educate the American public about issues related to disability and employment—a vital objective during this current period of high unemployment and budget cutbacks. The Department of Labor designated this year’s NDEAM theme as *“Expectation + Opportunity = Full Participation”* and the AbilityOne Program theme was *“AbilityOne Works for You.”*

No matter what the economic climate, every day is an extremely tough job market for people who are blind or

have other significant disabilities. They remain one of America’s greatest untapped labor resources, with more than 60 percent not employed. During the annual observance of NDEAM, AbilityOne honors and promotes the program as the largest single source of employment for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities in the United States, providing employment opportunities to more than 40,000 people, including 2,000 Wounded Warriors and service-disabled veterans.

The following is a summary of several AbilityOne NDEAM Federal Government events:

Dept. of Defense (DoD)

This year marked the third annual AbilityOne Recognition Ceremony at the Pentagon to honor those who demonstrate exceptional commitment

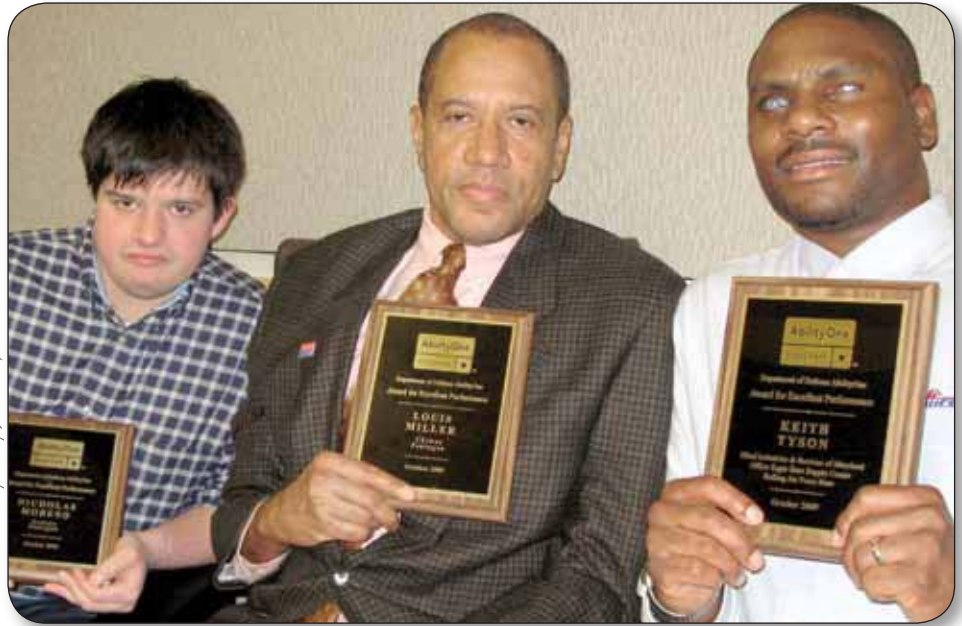
to increasing employment opportunities within the AbilityOne Program through the Federal procurement process. More than 31,000 AbilityOne employees who are blind or have other significant disabilities work on DoD contracts. In fiscal year 2009, DoD awarded approximately \$1.5 billion in contracts to AbilityOne-participating NPAs, creating an additional 1,600 jobs for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. AbilityOne employees produce quality office products, military goods, and provide essential services used throughout the military by our Warfighters and other personnel at all levels.

The Honorable Ashton Carter, the under secretary of defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, hosted this year’s awards presentation.

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"I'm proud to be honoring you today for your dedicated service to the Department," Carter told the award recipients. "There is no doubt that AbilityOne Program employees are vital to the military industrial base and contribute to the (Defense Department) mission here at the Pentagon."

Photo Courtesy: Gerry J. Gilmore, DoD



(Left to Right) AbilityOne employees Nicholas Moreno, Louis Miller and Keith Tyson pose with their Defense Department Awards for Performance Excellence on Oct. 20th at the Pentagon conference center.

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Shay Assad, acting deputy under secretary of defense for Acquisition and Technology and the Honorable Andrew Houghton, chairperson of the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, the Federal agency administering the AbilityOne Program, made opening remarks. SPC Alvin Ramlu, USA (Ret.) was the guest speaker.

"We wouldn't be here today if it were not for the support of the Department of Defense and the military," Houghton said, noting the Pentagon has "raised the bar" for other Federal agencies through its employment of people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

The Oct. 20 ceremony featured three major DoD awards:

1.

DoD Award for Excellent Performance - AbilityOne Program Employees

This award recognizes the achievement of AbilityOne employees who demonstrate excellent performance in their work. Each honoree was selected by their respective nonprofit employer for their advocacy of the AbilityOne Program and outstanding job performance in supporting the DoD mission.

This year's award recipients were:

- **Louis Miller** – a stocking and maintenance employee at the Pentagon. "It's a good feeling," Miller said, "to know that there's support (that assists people with severe disabilities in finding employment)."
- **Nicholas Moreno** – a custodian at the Pentagon. "The AbilityOne Program helps people like us with disabilities to find a good job in the community and it helps people to be on their own," Moreno said.
- **Keith Tyson** – a stocking (and other duties) employee at the office supply center at Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C. "I never could find a job until I

found out about the AbilityOne Program," Tyson said. "I really enjoy working where I am now."

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2.

DoD Award for Acquisition Excellence DoD Employees

The award recognizes the achievement of DoD employees who demonstrate support to the Warfighter by providing quality goods and services from the AbilityOne-participating NPAs, thereby creating a positive impact on employment for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

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