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BLIND ENTREPRENEURS INITIATIVE

THE BLITZ Spring, 2018

Sometimes, one must wonder if people really take the time to read The Blitz. It can be lengthy and people live busy lives. However, judging by the number of people who have asked, "Where's The Blitz?" "Do you guys still do The Blitz?" "Hey, did I miss The Blitz?" I guess at least some of you are reading it. I apologize for the extra couple of months between issues but things have been hectic. So, enough excuses. Lets' get on with what's going on in the Randolph-Sheppard world.

Get Ready D.C. The Largest Number of Blind Entrepreneurs Ever Will Soon Be on Their Way - As this issue of The Blitz goes to press, approximately 125 blind entrepreneurs are preparing to converge on our nation's capitol next week. It will be the largest such gathering in history. They will be attending NABM's Critical Issues Conference May 21-23 at the Marriott Key Bridge Hotel in Arlington, Virginia. Attendees will examine the critical issues facing Randolph-Sheppard today. The conference will also feature the organization's first-ever federal agency roundtables. Groups of attendees will spread out over town to participate in roundtable discussions at the Department of Transportation, General Services Administration, and Rehabilitation Services Administration. And half a day will be spent on The Hill educating members of Congress about key issues facing our program today. We will be educating Congress about:

1. Rest area commercialization
2. Challenges in DoD contracting
3. The Department of Education's failure to timely convene arbitration panels and approve state rules.

NABM is working closely with the National Federation of the Blind's Office on Advocacy and Policy on this educational piece. John Pare and Gabe Cazares from that office have played an integral part in the planning and will be on hand

to provide training and assist as needed. The help is much appreciated.

NABM is excited about this conference. Registration is closed but if anyone is just now hearing about it and wants to attend, they can contact Nicky Gacos or Terry Smith.

Our Next Generation of Leaders Are on the Way - In conjunction with the Critical Issues Conference, NABM will be holding its third Emerging Leaders Training. 14 future leaders will be on hand to partake in the training. The training is intended to develop our leaders of tomorrow. Some may want to get involved nationally. Two of NABM's most recently elected board members came from previous training classes. Others may be interested in state leadership positions either on the Committee of Blind Vendors or with the state affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind, state NABM Chapter, or another group. Regardless of one's aspirations, this training can be beneficial. Keep an eye out for a notice about future classes and consider applying.

Rest Area Commercialization: The Good News and the Bad – Since the last issue of The Blitz, there have been some interesting developments. President Trump released the framework for his much anticipated infrastructure plan. And as expected, it included rest area commercialization. He is asking Congress to give states the ability to create public-private partnerships to commercialize the interstate rest areas. Readers of The Blitz do not have to be told what this would mean for blind entrepreneurs. The week before the release of the plan, NABM President Nicky Gacos and Terry Smith along with Eric Dell of NAMA met with the Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation. The message from DOT was that commercialization would be part of the plan but not a pivotal piece. The President believes it is a good idea but it will be up to Congress to ultimately decide. He was interested in learning more about concerns of the blindness community and out of those discussions the May 22nd roundtable was born. We always knew the battle would be in Congress. Our job got a little harder when Congressman Shuster, who chairs the committee with jurisdiction over any potential legislation, came out in support of commercialization. Several members of Congress have indicated they will likely follow the Chairman's lead on the issue which means we have our work cut out for us in the House. On the Senate side, the news is a little better. Senator Barrasso who chairs the key committee that would have to consider such legislation does not support commercialization. But that doesn't mean we are out of the woods. If the House eventually passes a bill that allows commercialization and the Senate does not, it would go to a conference committee and the House could convince the Senate to agree to it. The goal needs to be to defeat any efforts in the House or Senate.

In an effort to get our message out, NABM has reactivated the website that will enable any interested individual to send letters to their members of Congress expressing opposition to rest area commercialization. It is a different letter than the one we did last year so you can go in and send this one even if you did the

one last year. Get all of your friends and family to send letters too. It couldn't be easier. Simply click on the link below, provide your contact information, and hit "Submit." The letter will automatically be sent to both Senators and your Member in the House. Do not delay, click now: https://nfb.constituentvoice.net/alert/us-nabm_online_letter_to_congress_commercialization/message/congress/write

Before leaving the topic of rest area commercialization, there are two positive developments. First, the Federal Highway Administration rejected the request by the Governor of Arizona to allow that state to do a pilot project with commercialization. NABM had gone on record with the FHWA opposing such approval and the organization is delighted with the disapproval. Also, Congresswoman Claudia Tenney called upon the FHWA to address New York's violation of the law. New York illegally put in self serve markets at two of he state's rest areas despite the fact only vending machines operated by the blind are permissible. NABM is on record with the FHWA on this issue as well; however, to date no action has been taken against the State of New York but the advocacy by the Congresswoman is much appreciated.

Before leaving the topic of commercialization, it is worth noting that the National Automatic Merchandising Association will be holding its annual fly in in D.C. on July 24-25. Rest area commercialization will be one of the topics at their fly in. This reflects positively on the value NAMA sees in Randolph-Sheppard and the role blind entrepreneurs play in the larger vending industry. It is also a positive reflection on NABM President Nicky Gacos who has committed himself to building the relationship between the respective organizations.

This is an issue that is not going to go away anytime soon. Randolph-Sheppard stakeholders need to remain vigilant and continue to get our message across to Congress.

Department of Defense: The Never Ending Story – As usual, we could fill up pages of this newsletter with DoD issues. We could copy and paste from the previous Blitz and just change the names. However, in the interest of brevity, we will just update you on a few matters addressed in the last issue and offer a little information about our strategy to try to address at least some of the concerns with DoD contracting.

- ***Fort Dix Arbitration*** – The State of New Jersey prevailed in its arbitration against the Army over its solicitation at Fort Dix. The Army had awarded the contract "without discussion." That meant it did not set a competitive range as required by the Randolph-Sheppard Act. This is a relatively new strategy being employed by DoD contracting officers. States had no way of knowing that "without discussion" was code for low bid and no competitive range so they generally did not protest the language in the solicitations. However, now that states understand the terminology, they are challenging the solicitation before submitting proposals. This was the

case most recently at Fort Benning, Georgia. There the State of Georgia filed a protest and was successful in getting clarification that a competitive range would be set. A second case involving the competitive range is progressing at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri. That case has not been heard.

- *Tyndall Air Force Base* – In the last issue of *The Blitz*, we told you that the State of Florida had challenged the Air Force on two issues: 1. That the Randolph-Sheppard priority applies to buildings with fewer than 100 federal employees and/or 15,000 square feet; and, 2. The post-exchange is not exempt from the income sharing provisions of the Act. The decision is in and kudos to the Florida SLA. It prevailed on both issues. The panel ruled that the Air Force has a statutory obligation to allow the SLA to establish vending facilities in buildings on the base even those with fewer than 100 employees and/or 15,000 square feet. This ruling was not surprising as several previous panels had issued similar rulings. However, the ruling on income sharing was a little more iffy. A federal court of appeals had ruled back in the 90's in a Texas case that any machine operated by the exchange is exempt from the income sharing provisions of the Randolph-Sheppard Act. However, the panel in the Tyndall case rejected the rationale in this ruling as the plain language of the law states that only machines within the outlet are exempt. The panel concluded that the law requires the Air Force to share income from any machine not within the walls of the post-exchange. The Air Force surely will refuse to comply which is the case every time they lose an arbitration. The State of Florida is expected to appeal to federal court to enforce the ruling of the arbitration panel so it could be years before this one is settled. In the meantime, SLA's are being encouraged to go after more locations on military bases and to pursue income sharing.
- *Full Food Versus DFA* – The debate on whether or not the Randolph-Sheppard priority applies only to full food contracts took an interesting twist recently. Congressman Pete Sessions of Texas has taken a keen interest in this issue and sought an opinion from Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. The Secretary issued a letter stating the priority applies to all contracts pertaining to the operation of a cafeteria. This could be a game changer for Randolph-Sheppard as this is the primary point of contention with DoD. There are currently at least two federal court cases (Fort Bliss and Fort Riley) where this is an issue and one federal arbitration (U.S. Navy in California). The DeVos letter will play prominently in all 3 of these proceedings. The big question now is what effect the DeVos letter will have on DoD's plans to promulgate regulations on this matter. It had published preliminary rules in 2016 but never finalized them. The DeVos letter would seem to suggest that the proposed rules violate the Randolph-Sheppard Act and, therefore, could bring an end to their promulgation. On the other hand, DoD may see a sudden urgency to move forward. We shall see but we can be assured of one thing and that is the issue is not over.

- *Still No News on the Marine Contracts* – We fully expected the Marines to have awarded its two multi-state contracts by now but they have not. However, that is expected to happen any day now. One contract will be awarded for the eastern part of the country for facilities in South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and D.C. South Carolina, teaming with FSIG, is the lead agency on that bid. California, also teaming with FSIG, submitted a bid on behalf of the California and Arizona blind entrepreneurs. We are cautiously optimistic. If awarded either contract, it will be the largest ever awarded to Randolph-Sheppard and the first ever multi-state contract.
- *AbilityOne Sues U.S. Department of Education* – In a startling move, the AbilityOne nonprofit agency has sued the Department of Education for not allowing it to intervene in the Fort Riley arbitration. The arbitration process was established to resolve disputes between SLA's and federal entities. The AbilityOne program is not a party to such disputes so it would seem reasonable that they would not be part of any such arbitrations. However, to this point, the federal judge has ruled that the case may move forward. Since the judge has more or less indicated that any interested party may intervene in these cases, NABM is preparing to do just that as is the State of Kansas. There are 2 issues at play here. 1. Can any interested party intervene in arbitrations cases? 2. Does the priority apply to the DFA contract? Stay tuned on this one.

RSA: Let's Get It Together – Although NABM was thrilled with Secretary DeVos' letter to Congressman Sessions, we remain frustrated by RSA's failure to resolve issues with delays in getting convening letters out for arbitration panels and approving rules submitted by state BEP's. NABM President Nicky Gacos and Terry Smith met with Acting RSA Commissioner Carol Dobak to discuss these concerns. Approximately a dozen arbitrations are being held up as the complainants await a convening letter. Some have been waiting for a year. Approximately 8 states are waiting RSA approval of BEP rules. Such delays are unacceptable. Little progress is being made in breaking loose this logjam. Now, the National Council of State Agencies Serving the Blind (NCSAB) is weighing in on the issue and individual blind entrepreneurs are asking their members of Congress to assist.

Some Progress on Prior Approval – In the last issue of The Blitz, it was reported that RSA is enforcing an OMB regulation that requires state agencies to secure RSA approval before purchasing any equipment costing over \$5,000 or in some cases costing over \$500. Requiring individual approval of each piece of equipment to be purchased for a vending facility was a recipe for disaster. However, RSA made it clear that it had no choice in the matter. It was NABM that first proposed the approval of an annual plan of sorts rather than each piece of equipment and RSA has implemented just such a requirement. Now, an SLA can submit to RSA an annual budget which can be approved. A state will not have to go back to RSA for further approvals unless they exceed the approved amount. Is this desirable? No, but states should be able to live with it. The new

procedure actually has some positive benefits in that it forces states to do some planning. But it's not all rosy news. Under the above referenced OMB regulations, states cannot use federal dollars or any dollars used to match federal dollars to send blind vendors to training conferences without getting prior approval from RSA. The maddening thing is this includes meetings of the Committee of Blind Vendors. Technically, Committees cannot meet in most instances unless the SLA has gotten approval from RSA. Same would be true for annual vendor training conferences. It is presumed RSA is working on a fix to this problem. Perhaps, they can just give blanket approval like they did for State Rehabilitation Councils or they can approve at the same time they approve the annual equipment budget. One thing that will not likely change is the requirement to get RSA approval to attend conferences like BLAST. Although NABM is concerned about the burden this places on states, it has no concerns about NABM sponsored events being approved by RSA. Just like we did with the upcoming Critical Issues Conference, we will work with RSA to ensure that our conferences, including BLAST, meet requirements for RSA approval. With that said, state agencies still have major concerns about the prior approval process in general. It doesn't apply just to BEP and some of the other requirements are extremely burdensome. We are sure our friends at NCSAB will be working on getting additional changes to the process.

Gacos Re-Elected to NAMA Board – NABM President Nicky Gacos was re-elected in March to a second 3-year term on the Board of Directors of the National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA). In 2015, when elected to his first term, Gacos became the first blind person to ever serve in this capacity. Gacos' election is a testament to the value blind entrepreneurs bring to the table. Last year almost 2,000 blind entrepreneurs generated approximately \$725 Million in gross sales. Those sorts of numbers make blind entrepreneurs collectively a major player in our country's vending industry. And it's Gacos' intent to leverage those numbers to better assist blind entrepreneurs. NAMA is a very influential organization politically. Over the past 3 years, NAMA has been quick to advocate on issues that are of particular interest to blind entrepreneurs. They have been particularly engaged on issues related to vending at interstate rest areas and Gacos is to be thanked for that. Congratulations President Gacos!

President Gacos Launches Women's Initiative – Concerned by a perceived shortage of women in Randolph-Sheppard, NABM President Nicky Gacos has launched a new women's initiative. He has appointed NABM Board Member and President of the Maryland Association of Blind Merchants Melba Taylor to head up the initiative. She has a committee consisting of Sharon Treadway (Tennessee), Melissa Smith (Tennessee), Lewanda Miranda (Oregon), Barbara Manual (Alabama), and Pam Schnurr (Indiana) assisting her. In 2016, Gacos revived the women's breakfast at BLAST to focus on women's issues but more is needed. Step 1 for Taylor and her committee was to gather data. A survey was sent to every state BEP Director and Committee Chair seeking information about the number of women in their programs and number serving on the Elected

Committees as well as suggestions on ways to increase the representation of women in the program. All of that data has been gathered and remarkably 45 states submitted data. Melba will be getting with experts at the National Federation of the Blind's Jernigan Institute to analyze the data and write up a report. The next step will be to present the findings to the field and then develop national strategies for addressing any identified deficiencies. Be on the watch for more on this in the coming months.

A Report on the NAMA Show – In March, the 2018 NAMA Show returned to Las Vegas. It was a huge success and was attended by several blind entrepreneurs. NABM was well represented and again, in conjunction with the RSA Management Group, conducted training for Randolph-Sheppard vendors. A half-day of training was held and attended by approximately 50 individuals. If you have never attended a NAMA Show, you should mark your calendar for next year's show. The 2019 NAMA Show will be April 24-26 at the Las Vegas Convention Center.

The Lone Star BLAST: Registration is Open – It's not too early to register for the BLAST Conference which will be held in San Antonio, Texas on November 13-16. The Hyatt Regency Hill Country will host this premiere training event. It is a luxurious resort that may be the nicest ever for this event. Please mark your calendars to attend. We will start with our staff training and pre-conference vendor breakout sessions on Tuesday afternoon. Staff will want to arrive on Monday. We officially start Tuesday evening with the opening night reception and then our leadership breakfast on Wednesday morning. We have moved our tradeshow to Thursday afternoon. We have some exciting things planned this year. Contracts are already signed for some outstanding speakers and we are working on some great entertainment. You won't want to miss it. If you hurry, you can get our super early bird registration rate. You can register as well as book your hotel room by going to <https://blindmerchants.org/blast-2018-information/>. See you in San Antonio.

Tennessee's 75th Anniversary and NABM Will Be There – On August 3-4, the Tennessee Business Enterprises Program will celebrate its 75th Anniversary. The blind entrepreneurs and state staff will come together for their Annual Statewide Managers Meeting and NABM will be there. One of the benefits to subscribing to the NFBEI is that an SLA can contract with NABM to conduct its annual vendor training conference. Tennessee is doing just that. There are many advantages to such a contract. It means less work for the states and better training as NABM can tap into more national resources for speakers. If your state would like to explore such a contract, let us know.

NABM to Host Region 5 Training Conference – Many years ago, when RSA had regional offices, regional Randolph-Sheppard training was a staple of the program. The 6 or 7 states in a region would bring their BEP Director, a staff person or two, and a couple of blind vendors together for a small training

program. When the RSA regional offices closed in the early 2000's, most of these regional trainings went away too. The one in Region 3 (D.C. and the nearby states) survived for a few years but it has since disappeared. Two years ago, the Region 5 states got together and conducted their own regional training. They want to do it again this fall and NABM has agreed to facilitate the training. It will be held September 19-21 in Des Moines. The states include Iowa, Wisconsin, Missouri, Illinois, and South Dakota. Other nearby states are welcome to participate. NABM is open to the idea of hosting regional training in other regions. If your region is interested, let us know.

NABM White Paper on Funding Revisited– Last fall, NABM posted on its website a white paper on funding of the states' vending facilities programs. You can read the white paper by going to <https://blindmerchants.org/an-impending-crisis/> The part that has gotten so much attention is the discussion on attorneys fees. NABM believes that a state cannot use set aside dollars to pay for its attorney to defend itself against a complaint filed by a blind vendor. Legal fees to defend oneself are not management services; therefore, set aside dollars cannot be used. This point is hardly even debatable. If set aside dollars can be used by the SLA for legal fees when defending itself, then the blind licensee should have access to the same dollars to defend himself against actions by the SLA such as license revocation. Unfortunately, for the same reason SLA's cannot utilize set aside funds neither can the vendor. They simply are not management services. We would make the same argument with respect to the use of federal dollars. We admit that an argument can be made that the SLA can use federal dollars; however, it is clearly illegal for them to do so when challenging an arbitration ruling in which the blind vendor prevailed. Before leaving the issue of using set aside dollars for attorneys, we get this question all the time. Can the Committee use set aside dollars to hire an attorney? The answer is yes provided (s)he is not representing the Committee in litigation. Set aside funds can be used to pay an attorney to advise on matters of law, offer assistance and support for rule development, etc. These are management services.

More Arbitration Panels Award Damages – As we have noted in previous issues of The Blitz, multiple arbitration panels have awarded damages to blind entrepreneurs who have prevailed. In the last year alone, panels have awarded damages in Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Ohio, Maryland, and North Carolina. The states have appealed each of these to federal court. In Oklahoma, the federal court upheld the award and that case is now in the court of appeals. The Maryland case was argued in court earlier this month. The others are still working their way through the process. Additionally, in Oregon, the federal court essentially overturned a panel's ruling and referred the case back to the arbitration panel to affix damages. How the lower courts rule is significant but not nearly as significant as the appeal courts. Over the next couple of years all of these cases will likely be ruled upon by the federal appeals courts and we will have a clearer picture on whether or not arbitration panels can award damages

or not. If history is a predictor of the future, we will probably end up with a mixed bag meaning vendors in some parts of the country can sue for damages and those in other parts cannot. The only way it gets resolved at that point is if the Supreme Court weighs in. Our legal experts tell us it is unlikely that the highest court would take on the issue since they only accept 1% of the cases presented to them for review. But you never know so we will be watching this drama unfold before our very eyes over the next couple of years.

Calorie Disclosure: It Won't Be Long Now – The calorie disclosure for products sold in vending machines has been with us since December 1, 2016. Most blind entrepreneurs are well aware of the requirements and are complying. However, there is about to be a slight change. The FDA has extended the implementation date for front of pack font size for products sold in glass front machines. The original rule required that the calorie declaration on the package be at least 50% of the size of the largest font on the package. In response to concerns expressed by the industry, the FDA extended that implementation date to July 26, 2018. That date is almost upon us. If you are relying on front of pack declarations, you must ensure that all products sold meet the font size requirements. Make sure you know the rules and you comply. Failure to do so may result in fines and even civil actions. Even if you operate fewer than 20 vending machines which are exempt from the labeling requirement, NABM encourages you to voluntarily comply to minimize confusion by customers.

More States Jumping on the Hadley Bandwagon – It was just a little over 2 years ago when NABM launched the on-line entry-level training program with the Hadley Institute for the Blind & Visually Impaired. Last year, 44 individuals enrolled in the training. This represents approximately 40% of all vendors trained and licensed in the United States. More states are taking advantage of the national curriculum and this year it is anticipated that 50% of all trainees in the country will participate in the NABM/Hadley training. The training has 3 distinct advantages for states.

1. It gives trainees access to a comprehensive national curriculum;
2. It attracts candidates who would otherwise not be interested because they can't leave home for months at a time to attend formal classroom training; and,
3. It saves money in the way of personnel savings and the cost of travel, lodging, and meals for trainees.

If your state is not already taking advantage of this training, you are encouraged to take a look at it.

Merchants Meet at Washington Seminar – The National Federation of the Blind held its annual Washington Seminar in late January. Among the several hundred who were there, there were a few dozen blind entrepreneurs. NABM held a special meeting / training session and a room full of attendees heard

several outstanding presentations. The next day they hit The Hill with fellow Federationists to educate members of Congress about issues of importance to blind people.

Join Us in Orlando – The National Federation of the Blind will be holding its annual convention again this year in Orlando, Florida on July 3-8. This will be the final year of a 6-year stint for the convention in Orlando. There will be 3,000 blind people gathered in convention and all Randolph-Sheppard entrepreneurs are invited. The Merchants Division will be meeting on the afternoon of July 5th. President Gacos is hard at work planning a terrific agenda for the meeting. So, make plans to come join us in the Sunshine State.

Need Assistance with Social Security? – Last year, when NABM President Nicky Gacos announced a new pilot project to assist blind entrepreneurs who were having difficulty with Social Security over their SSDI, it was felt there was a need for the service. The numbers suggest that is definitely true. Thus far, Michael Dalto, who is a nationally known Social Security expert, has assisted over 30 individuals with remarkable results. Practically everyone who has been referred to him was able to keep or have their benefits reinstated. It remains to be seen if NABM will continue to offer the service long-term. It simply depends on the demonstrated need. If you have a need for assistance, contact Nicky Gacos at nickycolorado@netscape.net or call him at 1-888-687-6226 and press Extension “4”.

Rebates! Rebates! Rebates! – The rebate program managed by the RSA Management Group for blind entrepreneurs continues to grow beyond anyone’s wildest imagination. By leveraging the buying power of all blind entrepreneurs nationwide, RSA Management Group recently sent out approximately \$650,000 in quarterly rebates to blind entrepreneurs nationwide. Do the math. That projects out to \$2.6 Million annually or an average of \$1,300 per blind entrepreneur. And that number will likely only get bigger as volume dictates better deals with manufacturers. For some reason, about one-fourth of the Randolph-Sheppard entrepreneurs are not signed up for rebates. It is free money. You don’t do anything except provide your account numbers to the buying group. They track your purchases and get your rebate from the manufacturer. If you are not a member, contact Claudia Lannan by email at claudial@rsamanagementgroup.com or by phone at 855-978-6800, Extension 1. That little lizard on TV says “Fifteen minutes could save you 15% on your insurance.” Well, in this case, 15 minutes could earn you literally thousands of dollars in rebates.

Farewell to Dan Frye: Let’s Hope It is Temporary – With a new governor comes new leadership in key departments. That was the case in New Jersey when the new governor asked for and accepted the resignation of every appointee of the previous governor. Unfortunately, long-time friend to Randolph-Sheppard Dan Frye was caught up in the political upheaval. He is out as the

Executive Director of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind. During his tenure there, Dan made significant improvements in the Business Enterprises Program. Dan will be missed by the blind people of New Jersey but let's hope that his absence from the Randolph-Sheppard community will be short lived. With his knowledge, experience, and commitment, he will surely be back in some capacity very soon.

Welcome to Some New BEP Directors – There are a few new names amongst the BEP Director fraternity. Some are brand new hires while others have just not been introduced to you yet. Join NABM in welcoming these new BEP Directors:

Kansas – Courtney Johnson
Kentucky – Corey Marcum
Missouri – James Brinkman
Nevada – Chris Mazza
New York – Louise Werner
Oklahoma – Mike Spencer
Rhode Island – Melanie Sbardella

It is worth noting that Mike Spencer was a Randolph-Sheppard entrepreneur in Oklahoma and managed the inmate commissary at the Tulsa County Jail before accepting his new challenge. We also want to send out special congratulations to Drazen Elez in Nevada. He vacated the Business Enterprises Chief position to accept a promotion as the Deputy Administrator for Operations. But Drazen won't be too far away. He will still supervise BEP and just recently hired his replacement.

Dates to Remember

- May 21-23 - NABM Critical Issues Conference, Washington, D.C.
- May 21-23 - Emerging Leaders Training in Washington, D.C.
- July 3-8 – National Federation of the Blind Annual Convention in Orlando
- July 24-25 – NAMA Fly In in Washington, D.C.
- September 19-21 – Region 5 Conference in Des Moines
- November 13-16 – BLAST Conference in San Antonio, Texas.

On the Road Again - Terry Smith and Nicky Gacos continue to spend a lot of time on the road visiting states. Thus far this year they have been in South Carolina, North Carolina, Louisiana, Virginia, Nevada, and Maryland. Gacos and Vice President Ed Birmingham were in Louisiana for the introduction of the Fit Pick campaign on state properties. Melba Taylor represented NABM at the spring meeting of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind in Bethesda. And the calendar is filling up for the rest of the year already. It's going to be a busy 2018.

Speaking of Going to Louisiana – In the last issue of The Blitz, we told you

about the Governor's Executive Order requiring 100% healthy items in state buildings. We told you that Nicky Gacos joined with representatives of NAMA in meeting with the Governor's Office to discuss a more realistic approach. The result was an agreement that blind vendors would commit to a percentage of products that meet Fir Pick guidelines. President Nicky Gacos and Vice President Ed Birmingham were on-site for the implementation and they got some nice press. Check this out

<http://www.vendingmarketwatch.com/news/12408096/taste-of-fitpick-held-in-baton-rouge-for-state-employees>

You Can Still Help – Do you like what the National Federation of the Blind and NABM are doing to advocate for the program on a national level and to assist individual state programs and blind entrepreneurs? Do you enjoy reading The Blitz and being kept informed about what is going on in the Randolph-Sheppard community? If so, we can use your financial support. Over half of our support comes from the NFBEI subscriptions but we count on donations to make up the rest. If you would like to contribute to the cause, we would welcome your donation. You can donate by sending a check to:

National Association of Blind Merchants
7450 Chapman Highway, #319
Knoxville, TN 37920

Make the check payable to NABM and write "NFBEI" in the memo portion of the check. Your support is greatly appreciated.

You can also donate by going to our website at www.blindmerchants.org and we have a new way you can contribute. We can do bank drafts if you want to sign up for monthly giving. Contact Terry Smith if you are interested in setting up bank draft donations

If your state is one of the 11 that doesn't subscribe to the services of the NFBEI, we'd welcome your involvement. Terry Smith would be happy to discuss the services with you.

Share Your News with Everyone - Help us keep everyone informed about what is happening around the country. Let us hear from you. Tell us what is going on in your state. What is happening in one state affects what is going on in another, and NABM and the NFBEI offer the best vehicle to keep everyone updated on what is going on out there.

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SHARE THE BLITZ**

**PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SHARE THE BLITZ WITH
OTHERS AND DISTRIBUTE ON YOUR LISTSERVS. WE
WANT ALL BLIND ENTREPRENEURS, BEP
ADMINISTRATORS, and OTHER STAKEHOLDERS TO
KNOW WHAT NABM AND THE NFBEI ARE DOING**

The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.