

COMMITTEE OF BLIND VENDORS
QUARTERLY MEETING
April 27, 2023

Roll Call – Attendance was taken, and a quorum determined, and the meeting called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Vice-Chair Lynn Florence, filling in for Chair Larry Hall.

Members Present: Lynn Florence, Vice Chair, Charles Dorsey, Todd Freeman, Katherine Gore, Jerry Grimes, Brad Holland, Buster Mayne, Chris Miller, Cramer Schneider, and Todd Stephens.

Staff Present: Corey Marcum, KBE Director, Jennifer Wright, Assistant Director, Janice Jackson, Administrative Assistant, Aaron Christy and Stuart Boggs, Vending Coordinators, Jason Wathen, Food Service Coordinator, Shelby Glisson, Repair Tech, Dondra Meredith, Deputy General Counsel, Education and Labor Cabinet

Vendors Present: Derrick Kromenacker and Angela Stevens.

Guests Present: George Bouquet, Martin Caldwell, Jessica Elliott, Mackenzie Kromenacker and Justin Purvis.

Todd Freeman opened the meeting with an invocation.

Approval of Minutes: Vice-Chair Florence called for a motion for the approval of minutes from the January 27, 2023 meeting, which were previously distributed for review. Todd Stephens made the motion to accept the minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Todd Freeman. The motion carried.

The vice-chair started the meeting by encouraging everyone to feel free to speak their mind but that guests need to wait till the Public Comments portion of the meeting.

KBE Director Report – Corey Marcum

Mr. Marcum began by introducing Derrick Kromenacker as a new emergency-appointed vendor in Louisville.

Mr. Marcum reported that he and Assistant Director, Jennifer Wright had just returned from the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) in Bethesda, where they attended training specific to Randolph-Sheppard. The training covered the new way agencies must determine whether something is considered equipment verses supplies.

He said that several bids had gone out and Derrick Kromenacker had been selected as an emergency vendor for the Gene Snyder, Mazzoli, and DEA buildings. The bid for the CHR building was sent out on April 25th. He told the Committee that the vendor at the Mayo Underwood building had rescinded his resignation for the building, and would remain there.

He reported that two new locations had opened in the first quarter. The Green River Correctional Complex is now part of Brad Hollands operation and Chris Miller has added the KY Correctional Institution for Women at Peewee Valley.

Mr. Marcum reported that KBE looked at the Bluegrass Army Depot and the Bluegrass Station at Avon but decided to pass due to several factors. The Fort Knox Summer Cadet Training was a small contract that was also passed on. He said it was better to concentrate on the Fort Knox year-round contract. The response for that has already been submitted.

He said KBE was still waiting to hear back on the UK Laundry RFP and a response was being prepared for the University of Louisville vending contact.

Mr. Marcum announced that Shelby Glisson had been hired as a full-time Repair Technician and that interviews had been conducted the previous day for a second Food Service Coordinator, who will begin June 1st.

He encouraged vendors to attend NAMA, which will be May 9-12, in Atlanta. He said that KBE would reimburse vendors for their registration fee.

He announced that the National Restaurant Association Convention will be held May 19-24 in Chicago. Lynn Florence and Cramer Schneider will attend, along with Jason Wathen and Mr. Marcum. The Field of Dreams training sponsored by the National Association of Blind Merchants (NABM), and U-Select-It, will be held in Des Moines, June 14-16. Aaron Christy, Stuart Boggs, and Mr. Marcum will be attending.

Mr. Marcum said that there are other upcoming training opportunities. The second Blast TNT Zoom training will be May 2nd from 3:00-4:30, and the third session will be August 3rd. The link to those trainings was emailed to all vendors. The Mini Blast/Vistar Show will be in Atlantic City, September 27-29 and KBE would like to invite two vendors to go. The Committee of Blind Vendors General Assembly will be held October 27th and 28th at the Hyatt Regency in Louisville. More information will be forthcoming on that.

Mr. Marcum said the iBEP ePay problems continue. It seems to be a 50-50 split as to who is at fault, Agate or KY Interactive. He said KBE is still working with Agate to get it fixed.

He said that micro markets are being installed at the DEA Building in Louisville and the Roederer Correctional Complex in LaGrange.

The equipment has been ordered but we are waiting on the American Printing House to get the space ready.

We have engaged the Lighthouse of Chicago for new vendor training. Two emergency vendors, Derrick Kromenacker and Glenn Smallwood are currently enrolled in the online training.

Mr. Marcum reported that the \$20,000 Coke Scholarship will now be administered by KBE. The scholarship committee includes Committee Member Todd Stephens, a Blind Services Manager, a Rehab Counselor and Jennifer Wright. The deadline for applying for the scholarship is May 31st.

At the last meeting, it was requested that KBE submit setaside and budget reports to the Committee. Those have been emailed out and there are hard copies available. There is good news as the setasides continue to increase. This quarter, we have collected gross sales of over \$526,000. At the same time last year, we had gross sales of \$389,000. We have had an increase, in this quarter alone, of over \$137,000 from the same quarter last year. We are going in the right direction. There are \$600,000 in outstanding bills so we will be slightly over budget, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Our financial situation is strong.

He reminded everyone that the next quarterly meeting will be July 27th at 4:00 pm.

Chair Report

Vice-Chair Florence said she had not been provided with a report and asked Todd Stephens to add anything the Chair had passed on to him. He said he was encouraged that the agency was looking at opportunities outside of vending in state and federal buildings and that vendors must be on their A game and put their best foot forward as there is no leeway if we aren't the best performers for

new opportunities. We need to clean up our own house and put our best foot forward before we start looking at the private sector.

Mr. Stephens passed along that he and the Chair had discussed the importance of the agency taking along a blind vendor when they go to check out prospective locations.

Vice-Chair Florence indicated that it was important for the agency and the blind vendor who is moving into a new location, such as a prison, to do their homework to find out what products are permitted to be sold so they don't purchase items to sell that aren't allowed. She said we need to work better as a team.

She indicated that if a location hasn't been making money for a long period of time, we need to get rid of it, instead of holding on to it just because we've always been there. She said we need to scrutinize new locations we are considering, to determine whether they will be a true money maker, or just a place holder. She said not all vendors want to have to take care of multiple small locations just to make a living.

Mr. Stephens said we need to be cognizant of adjustments that can be made in existing facilities, such as using unmanned operations like micro markets. We need to look at them for adjustments before we get rid of them.

Vice-Chair Florence asked if there were questions. There were none.

Old Business

Vendor Check-in Report – The Chair had asked Brad Holland to send out an email to all vendors to get their issues and concerns, and compile them for the meeting. The vendors were asked to respond back to questions regarding what they thought about the program going forward, the agency in general, and what their

coordinator could do better. Mr. Holland said that only two of the 23 vendors responded. He received two concerns. He indicated that they were fear of retaliation from the agency and lack of communication.

Mr. Holland said that he had dug deep and had not found any evidence of retaliation in recent years and felt that the fear may be a holdover from past directors. He asked members to speak up if they disagreed. Mr. Stephens said that he and Mr. Marcum had disagreed on several things and that there was never any retaliation against him.

Mr. Holland reported that the communication issue raised was that vendors felt more transparency was needed from the agency, especially from the director. The concern conveyed was that only one or two vendors were ever included in what was going on in the agency. He suggested that the agency be more inclusive and transparent and send out information and make all vendors aware of what was going on. He said that he thought more networking should be done among vendors and the mindset shouldn't be vendors against the agency. He said, KBE is there to work with us, not for us. He noted that we can all do better on working together as a collective.

Vice-Chair Florence told members that now was their chance to be heard and to please speak up. Many members spoke in support of the agency and how much they had helped them and how it was a very good team.

Jerry Grimes had complaints about the machine contract and Mr. Marcum told him that it was an ePort issue not a machine and the company was aware of his issue and was working on it. Mr. Grimes also indicated that he thought the UofL vending proposal was a bad idea and wouldn't be profitable.

The vice-chair told members that if they need something, to start with their coordinator and not complain to other vendors. Ask for help if it's needed. She also commented that she would like to see Mr. Marcum discuss emergency appointments with her, and Chair Hall, before making decisions. She said that is part of active participation.

Mr. Holland asked for comments from agency staff. Mr. Marcum said not to worry about the past and to continue moving forward. Other staff indicated that we're all in it together and need to work as a team.

New Business

New Vendor Training and Selection

Ms. Wright reported that the Blind Vendor Committee's Training Subcommittee, and the agency, are working out the details of the new vendor training and selection process. To ensure we are getting the best candidates all applicants will be required to complete a panel interview with specific questions chosen by the subcommittee. Once selected, the candidates will go through a one-week evaluation process at the McDowell Center. Once it's been determined they have the necessary skills to become a vendor, their counselor will be notified, and the candidate will be enrolled in the Lighthouse of Chicago Randolph-Sheppard training. It is all online but there is help available. The training is self-paced but should take no more than six months to complete. Once the candidate has passed the comprehensive exam, they will begin their on-the-job training.

To ensure that we are getting the best candidate referrals from counselors, KBE staff will be meeting with the Rehab Counselors for the Blind (RCB's) in July to explain our program and take them on a field trip in Louisville to visit with a vendor and see food

service, micro market, and vending facilities. We want them to see what it takes to run an operation so they will refer the best candidates to our program. We will also be meeting with McDowell Center staff on May 15th to discuss the evaluation process. They will also be taken on the same field trip. We want them to see what our vendors do so they will be able to know what should be included in the evaluations.

Vice-Chair Florence said she hoped bookkeeping will be part of the training for new vendors. She said Janice Jackson could be beneficial with helping new vendors with setasides and what can be deducted and how to get started. Ms. Wright told the group that keeping vendors' skills up to date with changing technology is very important and if any vendor needs training on that, or anything else, KBE will make sure they get it.

Ms. Wright asked the Vice-Chair if there has been a subcommittee assigned to work on planning the training and agenda for the General Assembly. The vice-chair said that one hasn't been appointed yet. Mr. Marcum said that he could reach out to subject matter experts in taxes, or any topics vendors would like to hear about. Ms. Wright said that she feels that all vendors need to be included in what training they would like to have at the meeting. Mr. Stephens said that he would check with SCORE to see if they would be interested in speaking at the meeting.

Public Comments

Retired vendor, George Bouquet, said that he really appreciated all the help that he received from Food Service Coordinator, Jason Wathen when he was running his facilities.

He said that he is still getting commission checks from Pepsi and Coke, which should go to Charles Dorsey. He said he's tried unsuccessfully to get Pepsi to straighten it out.

The vice-chair asked Mr. Marcum to reach out to all the different reps, like Coke, Pepsi, Vistar, etc. to see if they could come to the General Assembly. Mr. Marcum said that every time a new rep comes onboard, he tries to take them around to meet the vendors who they will be serving.

Angela Stevens thanked the agency for their assistance in helping her adapt after her recent eye surgery. She wanted to encourage all the vendors to work together.

Martin Caldwell said that in his 20 years in the program before his retirement, the agency has never had a better staff. He said he is glad to see the agency is recruiting new vendors. The program will not survive without it. He said that he couldn't have asked for a better team to work with.

The vice-chair asked, new vendor, Derrick Kromenacker, if he would like to say anything. He commented that he enjoyed working in the program.

Adjournment

Todd Stephens made a motion to adjourn. A second was made by Vice-Chair Florence. The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 pm.