

Nebraska Business Enterprises (NBE)
Blind Licensee Committee

Friday, March 8th, 2024

NCBVI, Lincoln Office
4600 Valley Rd., Lincoln, NE Suite 100

Minutes

Chairperson Sandy Alvarado called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available. The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, on the NCBVI website, and on NFB® Newslines. The notice was sent to the ncbvi.everyone Email List.

Attendance

Board Members

Sandy Alvarado, Chairperson; Andrea Chizek, Vice Chairperson; Ronnie Kellogg, Secretary; Jeremy Richey

Board Members Absent

Atty Svendsen

Blind Licensees and Trainees in Attendance

Amy Eidenmiller, Alek Balaberda, Jim Jirak, Jason Thompson

NCBVI Staff in Attendance

Eric Buckwalter, NBE Supervisor; Lizzie Heidenreich, NBE Orientation Counselor; Jeff Scheer, NBE VR Counselor, Carlos Serván, Executive Director of NCBVI

Guests

Amber Steet, Krystal Elmshouser, Oscar Alvarado

Approve Minutes from December 8, 2023

Andrea made a motion to accept the minutes from the December 8, 2023 meeting in Omaha.

Jeremy Seconded the motion

Andrea: aye

Jeremy: aye

Ronnie: aye

Sandy: aye

Motion passed.

Committee Chair Report – Sandy Alvarado, Committee Chair

Sandy Alvarado, Chairperson

At the start of her report, Sandy mentioned active participation, the active installations the SLA is doing, and the new Micro markets.

Sandy said that she and the SLA do research together and Sandy does her best to communicate with the rest of the committee when necessary.

Sandy said that she tries to share with us when certain meetings are going to take place, such as the Blind Merchants' and the Randolph Sheppard Vendors of America's monthly meetings, but she thinks she ended up losing her subscription to the email lists when they were switched over.

Sandy said that one organization has their meeting on the second Tuesday of every month while the other has theirs on the third Tuesday of every month.

Sandy said that she tries to forward information to us when she receives it. She recently got information that BLAST will be taking place in Tennessee from the nineteenth to the twenty-second of November, but the agenda is still being worked out.

She mentioned that BLAST took place in Florida previously and how it was pulled off successfully.

She mentioned that the Blind Merchants did very well getting speakers, reps, and vendors all lined up in a short period of time and that they had 300 people show up.

Sandy said that Sagebrush took place, too, and that she would ask Jim and Amber to give a report, since they were able to attend.

Sandy asked if anyone attended even virtually. She said that she typically does, but she was not able to this time because her new micro market has been keeping her extremely busy.

Sandy said that a letter to the military went out through the Blind Merchants recently. The military has been failing to give priority to Randolph-Shepherd vendors like they are supposed to and have been going through called AFES. Sandy said that the letter that the Blind Merchants sent out was an attempt to get clarification on that issue. She said that the clarification would have to come from a judge and that a case was filed at one of the district courts around a month or so ago.

Sandy also spoke with Eric about getting permission to raise prices for vendors in the state contract division because prices for product have gone up again.

Sagebrush Report – Jim Jirak, Vendor; Amber Steet

Jim said that he was able to go to Sagebrush for the first time because all expenses were paid for. He explained that, every year, RSVA selects a vendor that has been in the program less than five years and pays all expenses so that the chosen vendor can attend Sagebrush.

He said that it was a good experience and that he got some things out of it. He thought that the meetings were informative and he really enjoyed the exhibits. He said that the exhibits were the highlight of the event for him. He encouraged that all Vendors should attend a Sagebrush or BLAST event at least once.

Amber said that they had the coolest stuff at the exhibits.

Amber mentioned AVS has lockable coolers, that can only be accessed once a person swipes their credit card.

Amber said that she had an excellent time over all. They were able to gather a lot of materials that they would be happy to share around if people would like to learn more.

Jim said that RSVA plans to make a podcast and when it happens, he will let sandy know so she can share it.

State Licensing Agency Report – Eric Buckwalter, NBE Supervisor

Introduction of New Staff and Vendors

Amy Eidenmiller

Jay Van Winkle

Tanya Cady

Alek Balaberda

Abbi Wioskowski

Vending Site Update

Micro Market Update

The SLA is still hoping to install the four new micro markets at DHHS and NDE locations next week. However, we are running into internet issues that we are working to solve; however, the issues that need solving are beyond our control.

The micro market on Offutt AFB opened at the end of December and has been a huge success! Sandy will have an update on this site later in the meeting.

A second larger micro market is being worked on at Offutt AFB that will be connected to our cafeteria operation. This is a fairly large scale project and our most ambitious project since launching the STRATCOM cafeteria. The building is fronting a remodeling project of the cafeteria to go along with this. Projected opening of this market is probably not going to be until after August of this year.

Lincoln Regional Center

The SLA completed the install of new vending machines at the Lincoln Regional Center in December and the new Vendor is up and running and doing fantastic. We are slowly working through a couple of kinks in the operation as there are several unique health and security related measures in this operation.

Hopefully, next week we will have the new coffee system up and running. We are using a new system at this location as a trial to see how it works, and if the customers at the location are happy with the product. It is a proprietary pod based system, which means it offers the flexibility of a Keurig system, but with pods that only the Vendor can obtain.* If it goes well, we will consider offering this to other Vendors as well.

*Technically, customers could source the pods themselves. However, they are only available in bulk at the moment.

BSDC

The SLA installed ten new machines at BSDC in the last month and a new Vendor started his operation in servicing this site. The site has only been open for about a week, so there is little to report at this point. However, the amount of positive comments we received while installing and stocking the machines was encouraging. Individuals constantly commented about how nice the machines looked and that they were happy to have a variety of options in the machines.

USDA

In the past month the SLA also placed new machines in the new USDA building in Lincoln and another new Vendor started his operation. The refurbishment of the building is brand new and different offices are slowly starting to occupy their space. As the building is not yet to capacity, and has only been open for about two weeks it is still too soon to have much more to report at this time.

YRTC's

Since the last NBE Committee Meeting the SLA has also installed machines at the DHHS-YRTC sites in Kearney and Hastings. The sites are managed by another new Vendor in the NBE program. Again, with the newness of these locations it is hard to have enough data to report on at this time.

DHHS – York

The SLA has opened a new location at the DHHS-York office. Unlike the other DHHS office locations in Omaha and Bellevue, this site was too small to place anything other than two vending machines. The site is operated by a current Vendor. The staff of the building was excited to have machines in their breakroom.

Upcoming Sites:

DHHS-Hastings

Micro market (Spring 2024)

GSA Omaha (Fall 2024)

USCIS – Lincoln, Micro Market or Vending (Winter/Spring 2025)

NBE Licensed Vendors

There are currently 12 Licensed Vendors in the NBE program and 5 Vendors who are in their probationary period and actively operating sites. The SLA is happy with this growth in new individuals interested in NBE. A huge thanks to the new individuals willing to take this leap, as well as the current Vendors who have offered support and guidance to the new folks as they prepared.

Vending Site Complaints

The only major complaint received by the SLA this past quarter involved some machines being under-stocked and under-serviced. This situation was addressed and ultimately the decision reached by both the SLA and the location was to remove services from the location. While the SLA always hates to give up sites; in the long-term this was the best decision for both parties.

Other Items

NBE Team Member Update

Since the middle of December, the SLA's NBE Team has been completely staffed for the first time in over five years. We are excited about what having a fully staffed team means – for example we

would not have been able to launch all of the new sites as quickly as we did if we only had two team members.

Over the next few weeks things will slow down, slightly, for the SLA and we will be designing a plan for who will take care of which aspect of the SLA's duties. Look for an email regarding who you will contact depending on your needs.

State Building Agreement

The SLA will be putting together a price increase proposal for sites that fall under the State Building Division agreement. More information will be available soon.

Update on Profit and Loss Reports

Lizzie all P&Ls are coming in on time, and she is working on reconciling January P&Ls.

Sales Tax Line on P&L

A discussion was held on whether to change the P&L line for sales tax to be a fillable cell for Vendors to place the sales tax amount they paid, instead of it being an auto-fill cell, as there are some variables in sales tax that the formula for the auto-fill cell can not take into account.

There are pros and cons to this as some Vendors pay sales tax quarterly and others pay monthly.

After discussion, the SLA will bring a potential solution to the next meeting to present to the Vendors.

Set-Aside Through ACH

There have been some issues with the method of paying Set-Aside through ACH. Few Vendors are using this method, and half of those who do are having issues with it going through correctly.

After discussion, it was suggested that Vendors who are not using this method or are having problems with it processing correctly not use it until the SLA can look into the issue further. For those who are currently using the method successfully, they can continue to do so for the time being.

Micro Market Update - Sandy Alvarado

Sandy gave an update on how her new (first) micro market is doing now that it has been open for about two and a half months.

Sandy shared how the market is going great and people in the building really love it. It has kept her quite busy and she is now in the building about five days per week instead of two or three when she just had vending machines.

The building really got behind it and made their own internal promotional videos to demonstrate to use the self-checkout kiosk.

She is looking forward to going deeper into the capabilities of the micro market software and starting to add deals and incentives for her customers.

Cantaloupe Update

Eric provided an update on the Cantaloupe 1099s and shared that all Vendors who meet the sales threshold should have received their forms by now. He said that he was working with Cantaloupe again this year to make sure the delays do not occur again next year.

Eric also shared that Three Square's (provider of micro market backend service) systems are starting to become more integrated into Cantaloupe. Cantaloupe bought Three Square about one year ago.

Set Date for Next Meeting

A recommendation was put forth to hold the meeting on 6/7/2024.

After discussion, Jeremy made a motion that our next quarterly meeting be held on 06/07/2024 in Omaha at 10:00 AM at the 1313 Farnam Street State Office Building.

Andrea seconded the motion.

Andrea: Aye

Ronnie: aye

Jeremy: aye

Sandy: Aye.

Motion Passed.

Discuss Training for Next Quarterly Meeting

Andrea made a motion that we have a round table discussion with the relevant vendors about their experiences with their new micro markets for our next training.

Jeremy seconded the motion.

Andrea: Aye

Ronnie: Aye

Jeremy: aye

Sandy: aye

Motion Passed.

Andrea made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Jeremy seconded the motion.

Andrea: aye

Ronnie: aye

Jeremy: Aye

Sandy: aye

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:51 AM.

TRAINING

Vendors' present for training:

Sandy, Jeremy, Ronnie, Andrea, Jason, Alek, Amy, Jim,

Training started at Noon.

Sandy recognized and introduced Roger Frank, CEO of Frank Financial Concepts, Inc.

He explained how our retirement plan works and how important it is for us. He answered Vendor questions about different retirement and financial strategies.