



**MidWest Enterprises for the Blind, Inc.**  
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**MWEBMI.COM**

## **Press Release**

MidWest Enterprises for the Blind (MWEB), a self-sustaining 501c3 non-profit organization, that is based in Kalamazoo, MI, provides employment opportunities for visually impaired individuals. Operating under the AbilityOne program, its primary goal is to combat the high unemployment rate of 70% among visually impaired individuals. MWEB achieves its mission, through procuring government manufacturing contracts primarily serving the United States Military. MWEB's 100% direct blind labor force produces high-quality plastic blow-molded folding tables, folding chairs, and open storage shelves.

MWEB passionately supports our U.S. Military, but also passionately supports its community. For nearly 20 years MWEB has participated in advocacy and community outreach on behalf of the blind community as well as participating and supporting programs that provide resources to local Kalamazooligans. MWEB gives back through advocacy on Capitol Hill, connecting with Senators and Representatives in Lansing, attending national conferences, packaging hats and gloves for the Warm Kids Project, sponsoring company participants in the Bronson Children's Hospital walk, hosting the spirit station The Pickle Pit in the Kalamazoo Marathon, donating monetary and basic need goods to various Kalamazoo charities, and supporting kitting for Kalamazoo Growlers community projects. MWEB is always looking for new opportunities to support and promote growth.

Last year, MWEB focused on mission awareness, alongside community growth. The Channel Development Team comprised of four members with varying degrees of visual impairment embarked on a website development journey. MWEB's Channel Development team undertook the significant challenge of independently creating MWEB's new website to avoid relying on external web designers. In an effort to gain freedom from an outdated website, MWEB parted ways with its WordPress style web presence. The team knew that a functional and representative website would be needed to allow for continued growth – a modern website was required. The new website allows customers the opportunity to learn more about MWEB's mission and buy products that provide people who are blind career opportunities.

While none of the team members had previous web build experience or formal instruction, the desire to achieve independence was so strong team members trained themselves to utilize web building tools. For people who are blind, independence is a dignity that is never taken for granted. While separating ourselves from an outdated website was best for business, creating a new and improved website all-the-while building new skills provided the team and the company, it represented a profound sense of independence and achievement.



Web design was not the only hurdle to overcome, building a good website requires product photos, marketing savvy, and editing capabilities. Professional backgrounds of the team include computer networking, customer service, and an English major. In addition to web design skills, photography capabilities, photo editing, and product marketing were valuable skills learned. In the span of a year, a two-person team photographed all 44 of MWEB's Skilcraft products (listed on the government's procurement list). While another team member learned to manage the selected web design platform. Editing completed webpages and marketing materials were a team effort. In total the new website took one year to design, build, and launch. The new website hard-launched January 8, 2024.