The Chicago Lighthouse Launches New Retail Venture at Navy Pier

CHICAGO -- In an effort to expand job opportunities for people who are blind or visually impaired, The Chicago Lighthouse has launched an exciting new retail venture at Navy Pier, the city’s premier tourist attraction. The NEW Chicago Lighthouse Retail Store is NOW OPEN during Navy Pier Operating Hours.

The store provides full-time and part-time employment for individuals with visual impairments and offers a broad array of colorful gift items focusing on lighthouse and nautical-related themes.

Among products available are Lighthouse replicas, home décor items, clocks, adult/kids apparel and children’s toys/games/books. Prices range from $2.50 to $50.00 per item to appeal to a wide variety of customers. All revenues go directly to supporting the 28 programs at The Chicago Lighthouse that are dedicated to improving the lives of people who are blind or visually impaired.

“We are absolutely thrilled to undertake this dynamic new initiative and become part of the Navy Pier family,” said Dr. Janet Szlyk, Lighthouse President and Executive Director.

“In doing so, we’re pleased to create jobs for people who are visually impaired at a time when the economy is still struggling and experiencing a high unemployment rate,” she observed.

Dr. Szlyk noted that the Navy Pier store is overseen by two managers who are visually impaired: Rob Cancilla, director of new business development, who supervises the operation and Elbert Ford who serves as manager.

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She also acknowledged the critical role played by Jennifer Nemec, founder of Ideation Studio, in the design and décor of the new facility. Ms. Nemec, who also worked on the development and design of Oprah Winfrey’s retail store, previously was the lead designer for the Lighthouse’s Tools for Living store at its main facility on West Roosevelt Road and its convenience store at Rush Medical Center.

While serving a largely sighted customer base, Cancilla pointed out that the Navy Pier store is visually appealing while specially designed to accommodate the needs of blind workers.

“Our hope is to provide future opportunities for on-the-job and customer service training for additional people who are visually impaired,” he observed. “With the blind and visually impaired community coping with an unemployment rate of nearly 75%, finding jobs is absolutely essential.”

Maintaining that people who are visually impaired often make the best employees, Cancilla pointed to the strong work ethic of the store’s staff.

Ford, for example, started with the Lighthouse’s school for children with multi-disabilities then moved into the agency’s job placement area where he oversees its kiosk operation at Midway Airport and then the store at Rush.

“Elbert excelled in all those assignments, so he was a natural to manage our new store,” Cancilla said.

Summer hours for the Navy Pier Store are 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday and 10 a.m. to midnight Friday and Saturday. For further information, call 1 312/595-5412.

About the Chicago Lighthouse: The Chicago Lighthouse, whose credo is “Because there is still hope,” was founded in 1906, and is one of the nation’s most comprehensive social service agencies. Housed under its roof are the oldest and most prominent vision care and rehabilitation program in the U.S.; a nationally acclaimed school for children with multi-disabilities; a world class employment services program; one of the few remaining clock manufacturing facilities in America; a VA program serving veterans in all 50 states; and a radio station.

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