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**NISH Recognizes College Engineers
for Inventions Designed to Help People with Disabilities in the Workplace**
California Polytechnic State University Students Create Award-Winning “Napkin Roll Assist”

Washington, DC, June 11, 2008 — A \$10,000 top prize was awarded to two innovative students from California Polytechnic State University in the 2008 National Scholar Award for Workplace Innovation & Design. The National Scholar Award is an annual national competition for U.S. college students to build technologies that help people with disabilities overcome barriers to employment and improve their ability to be competitive in their places of work.

The annual competition, now in its sixth year, is sponsored by NISH, a national non-profit participating in the AbilityOne Program, which provides employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities by procuring Federal contracts for goods and services. The awards were presented during a reception during the 2008 NISH Grassroots Advocacy Conference at the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

The winning students – Paula Gijon and Chittayong (Jao) Surakitbanharn designed the “Napkin Roll Assist” for an individual who works in a supported employment position through VTC Enterprises, Inc., in Santa Maria, CA. The employee has limited dexterity and use of only one arm and was not able to meet industry standards for this task at the restaurant at which he works. The Napkin Roll Assist enables the individual to roll napkins at a significantly higher rate of productivity (26 seconds with the device compared to two minutes without). The device can also be used by other individuals with a variety of dexterity and motor impairments.

Second and third place recipients were also honored at the Washington, DC event. University of Washington student, Susumu Harada received second place for the “Hands-Free Voice-Driven Drawing and Diagram Creation Method for People with Motor Impairments,” a voice activated speech recognition technology that allows the user to create diagrams and drawings on the computer. This technology successfully bridges the gap that has existed between voice activated technology for dictation and hands free control of the computer. It also serves as a low cost method of drawing and designing via the computer. Mr. Harada was mentored by Dr. Jacob Wobbrock, a previous first place award winner in the National Scholar Award program.

Nine students from Trinity University were awarded third prize for their engineering work to modify a riding lawn mower so that it is accessible to individuals who can only use their hands operate the mower. The goal of the device was to enable a person with limited use of their legs and feet to work on an AbilityOne grounds maintenance contract located at Lackland Air Force Base. A lever was designed that can be attached to the lawn mower that enables the individual driving the mower to accelerate and decelerate by using their hand, rather than feet. The student team collaborated with Goodwill Industries of San Antonio, in San Antonio, Texas to develop the device.

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nish **Creating Employment
Opportunities
For People With
Severe Disabilities**

“It is inspiring to see so many young people taking an interest in the daily challenges people with disabilities encounter in the workplace,” said Bob Chamberlin, president and CEO of NISH. “All of the participating teams exemplified the purpose of this contest—to design innovative technological solutions that break down barriers facing people with disabilities in the workplace.”

To compete for the National Scholar Award, each individual student or team is required to identify a workplace problem encountered by individuals with disabilities and design a technological solution to overcome the workplace barrier. College students are strongly encouraged to partner with a NISH affiliated nonprofit agency in their community so that they are designing technology that clearly meets the needs of those in the AbilityOne Program. NISH offers assistance in facilitating partnerships between the schools and the nonprofit agencies. This year, more students worked directly with these nonprofit agencies than any other year.

Several teams have continued their relationships with participating nonprofit agencies and have gone on to produce other assistance technologies, such as a portable wheelchair ramp, a one-handed envelope stuffing device and a personal paging device for the auditory impaired.

College engineering and design teams across the United States participated in the competition this year. Second and third place entries were awarded \$5,000 and \$3,000 respectively and all winners are also awarded matching grants for their sponsoring academic departments.

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NISH—Creating Employment for People with Severe Disabilities

Established in 1974, NISH (www.nish.org) is one of two national, nonprofit agencies designated by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled to support nonprofit agencies (NPAs) participating in the AbilityOne Program.

NISH provides employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities by procuring federal contracts for goods and services. Headquartered in Vienna, Va., NISH supports a network of more than 1,300 NPAs as well as federal customers by providing legislative and regulatory assistance, communications and public relations materials, information technology support, engineering and technical assistance, and extensive professional training needed for successful contract management.

AbilityOne Program

Providing employment opportunities to more than 40,000 people, the AbilityOne Program is the largest single source of employment for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities in the United States. More than 600 participating nonprofit organizations employ these individuals and provide quality goods and services to the federal government at a fair market price. The AbilityOne Program is administered by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled (www.abilityone.gov), an independent federal agency, with assistance from National Industries for the Blind (NIB) (www.nib.org) and NISH-Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Severe Disabilities (www.nish.org).