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For Immediate Release:

NISH ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF 2004-2005 NATIONAL SCHOLAR AWARDS FOR WORKPLACE INNOVATION & DESIGN

*Unique Program Invites Students to Design Technological Solutions to Barriers
that Prevent People with Disabilities from Entering or Advancing in the Workplace*

Vienna, Va. (DATE) – NISH, one of the two national nonprofit agencies designated to facilitate the Federal Javits-Wagner-O’Day (JWOD) Program, which provides employment opportunities for nearly 45,000 people who are blind or have other severe disabilities, today announced the winners of the 2004-2005 NISH National Scholar Awards for Workplace Innovation & Design.

The award program, established in 2002, encourages students to design creative technologies that help eliminate the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from entering or advancing in the workplace. The 2004-2005 awards were presented to four college students, and the first-ever high school winner, at the NISH National Training and Achievement Conference held recently in New Orleans.

“We are continually amazed at the ingenuity of our nation’s students,” said Robert Chamberlin, president and CEO of NISH. “This year’s winners reflect exemplary academic applications of technology to several workplace challenges, while also addressing various factors such as economics, ease of use and access technology that are encountered daily by people within the disability community.”

The first place award went to Jacob Wobbrock, a doctoral student from the Carnegie Mellon Human-Computer Interaction Institute in Pittsburgh, Pa. He developed the “EdgeWrite,” an accessible handheld and desktop text entry device for people with motor impairments. The device provides greater ease, stability and accuracy thereby reducing inputting errors on handheld and desktop computer devices.

The “Farm Tractor Accessibility” device, invented by Carla Sanders, a master’s student in rehabilitation counseling at the University of Kentucky, received the second-place award. This innovative tractor lift provides safe accessibility to tractor equipment for farmers with disabilities who might have previously been unable to pursue their chosen agriculture careers.

Two biomedical students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Sirin Yaemsiri and Ken Bradley, achieved third place for their “Audible Counter for People with Cognitive and Physical Disabilities”.

This new device is more compact and portable than models currently available, and incorporates novel features - more accessible control buttons, audio prompts and a specialized count-saving component work—that work together to increase productivity and independence for those using the machine.

The first-ever NISH Junior National Scholar Award for Workplace Innovation & Design went to Daniel Parrot of Bartlesville High School in Bartlesville, Okla. He created a computer program, the “Screen Navigation for the Visually Impaired,” which facilitates the use of graphical operating systems for the visually and cognitively impaired. The program assists in computer navigation, document proofreading and editing, and decreases the time it takes for an individual to access various computing functions.

“The unemployment rate for severely disabled people is an alarming 70%, and NISH works tirelessly to reduce that number through novel programs such as the National Scholar Award for Workplace Innovation & Design,” said Tony Young, Senior Public Policy Strategist for NISH. “We strongly encourage the development of these innovative technologies because we see, on a daily basis, what having a job does to empower people with disabilities, and we will do everything possible to give them greater access to employment and then on to upward mobility.”

The NISH National Scholar Awards are awarded annually to a student or group of students at the undergraduate or graduate level. This year a second track was added for high school students. All award-winning designs have been selected from a pool of highly qualified applicants. Matching grants are also awarded to the schools and other partners. Workplace technology designs that are accepted are computer access, environmental, accommodations, functional control and access, transportation/mobility, and communication assistance.

For more information on how to participate in the 2005 program, email scholarship@nish.org or visit the NISH website at www.nish.org.

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 Javits-Wagner-O’Day (JWOD) Program, which 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 2,100 NPAs as well as Federal customers by providing the 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.

In FY 2004, through the JWOD Program, NISH-affiliated agencies operating in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam reported a record 41,154 jobs for people with severe disabilities, who collectively earned more than \$366 million in wages. During this same period, JWOD-producing NPAs reported more than 135,000 jobs for people with disabilities supporting a wide range of companies, organizations and Federal customers.

Javits-Wagner-O’Day (JWOD) Program

Providing employment opportunities to more than 45,000 people, the JWOD 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 price. The JWOD Program is administered by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled (www.jwod.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).

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