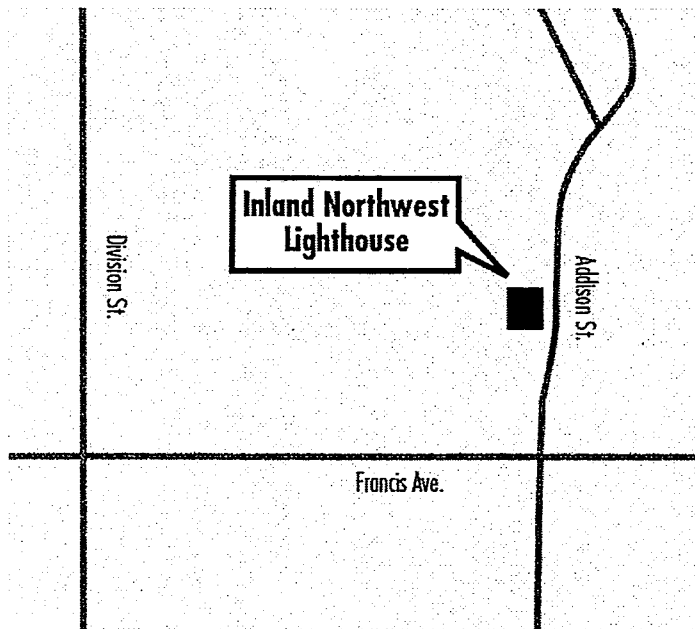


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## Lighthouse for the Blind to expand North Side manufacturing facility

Nonprofit manufacturer plans \$3.5 million project, aims to double workforce

By Jessica Valencia  
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Seattle-based Lighthouse for the Blind Inc., which provides jobs for blind people and others with disabilities, plans to expand its Inland Northwest Lighthouse manufacturing facility, located on Spokane's North Side, and boost its employment here.

Melanie Wimmenauer, a Seattle-based spokeswoman for Lighthouse, says the organization plans to add 41,000 square feet of combined office and manufacturing space to the 52,000-square-foot facility, located in an old Tidyman's supermarket building at 6405 N. Addison. Total construction costs are estimated at \$3.5 million.

Wolfe Architectural Group PS, of Spokane, is the architect for the project, which will go to bid soon, Wimmenauer says. Lighthouse hopes to break ground on the expansion in late May and anticipates the expansion will be completed by November, she says.

The expansion will include space for training rooms in addition to more manufacturing floor space, she says.

The new construction also will triple the space used to hold guide dogs while the company's employees work on the manufacturing floor, providing room enough to accommodate 10 to 12 dogs once completed, she says.

"In terms of what is behind the need, basically we just need more facility space, and we want to provide more jobs," Wimmenauer says.

She says the organization currently employs more than 45 people at its facility here and hopes to more than double that with the new addition, with the expectation of reaching 100 employees within five years. Of its current employees, 36 work on the machining side, with the rest working in office and administrative roles, she says.

"When we opened the facility, we were there in about a year," she says of the current size of its workforce.

Inland Northwest Lighthouse is a manufacturing organization that provides jobs for people who are blind, deaf-blind, or blind with other disabilities. Parent organization Lighthouse for the Blind provides employment and training to the blind.

Inland Northwest Lighthouse opened its doors in 2008 and manufactures office supplies such as wallboards, hanging file folders, paper trimmers and dry-erase easels for government agencies. It also manufactures airplane parts for Triumph Composite Systems Inc., which makes composite interior components for aircraft.

The organization also offers additional programs to its employees, such as orientation and mobility training, a braille class, and assistive technology training, which are all skills that can be used in the workplace, she says.

The organization is largely self-funded through the sales of its manufactured products.

Inland Northwest Lighthouse is a satellite facility for its headquarters on the West Side. A 150,000-square-foot facility operating as Seattle Lighthouse manufactures products for the Department of Defense and Boeing Co., among others. It has been operating since 1918.

In addition to the two manufacturing facilities, Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. operates six supply centers on the West Coast that sell products made by people who are blind to government employees. The company employs around 55 people at its retail centers and more than 350 people altogether.

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