

2015 Kentucky Office for the Blind State Rehabilitation Council "An Untapped Labor Pool"



Department of Workforce Investment
Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

State Rehabilitation Council

**Susan Ament
Angela Anderson
Nancy Clayton
Deborah Culpepper
Kathy Eversole
Sharon Fields
Kelly Foust
Dennis Franklin
Michael Freholm
Regina Fugate
Don Gerard, Jr.**

**Gerry Gordon-Brown
Jennifer Hall
Daniel Scott Heads
Cathy Jackson
Vanessa Jones
David Lawson
Debra Lewis
Grant Logsdon
Paul McKee
Carla Ruschival**

**Stephanie Sharp
Kevin Shurn
Peggy Sinclair-Morris
Rhonda Skidmore
Todd Stephens
George Stokes
Shirley Stivers
Ashley Taylor
Theresa Thomas
Carla Webster
Kim Zeigler**



Message from the SRC Chair



First of all, I would like to compliment Susan Ament on doing a wonderful job as last year's Chair of our SRC.

The council members had an active role in developing, conducting and reviewing the 2015 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

One major concern addressed by the council was the need to find a resolution to the financial problems surrounding the budget. Office for the Blind is to provide services to visually impaired individuals; however, without the necessary funding, OFB staff cannot provide these needed services. Comparatively speaking, if only a few more dollars were provided by the legislature, services would not be interrupted. This year we are going to try a new and promising approach.

The Kentucky Business Enterprises program is facing challenges, as well. However, there is a new Assistant Director with years of experience in this field. This is an exciting time as it seems our program is on track with lots of new ideas as well as solving problems that once seemed insurmountable.

Public hearings were held to gain input for the OFB State Plan and Order of Selection and the closing of additional categories of service, due to lack of funding.

The council reviewed the recommendations from the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and the goals and objectives for the upcoming year, to be voted on in our January meeting.

The Bylaws and Nominating Committee recruited eleven new members to replace the ones rotating off the council, which was quite challenging.

Thanks to all our members for putting their faith in my abilities to lead the council in the coming year. We have many challenges ahead of us.

Sincerely,
George Stokes
SRC Chair

Message from the Executive Director



The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act that was passed on July 22, 2014 has brought a multitude of opportunities to the Kentucky Office for the Blind. The 2015 Annual Report will highlight the new partnerships as well as the strengthened partnerships that existed as a result of the Act. As a core partner, the Office for the Blind continues to seek creative solutions to increase integrated employment outcomes for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Many of the solutions focus on the students with disabilities population and our new dual-customer, the employer, as outlined in the Act.

Integration into Kentucky's Workforce system is key to continued success in employment and independent living. With unemployment data below 5% in the Commonwealth, employers need highly skilled applicants to fulfill their needs. This Annual Report will highlight the curriculum changes implemented at the McDowell Rehabilitation Center and the Kentucky Career Center partnerships to improve the employability skills of individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

This report highlights many areas of accomplishment within the Office for the Blind but there are many more within our various programs. The dedicated staff who have the expertise in the field of vocational rehabilitation and independent living for individuals who are blind or visually impaired deserve the recognition for their dedication and assistance in achieving the goals of individuals with disabilities. It is with the staff of the Office for the Blind that I enthusiastically share the 2015 Annual Report.

Respectfully,
Allison Flanagan, MRC, CRC
Executive Director

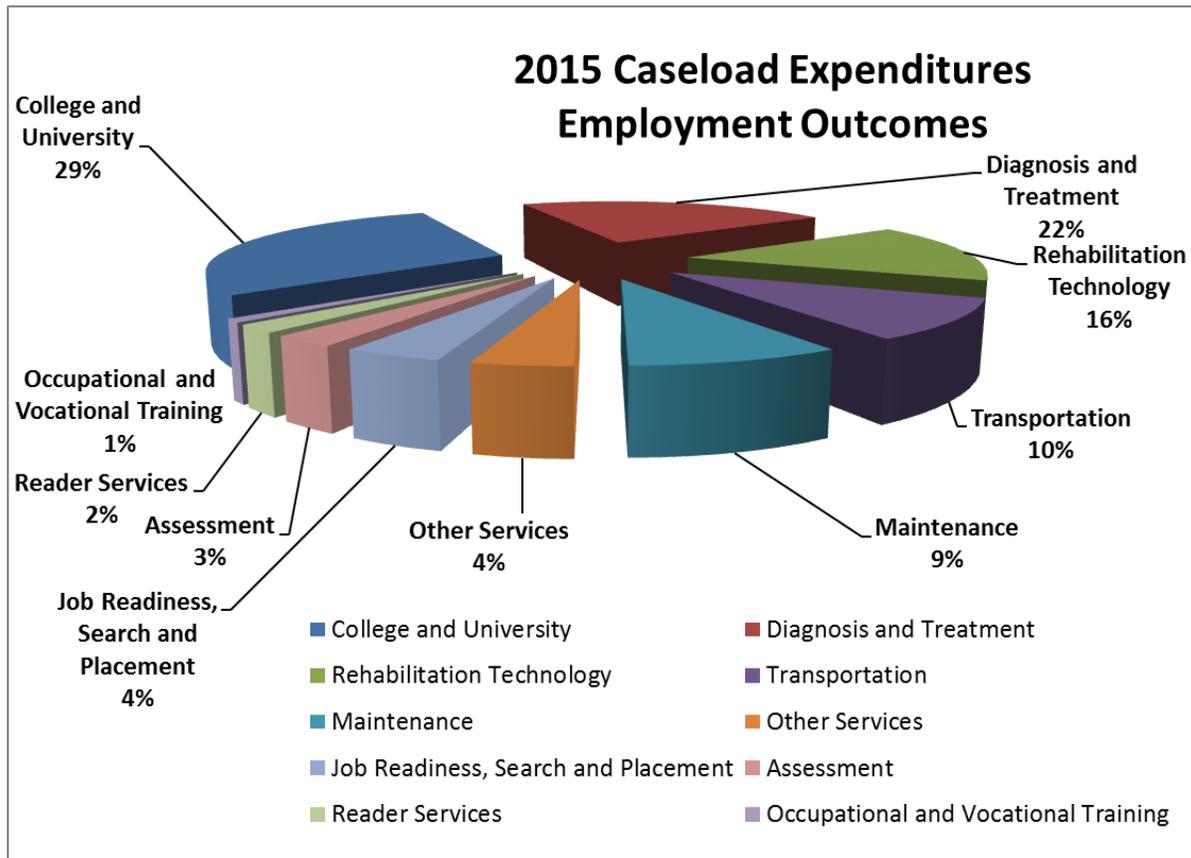
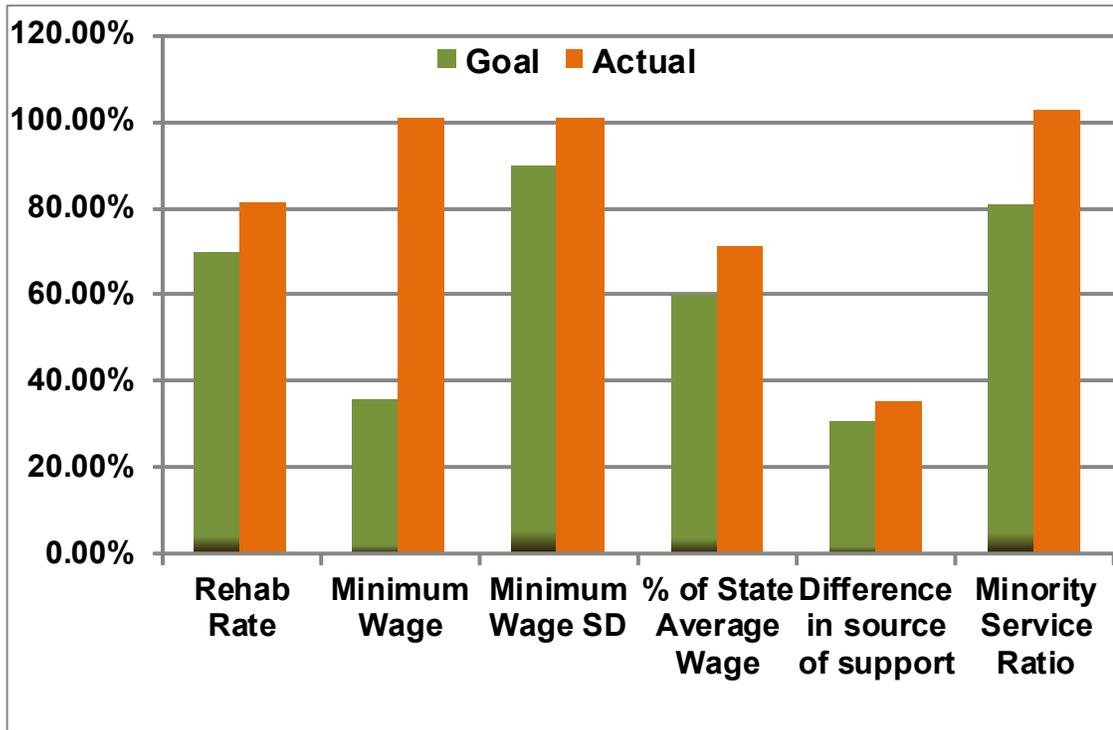
Independent Living Services... Celebrating 35 Years



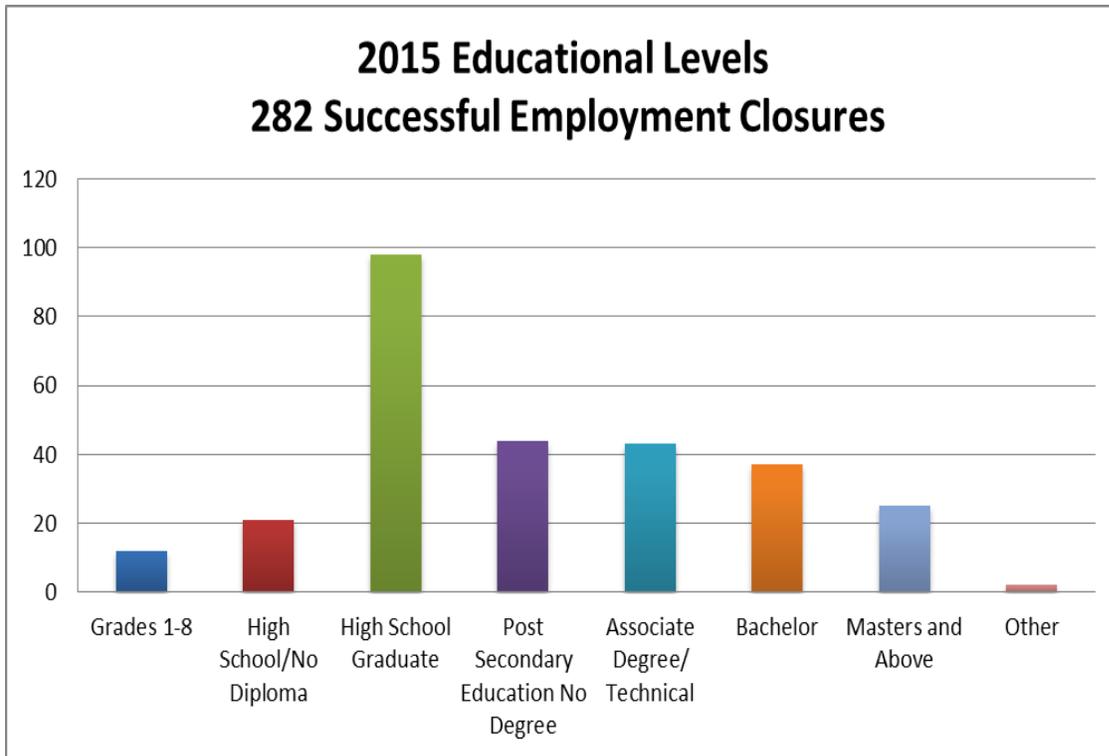
In October 1980, the Bureau for the Blind, using a federal grant, established a Center for Independent Living program. The first office, located in Louisville to serve Jefferson County, opened with a staff of four including the program director, two independent living instructors and one assistant. In 1981, offices were opened in Owensboro and Lexington and services were expanded to cover all of Kentucky. In 1993, there was a program redesign necessitated by changes made in awarding the federal grant and this agency began receiving funds for the Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) program. Since that time, the agency has offered independent living services to persons of all ages using Title VII, Part B funds and the Older Individuals Who Are Blind funds. Today, the Independent Living program has eight staff members which are housed in OFB offices located in Paducah, Bowling Green, Elizabethtown, Louisville, Somerset, Lexington, Covington, and Prestonsburg. The program's services are designed to be flexible and to meet individualized needs with focus directed toward developing greater independence in the home, community and/or workplace. Since the program was expanded to cover the entire Commonwealth, several hundred people have received services each year. In FY2015, more than 700 people living in 109 Kentucky counties were provided independent living services. With a solid history, the Office for the Blind remains dedicated to offering services enabling visually impaired Kentuckians to have opportunities promoting independent living.

Gay Pannell,
Program Administrator

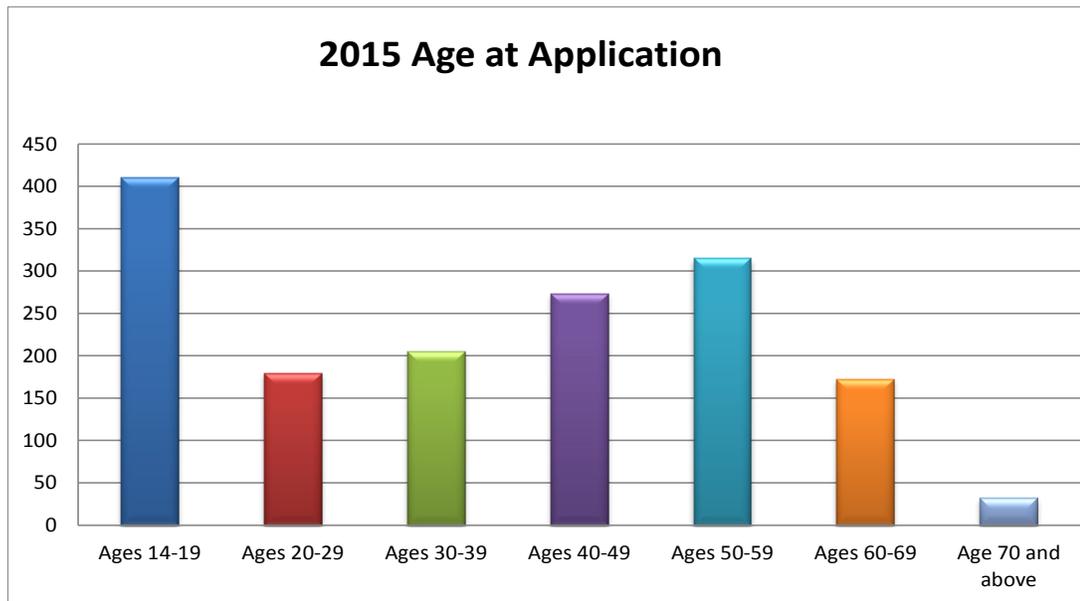
Successful Employment Closure Statistics



“An Untapped Labor Pool”



2015 SRC Annual Report



Satisfaction Survey Results

Satisfaction Survey results indicate that in 2014, consumers expressed high degrees of satisfaction with their experiences. The Human Development Institute at the University of Kentucky coordinated a telephone survey with a total of 297 consumers that were closed successful and unsuccessful in employment in FFY 2014. Overall, the results of the study indicate that consumers expressed high degrees of satisfaction with their experiences. Nearly eighty five percent (84.7%) of all participating consumers rated that services they received through the Office for the Blind as a 1 or 2 on a five point scale where 1 = “excellent” and 5 = “poor”. In addition, for those with a case closed successfully, 88.5% indicated that their needs were met through the services received by responding with a 1 or 2.

At the time of the survey, 65.5% of all participating consumers reported that they were currently working in paid competitive employment status, an increase of almost 5% from the previous year. 9.8% were unemployed and currently seeking employment and 17% were unemployed and not seeking employment. Those with cases closed successfully had the highest competitive employment percentage at 82.7%, suggesting the benefit of service provision toward obtaining and maintaining employment.

Consumer Success Stories



Avery Baggett was a self-professed alcohol abuser. When she was a senior at a prestigious Ivy League university, she said she tried to stop drinking without medical supervision. As a result, she suffered a grand mal seizure that deprived her brain of oxygen and damaged the vision center of her brain and resulted in a loss of motor control and issues with her speech. When this occurred,

Baggett was only three courses away from earning her Bachelor's degree in Linguistics. An occupational therapist referred her to the Office for the Blind and Baggett began training at the McDowell Rehabilitation Center in Louisville.

According to her vocational rehabilitation counselor, "Avery has been focused on recovery and independence ever since her brain injury. She has the attitude and courage to continue learning and to accomplish her goals." At the McDowell Center, Baggett is working on increasing her Orientation and Mobility and home management skills. There has been some improvement in her vision but it is still uncertain as to how much will occur.

Baggett has already completed one of the three remaining courses necessary to obtain her degree and has a target completion date of December 2016. She plans to continue her education in Linguistics and Computer Science with a vocational goal of becoming an assistive technology software programmer. She said her first-hand knowledge of both visual and motor skill loss has made her realize how invaluable technology is in her life every day. She said her personal perspective could greatly impact her work in the assistive technology field.

Baggett said, "I am better off today than before my brain injury because now, I like myself. It doesn't matter how capable and smart I am, if I'm not happy with myself, nothing else matters."

Consumer Success Stories



Kim Becker is looking forward to retirement. Becker, an Assistant Manager for Airgas in Louisville holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration. This has allowed him to work in several areas of the business including logistics, inventory management, sales and training. Becker has a genetic condition known as cone dystrophy which causes vision loss. During the past five years, it had become increasingly difficult for him to read his computer monitor and fine print. His sight deteriorated so much that he had to stop driving, which greatly impacted his independence.

Becker learned about the Office for the Blind by chance, while working out at his gym. An OFB counselor, who also works out there, told him about the agency's services. Becker worked with an Assistive Technology Specialist who trained him on magnification software for his office and home computers. He was referred by the agency to a low vision specialist and was certified eligible for the Bioptic driving program. Becker received training on the monocular device from an OFB Orientation and Mobility Specialist. He was a diligent pupil and it took only 15 days of Bioptic driving instruction until he was ready to take the test, which he passed with flying colors. Becker said not only has it allowed him to continue driving himself to work, church, and volunteer opportunities, but it has also enabled him to drive his father, who is still very active.

Becker said the most important thing that OFB has provided him is hope and opportunity.

Consumer Success Stories



Dianna Gaines grew up living all over the world, as the child of military parents. While a teenager residing in Germany, she met her future husband, who was also in the military. Their travels continued until his retirement when they settled in Kentucky.

A couple of years ago Gaines noticed she was losing her peripheral vision and was diagnosed with macular degeneration. Her vision continued to deteriorate.

Further testing revealed that her

vision loss was not from macular degeneration after all, but from a non-malignant brain tumor.

Gaines' eye physician referred her to the Office for the Blind for the Independent Living program services. She received training on using a white cane for safety. She was also provided magnifiers, and something Gaines has been most pleased with, a writing guide. Before the writing guide, she said that when she addressed envelopes, the address would end up all the way up to the stamp corner. Now she can address the envelopes just like before her vision loss.

Gaines commented that of all the benefits she has received from the Office for the Blind, the information on vision loss and the services received to assist her in maintaining her independence have meant the most. She said before her experience with OFB, she thought all people using white canes and dog guides were totally blind. Now Gaines knows firsthand that isn't necessarily the case. There are many degrees of vision loss and ways to adapt to them. She said she likes knowing that if her vision loss progresses, there is more that the Office for the Blind can do to help her stay independent; and that gives her peace of mind.

Consumer Success Stories



Ben Childs is a native of Paducah where he worked as a Hazardous Materials Specialist. After seven years on the job, he thought he needed glasses and went for a vision check. Much to his surprise, at the age of 26, he was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, a genetic condition that causes retinal degeneration and eventual vision loss. Childs' ophthalmologist referred him to the Office for the Blind (OFB) for services. He maintained his position for two more years before his vision loss

increased to the point where he could no longer do his job.

Losing his vision and his job proved to be a very difficult time in his life. Childs, at the urging of his vocational rehabilitation counselor, reluctantly went to OFB's Charles McDowell Rehabilitation Center for training; and that, he said, changed his life. While at the Center, he heard about the Randolph-Shepherd vending program administered by OFB. Childs applied for the program, interviewed and was selected to participate in the vendor training program. He successfully completed the training and became a licensed vendor. Childs obtained a vending route in Owensboro and has relocated there in order to be close to his independent business.

Childs said he is grateful to OFB for helping him establish his business and once again, become self-sufficient and independent. He said, "Working allows me to go out every day and show the world what someone with a disability can do, and in a small way, it has given me back my purpose. I just wanted to work", said Childs. "I put in 337 applications and only got back three calls because in a small town, everyone knows your circumstances and they wouldn't even interview me because of my vision loss. Now I have my own business and I'm proud of what I've achieved."

Consumer Success Stories



Chris Lipps was a victim of shaken baby syndrome. It completely destroyed the sight in one eye and left him with only partial vision in the other. At age seven he developed glaucoma and had to have an eye removed.

Lipps said as a teenager he resented being different from other kids. He didn't like being singled out for his vision loss or having to be in special classes. As a re-

sult, his attitude toward life affected his success after high school and he dropped out of Berea College after only one semester.

Although it took him several years, Lipps finally got serious about his education and graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor's degree from Ashford University. That success motivated him and he made the decision to write a book and pursue a Master's degree in Organizational Management. He not only obtained his Master's degree, with honors, he finished his autobiography, *In a Baby's Eye*, and has followed up with two more books, *In a Mother's Eye* and *In a Father's Eye*, which is currently being prepared for publication.

Since obtaining his Master's degree, Lipps has become the Sunday School Director and Children's Evangelist at the Calvary Tabernacle Church in Corbin. The Office for the Blind has provided him with needed assistive technology that has allowed him to maintain his employment and independence. Lipps said, "The Office for the Blind has been an absolute blessing to me. The services they have provided leveled the playing field and have allowed me to further my education and career and maintain my independence.

Employer Conference

The Kentucky Career Center hosted a one-day training for employers with the theme, “An Untapped Labor Pool” Recruiting and Retaining Workers with Disabilities. The Career Centers recognize that employers face many challenges including generational differences of workers, ever-changing technology in the workplace, the aftermath of the recession and the loss of senior workers that is looming on the horizon.

Peggy Anderson, Administrator, Business Relations Program, READI-Net, Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services was the keynote speaker. Her session provided training and education to assist federal contractors in understanding and complying with their OFCCP affirmative action obligation and in developing and maintaining effective workplace policies and practices. Beth Loy, from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), presented on practical ADA solutions and reasonable accommodations.

The training was provided at no cost to employers and gave needed information, resources and tools for recruiting, hiring and retaining qualified persons with disabilities; tools such as new technologies which have allowed individuals with disabilities to be successfully employed. Employers have access to an untapped talent pipeline of workers that bring new ideas and experiences to the workplace.



Contact Us

CENTRAL OFFICE

275 East Main Street
Mail Stop 2E-J
Frankfort, KY 40621
502-564-4754
800-321-6668
Fax: 502-564-2951

ASHLAND

411 19th Street
Ashland, KY 41101
606-920-2000
800-334-6881
Fax: 606-920-2001

BOWLING GREEN

955 Fairview Ave., Suite 100
Bowling Green, KY 42101
270-746-7479
800-222-1215
Fax: 270-746-7481

MCDOWELL CENTER

8412 Westport Road
Louisville, KY 40242
502-429-4460
800-346-2115
Fax: 502-429-7101

ELIZABETHTOWN

233 Ring Road, Suite 100
Elizabethtown, KY 42701
270-766-5126
800-760-6891
Fax: 270-766-5125

COVINGTON

1324 Madison Avenue
Covington KY 41011
859-371-3380
800-334-6895
Fax: 859-371-0379

LEXINGTON

333 Waller Avenue, Suite 420
Lexington, KY 40504
859-246-2111
800-291-8424
Fax: 859-246-2112

OWENSBORO

3108 Fairview Avenue
Owensboro, KY 42303
270-687-7306
800-334-6929
Fax: 270-687-7526

PADUCAH

416 S 6th Street
Paducah, KY 42003
270-575-7315
800-334-6945
Fax: 270-575-7987

PRESTONSBURG

16 Bingham Street
Prestonsburg, KY 41653
606-889-1685
800-334-6940
Fax: 606-889-1686

SOMERSET

650 North Main Street
Gateway Center, Suite 240
Somerset, KY 42501
606-677-4042
800-895-3863
Fax: 606-677-4043

KBE WAREHOUSE

100 Mill Creek Park
Building 7
Frankfort, KY 40601
800-928-4958
502-573-4958

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