



Shattering stereotypes: Jessica Markle may be blind, but she is a productive worker at a window factory.

CHAMPION OF CHANGE

FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, THE ARC IS THE MAIN BRIDGE TO HELPING THEM FIND AND KEEP EMPLOYMENT AND LEAD A MORE PRODUCTIVE, FULFILLING LIFE

When The Arc's Northern Chesapeake Region chapter was seeking to find jobs for individuals with I/DD—intellectual and developmental disabilities—the chapter's job developer, Jan Stauffer, called Neill Christopher at Baltimore's Acadia Windows & Doors.

"She asked if we could talk for 15 minutes, and I thought that was all I would need to brush her off," recalls Christopher, Acadia's vice president of manufacturing. "This is a factory with huge sheets of glass and machinery that's capable of cutting off people's fingers. I didn't think it was a great environment for people with I/DD." After meeting with and giving Stauffer a tour of the facility, Christopher was willing to give it a try.

That was eight years ago. Today, Acadia employs five people with I/DD—roughly 6% of its workforce—including Jessica Markle, whose job is to measure, cut and install wool pile for insulation. In addition to having a developmental disability, Jessica is blind. "Jessica and the others are no different than the rest of us," says Stauffer. "Jobs help define who we are, make us feel better about ourselves and allow us to be part of society."

Markle and the others with developmental disabilities have filled Acadia's employees with a sense of pride and cohesion. "They're

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proud that we're able to employ people with disabilities," says Christopher, "and the people from The Arc consistently meet or exceed their goals. Their attendance is higher than average, they love their jobs, and they're happy to have a place in the company."

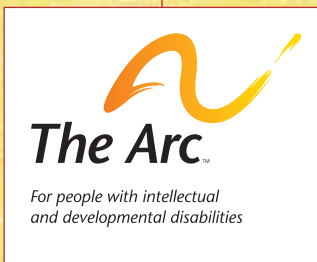
If people with I/DD—such as Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, autism spectrum disorders and cerebral palsy—can work in a challenging environment like Acadia, you'd think many more companies would reach out to them. But only about 15% of people with I/DD are employed. It's one reason The Arc, a national federation with more than 700 chapters in communities across the country, is working with supporters around the nation to employ people with I/DD. The Arc is also working with the federal government, which has established a goal of hiring 100,000 people with disabilities.

"Finding work is a huge problem for people with I/DD and their families," says The Arc of the United States' CEO, Peter Berns. "Having a job is really the key to having a life and being able to participate in the community and live on their own."

That is where The Arc and its national network of chapters across the country come in, providing a range of services like job coaching, transportation and independent-living assistance. The possibility of cuts to Medicaid—the single largest source of funding for services and support for people with I/DD—is a huge threat that looms large.

Fortunately, help has come from corporate sponsors, including firms like Mutual of America. "The enduring spirit of America is truly embodied in the remarkable work accomplished by The Arc," says William Rose, executive vice president and chief marketing officer. "Their mission is to promote and protect the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their selfless dedication to ensure the success of this mission is inspiring."

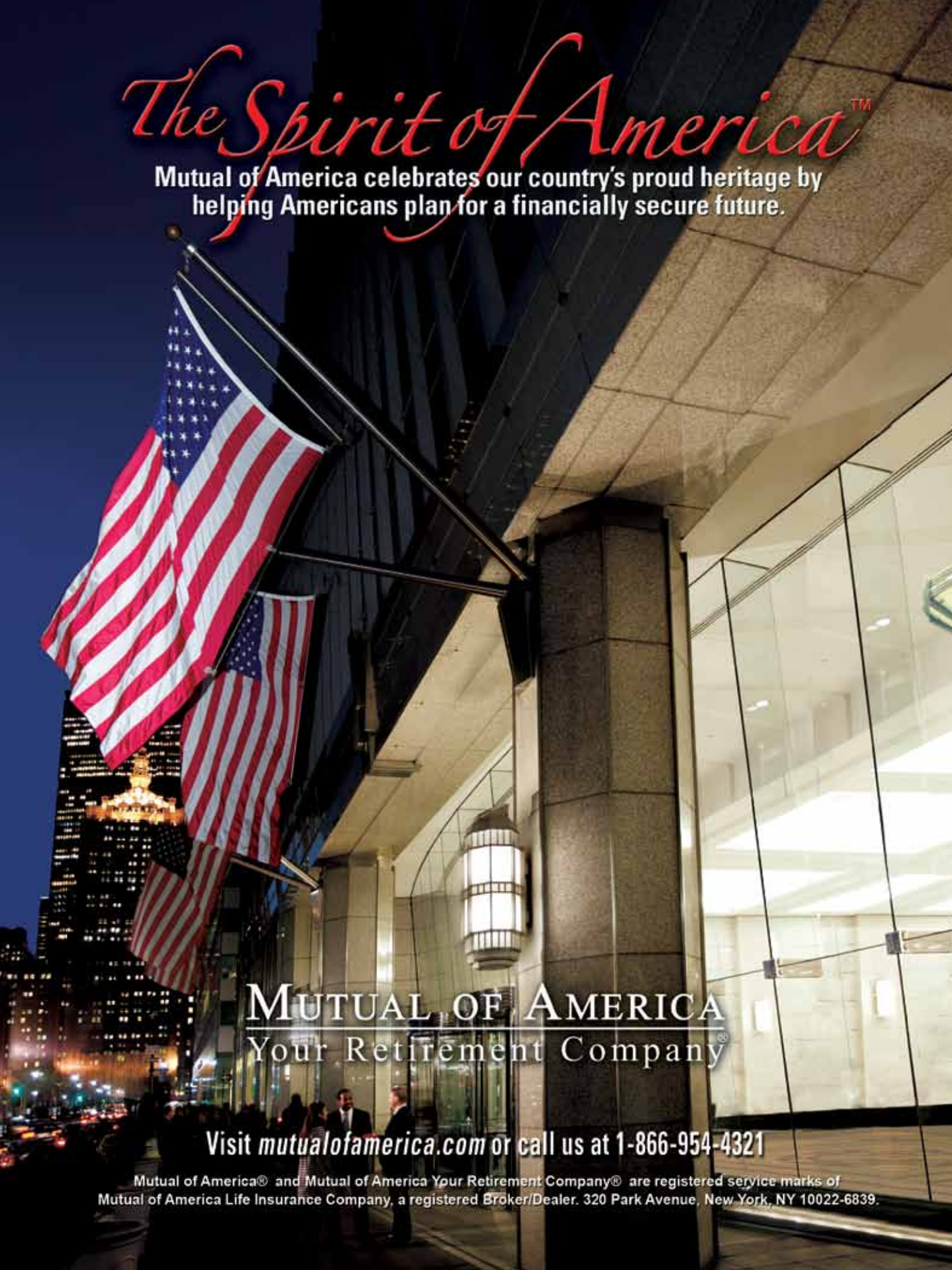
"Mutual of America is proud of our longstanding relationship with The Arc and hundreds of its chapters nationwide," he adds. "As a retirement plan service provider, we are committed to helping their employees—who are so focused on serving the needs of others—save for their own retirement and plan for a financially secure future." ◻



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