

Blind agency looks to Marino for help

June 7, 2011

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U.S. Rep. Tom Marino, R-Cogan Station, Monday inspected packaging of computer office discs handled by Charles Clark, who is legally blind and earning a paycheck at North Central Sight Services. It was part of the freshman congressman's tour of the plant at 2121 Reach Road.

"This is an incredible facility," Marino said.

In March, Marino promised to visit when company President and CEO Robert B. Garrett was in Washington, D.C.

Garrett said the business moves through "hoops to get different products it manufactures on federal government procurement lists." Among the products are compact discs bound for offices and targets headed to military base supply stores and small businesses.

"Part of my responsibility as a congressman is to help you through the system," Marino said.

Formerly on Memorial Avenue, the business, a staple in the community for more than 50 years, continues to provide jobs and training opportunities for those who are blind in greater Williamsport and several surrounding counties.

Marino described the industry as a "diamond in the rough."

Garrett pointed toward difficult times with some temporary furloughs occurring but said businesses such as this can cut down on overall waste.

"If government does its own distribution, the upcharges are about 42 percent," Garrett said. "If we distribute, the cost is about 13 percent."

Marino also stressed the importance of the company providing quality jobs to so many who otherwise would have difficulty finding work.

"We have men and women, some of whom are visually impaired if not totally blind who are working and paying taxes," Marino said.

Garrett agreed the company provides employment to individuals who otherwise wouldn't be employed. The agency's mission is to provide exceptional programs, services and employment to the blind and visually impaired, as well as education, prevention services and products to customers in Bradford, Centre, Clinton, Lycoming, Potter and Susquehanna counties, he said.

Despite the overwhelming positive atmosphere by employees at the facility, Marino was stark when he spoke inside the production area.

"The days of earmarks and cash handouts from the federal government are over," he said.

"We didn't expect that," Garrett said later. "I'm not naive."

Marino said he promised his office personnel would help the business with grant applications.

"We can help to expedite the process to get through government red tape and hopefully help them to expand their business," Marino said. "The purpose is so they can continue to provide services, create jobs and produce products used by the government and retail sectors."