

# LIGHTHOUSE FOR THE BLIND PROVIDES DISABLED MANUFACTURING WORK WITH NEW PRE-TEC ROBOTIC FINISHING CELL

*Special to ASSEMBLY*

*By WAYNE RILEY*

**Seattle, WA, June 23, 2011** - It is heartening to learn that organizations like Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc. provide meaningful employment for those who are vision-impaired or who have other physical limitations. And it is equally -- inspiring when such a business organization engages in the successful – and profitable --- manufacture of equipment like a sophisticated trenching tool intended for use by the U.S. military as well as various relief agencies.

That is exactly what is happening at Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle, WA, where they manufacture just such a device.

One of the keys to this firm's business success is that this organization chose the Custom Robotics group of PRE-TEC, a division of the Willamette Valley Company to design, supply, and install an advanced robotic finishing cell that is operated by sight-impaired workers.

The newly-installed cell has become part of the assembly line for Lighthouse's E-Tool, an entrenching device for use in often-hostile environments where efficiency and reliability are paramount. The cell is built around a Fanuc Six Axis Robot Arm, which selects a shovel blade from inventory in a cart, takes it through a four-step grinding process, and then places it in a second cart which transports it to the next work station.

Explains Douglas Hintz, Special Projects Coordinator for Lighthouse for the Blind, “Our new robotic finishing cell improves throughput and quality and contributes to overall cost containment, while being very user-friendly for our employees, all of whom are vision-impaired or otherwise physically challenged. PRE-TEC was able to provide a robotic finishing cell with audio and enhanced visual monitors that ensure our associates maintain productivity and top quality in the grinding and finishing stages of production.”

“Lighthouse for the Blind is a successful business that happens to employ handicapped workers, and we have built a reputation for producing sought-after, well made equipment delivered on time. The new robotic cells help ensure our profitability, product quality and that the products are available when they are supposed to be,” Hintz said.

Adds Rufus Burton, Marketing Manager for PRE-TEC’s Custom Robotics group, “It is very rewarding for PRE-TEC to be able to provide a state-of-the-art manufacturing cell that accommodates the needs of these employees to productively produce sophisticated, in-demand equipment. This is very important to the company, and important for the workforce, who provides a high-quality product while receiving competitive wages.”

PRE-TEC offers automation engineers products, systems, and advanced technology that provide manufacturing and assembly techniques that meet and exceed goals for speed, accuracy, flexibility, and optimal throughput in all types of manufacturing and assembly environments. The PRE-TEC Custom Robotics group supplies multi-axis robot arms, custom built end-of-arm tooling, conveyance systems and more, including advanced robotic systems and manufacturing cells for automation engineering, finishing, and material handling.

The Lighthouse for the Blind Inc. is a 501(c) (3) social enterprise dedicated to generating opportunities for independence and self-sufficiency for adults who are blind or otherwise physically-challenged. Lighthouse provides a comprehensive range of training programs and career development opportunities. While manufacturing

operations are self-funded, Lighthouse welcomes philanthropic contributions for training programs and other initiatives. More information can be found at [www.seattlelighthouse.org](http://www.seattlelighthouse.org).

PRE-TEC is a company founded nearly thirty years ago out of the need for parent company Willamette Valley Company, for a sophisticated system for metering chemical products. When a suitable supplier could not be found to provide the necessary engineering and integration, PRE-TEC was formed to provide precisely those services, and more. Since then, PRE-TEC has engineered more than 165 robotic systems for a wide range of industries and products, and has become one of the largest such companies in North America. The company's web address is [www.PRE-TEC.com](http://www.PRE-TEC.com)