



Profiles in courage

May was ALS Awareness Month, so I want to spotlight ALS in this month's article. ALS is a terrible disease, one of the 40-plus diseases covered by the Muscular Dystrophy Association. When we work to raise money for MDA, we are helping those stricken with this disease.

ALS, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, is also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. It is a devastating disorder that destroys the nerve cells that control voluntary muscles. Muscles grow progressively weaker, affecting movement, swallowing, chewing and breathing, leading to paralysis and ultimately death. Average survival time is three to five years. While some live longer, many also contract the flu or a bacterial infection that leads to death from pneumonia.

While MDA has funded ALS research for over 50 years, recently there has been tremendous growth in research for ALS treatments and cures. Currently, MDA sponsors over 37 ALS centers at major medical institutions across the country, as well as a national network of some 225 hospital-affiliated MDA clinics. For more information, go to www.als-mda.org.

The devastating effects of ALS were made personal to me when I met a letter carrier, Earl Davis, in 2003. Ironically, Earl had been an MDA fund-raiser for Branch 73 Atlanta, Georgia. For years Earl reached out to raise money for those afflicted with muscular dystrophy. Little did he know that one day he would fight the battle in his own life.

When I met Earl he was already in a wheelchair. He was appreciative of MDA and all it had done for him, especially the wheelchair, which enabled him to stand up with a special lift mechanism. His courage was revealed to me and to all who attended or watched the National MDA Telethon that year. He was so proud to be on stage when the NALC was recognized for our efforts for MDA. I will not forget his words to me when he expressed a joy in life and service to his fellow man in the face of the difficult challenges he and his wife were experiencing. That is true courage. Earl lost his fight in 2005.

Earl is not the only letter carrier to show depth of character while fighting this disease. Randy Maxwell, of Casper, Wyoming, a former branch president, continued to work

for almost six months even when confined to a wheelchair. He was honored for his good nature, hard-working attitude, integrity and love for the NALC, when the street in front of his post office was renamed Randy Maxwell Drive.

The employees of the Casper, Wyoming Post Office rallied around Randy and his family until his passing in November 2005. They worked shifts helping Randy's wife and children at home. They raised over \$2,000 in donations to help the family with expenses. But that was not all. Randy was a lifelong Chicago Cubs fan. His co-workers raised the money to send Randy to Wrigley Field to attend a Cubs game. He loved it.

There are other stories I could tell about the resilience of letter carriers and others afflicted with ALS. They touch the very being of those who know them. Get involved and be a part of someone's story. Every dollar we raise, every hour we volunteer, gets us closer to a cure.

From time to time I want to recognize a branch or state association that excels in a fund-raising event. Recently, Branch 70, San Diego, California, held a bowling tourney and raised over \$5,600 for MDA. This was a \$450 increase from the prior year. Thanks, San Diego, and to all who work hard for MDA.

We are working toward our goal of starting an online forum for NALC MDA coordinators. This will allow coordinators to share success stories and receive the latest information more quickly. The site will be password protected and limited to our database only. So register now if your branch hasn't, by going to www.nalc.org and clicking on the MDA page. Print the form, fill it out and send it to NALC Headquarters so that the "Deliver the Cure" handbook and DVD can be sent to you. You'll also be part of the forum when we get it up and running.

The handbooks and DVDs have been mailed to all addresses we have, so if you haven't received them, please contact your National Business Agent, who will advise Headquarters to send the material. The information is valuable and will help organize our efforts for MDA. Thanks for all you're doing! ☒