



Southern's comfort

It is hard to believe that it has been almost 40 years since my first day of employment at the Kendall Station of the Miami, Florida Post Office. An old teacher of mine always used to mutter “Tempus fugit” (time flies). And does it ever! This will be my last article for *The Postal Record* as Director of Retired Members, as I am retiring this month.

Since coming on board as a union letter carrier in 1967, I have seen many changes. Clearly, the most significant change has been in the lives of letter carriers. Our union has met the challenge head on and the results have been incredible. The accomplishments are many, and they were made despite the self-destructive mentality of the Postal Service.

The strike of 1970 was one of the most significant events in our history as a union. Many called that action reckless, but the results were significant, and the union has capitalized on that action to the advantage of our membership. Collective bargaining, achieved as a result of the strike, has rewarded letter carriers with a good living. Look around you and see how many unions are able to say they have a no-lay-off clause, or a guaranteed cost-of-living adjustment, or the salary we enjoy today. Thank those members who stood up for you back then. Don't ever let anyone forget what those men and women did for our union.

I retire with a sense of accomplishment, but also knowing there is much work still to be done. The many changes brought about by the 2006 Congressional elections will be a starting point for more accomplishments in the future. I hope we will have a renewed opportunity to pass the WEP/GPO legislation once and for all, along with achieving real postal reform.

Letter carriers are fully aware of how important it is to have support in Congress. The recent actions concerning postal reform serves as a prime example. If we did not have such staunch support, the bill would have rolled through Congress in the middle of the night, and letter carriers would be the *only* federal employees who would lose the first three days of pay after being injured on duty.

COLCPE is the vehicle that makes us successful with

our legislative initiatives. The support we show throughout the year for our friends in Congress pays big dividends when we need support for a bill that will affect the lives of our members. The late night “hold” of postal reform is indicative of how important it is to be making automatic contributions to COLCPE.

COLCPE has come a long way since I took office in January 2003. We initiated the automatic deduction programs with the USPS and OPM, and made it simple for everyone to do their share. Do not think for a moment, however, that we have finished the job. We have over 300,000 members in our union and only 21,854 members making automatic contributions. Do the math! There are an awful lot of members who need to step up to the plate—for their own sake, if not for the sake of their union brothers and sisters. Look at it as employment insurance and protecting your family. FedEx and UPS still contribute *millions* more to their friends than we do!

I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to the members of the NALC, especially Branch 1071, for their overwhelming support throughout my career. It is a blessing to know that so many people have that kind of confidence in you. Letter carriers are special people. No matter where I traveled, I was received warmly, and left with new friends and a renewed sense of brotherhood. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work alongside them for so long. And special thanks to my family for dealing with my constant absence while serving the members of the NALC. No longer will they have to say, “Where are you?!”

Thanks also to Ernestine Douglas and Vickie Bowman. Despite all the ringing phones and constant chaos, they calmly and professionally keep the retirement office running efficiently.

The new Director of Retired Members, Ernie Kirkland, takes over officially on December 8. Ernie has many years of experience as a union activist and will be a great asset to our membership. I wish him well and hope he is treated as exceptionally as you have treated me. With heartfelt appreciation, I wish you all the best of the holiday season. ✉