National Association of Letter Carriers
Fredric V. Rolando, President
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On the record

Good publicity, *Post* problems and fun facts

Over the last few weeks, the U.S. Postal Service has received some good exposure in the national press from a number of outlets, but it also has been attacked—again—with more of the same-old, same-old from *The Washington Post.*

Positive press

On the positive front, NALC President Fredric V. Rolando was recently interviewed for the politically-minded news website The Daily Caller, and he took full advantage of the opportunity to talk to a new audience about some of the union's ideas for keeping the Postal Service solvent and relevant in the 21st century.

"There's so many things you can do with the most trusted employees and the only universal communications network," Rolando said in the Jan. 24 article. The delivery infrastructure lends itself to "working with the businesses that work out of their homes, becoming the only delivery vehicle with a green vehicle fleet throughout the country, using sophisticated scanners to provide other services, using sensors on the vehicles to work with the Red Cross or Homeland Security," he added.

The president also restated the NALC's position on the Postal Service's proposal to drop a day of mail delivery, calling the notion "insane."

"It's just nuts to take this network and start to dismantle it," he said. "If anything, it would be ideal if you could expand it to seven days."

Wrong—again

Unfortunately, the afterglow of such upbeat news coverage was tarnished a mere three days later, when *The Washington Post's* editorial page once again displayed just how out of touch the paper has become on the subject of the Postal Service.

The paper's Jan. 27 editorial described the USPS' huge financial losses and applauded the planned closing of thousands of post offices to save money while it ignored the proverbial "elephant in the room"—that the biggest single drain on the Service's finances is the unique and onerous $5.5 billion payment it has to make each year by congressional mandate to pre-fund future health benefits, an eminently fixable problem that merely requires congressional approval for an internal transfer of USPS money to make the payments.

By now, most managers, labor leaders and key legislators from both parties understand this reason, and most journalists do, too—except, evidently, the ones at the *Post*, since the paper's editorial completely ignored it, either because of willful misrepresentation of the situation or because of a startling lack of knowledge.

Earlier that week, a story in a *Post* competitor, *The Wall Street Journal*, noted prominently that the Service is "saddled with billions in unusually burdensome retiree health costs," and said that this obligation "contributed heavily to recent record losses."

"We're not asking for agreement with our position," President Rolando said, "but simply recognition of the facts. Tell readers why you don't think fixing the pre-funding problem is a good idea, but don't pretend the problem doesn't exist."

Secrets revealed!

Amid all the doom-and-gloom financial news and our ongoing efforts to save the Service, the core of what we do remains delivering the mail to every address in America, six days a week. The venerable *Reader's Digest* magazine reminded its readers of this simple fact when it spotlighted our craft in a February article entitled "13 Things Your Mail Carrier Won't Tell You." And since we all know there is more than a baker's dozen of such tidbits, the magazine also included a second story, "11 More Things Your Mail Carrier Won't Tell You."

Both articles touched on many of the challenges we deal with every day on our routes, and touted the advantages the USPS has over its competitors. "We go to great lengths to deliver to every address, no matter how remote," the articles noted. "That's why, in the most rural areas, even UPS and FedEx rely on us to make their final deliveries."

"Paychecks, personal cards, letters—anything that looks like good news—I put those on top," the lighthearted features also said. "Utility and credit card bills? They go under everything else."

But despite their overall tone, the stories didn't shy away from the realities of the job. "Sorry if I seem like I'm in a hurry," one item read, "but I'm under the gun: Our supervisors tell us when to leave, how many pieces of mail to deliver, and when we should aim to be back. Then some of us scan bar codes in mailboxes along our route so they can monitor our progress."

To prepare the articles, *Reader's Digest* writer Michelle Crouch spoke with President Rolando, as well as carriers in Missouri, New Jersey and North Carolina.

Pres. Rolando salutes King's commitment to working people

To honor the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the AFL-CIO asked members of its executive council to travel to various cities across American to speak at observances of King's birthday, celebrated as a national holiday this year on Jan. 17.

The council, comprised of the heads of the largest organizations within the federation, includes National Association of Letter Carriers President Fredric V. Rolando, who was invited to give an address in Cincinnati as part of a weekend-long celebration of King's life.

"In addition to Reverend King's non-violent fight for civil rights for all Americans, he fought for the rights, the well-being and the dignity of those who work for a living," Rolando told a Saturday gathering at Cincinnati's Millennium Hotel. "Tragically, he died for them in Memphis. It is incumbent upon us to let neither his struggle nor his sacrifice be in vain."

King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, on the balcony of his motel room in Memphis, where he had come to lead a protest march in sympathy with the city's striking garbage workers.

Rolando acknowledged that holding the line against anti-labor forces remains hard to do, but that we can draw inspiration from King, who "never backed down when things were tough, he never hesitated when faced with tough odds, he never turned around when the path ahead was risky."

Too many people think of labor as either a relic of another era or as some fat-cat special interest group, Rolando said. "It is critical that we change that perception," he said, "because it affects everything we try to do. When we let ourselves be defined by our opponents, we should not be surprised when people's view of us does not square with reality—or when they simply tune us out.

"Even as he was fighting the gravest of injustices," Rolando added, "Martin Luther King knew that Americans want to do the right thing. Sometimes they just need a little push, a little encouragement."

Tax credit end brings annuity changes

The "Making Work Pay" tax credit expired Dec. 31. The credit was originally included as a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (President Obama's economic stimulus package). As a result, many retired members could see higher federal tax withholding amounts this year, although due to an IRS delay, any adjustment of withholding levels did not actually take place until Feb. 1. Visit nalc.org for links to more information.

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Education helps us better serve our fellow members

Secretary-treasurer training

NALC Secretary-Treasurer Jane E. Broendel recently conducted the first of two training sessions on financial administration for branches and state associations.

During the San Diego session Jan. 17-19, Broendel, along with a number of NALC Headquarters staff members and outside consultants, held discussions and facilitated breakout sessions on the importance of mastering the basics of union financial management.

Topics ranged from payroll tax withholding requirements to accounting systems and maintenance of proper internal controls, from reporting to the Department of Labor to financial officers' fiduciary duties under the Landrum-Griffin Act. Also discussed were the bonding of branch officers, handling NALC dues requirements, the legal limits on different types of union spending, and requirements for keeping financial records and filing the proper forms with the Internal Revenue Service.

The seminars are geared toward helping new branch secretary-treasurers as well as other local and state association officers who have a hand in managing their associations' financial matters.

Nearly 150 NALC members attended the San Diego session. A second is set for Feb. 27-March 1 in Orlando.

Arbitration advocate training

Also in January, 24 letter carrier activists traveled to suburban Washington to attend a special training session on arbitration.

The week-long seminar was held Jan. 24-28 at the National Labor College in Silver Spring, MD, and was facilitated by Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr., Director of Education Jamie Lumm, Contract Administration Unit staff member Bill Bothwell and retired CAU staffer Steve Hult.

Topics included reviewing an actual arbitration file, making opening statements, interviewing and preparing witnesses, lining up questions for and then practicing direct and cross examination, and preparing closing statements.

Participants spent Wednesday evening gearing up for a mock arbitration hearing, and then put their preparation to work on Thursday, when they divided into groups of six—three representing management and three for labor—and spent the day practicing presenting an actual case before an arbitrator. Acting as arbitrators were four former national officers: retired Executive Vice President Jim Williams, retired Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Jim Korolowicz, retired Director of the Health Benefit Plan Tom Young and retired Region 7 National Business Agent Barry Weiner.

Before heading home Friday, the students conducted a post-hearing debriefing and discussed advocate ethics.

Left: NALC President Fredric V. Rolando discusses the role of preparation in representing letter carriers for arbitration hearings. Right: Retired Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Jim Korolowicz (l) acts as an arbitrator during a mock hearing.

Nalcrest vacancies now available

NALC President Fredric V. Rolando has announced that there are a number of apartment openings immediately available at Nalcrest, the union's retirement community in Florida.

The president serves on the community's board of trustees, along with Executive Vice President Timothy C. O'Malley, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine, Director of Retired Members Ernie Kirkland, and Nalcrest Committee members Matty Rose (retired Region 9 national business agent), Don Southern (retired national director of retired members) and Tom Young (retired national director of the Health Benefit Plan).

Nalcrest is situated along Florida Route 60, midway between Tampa and Vero Beach, east of Lake Wales. The development, which first opened for business in 1963, features nearly 500 garden-style, ground-level apartments.

Monthly rent ranges from $365 for efficiency apartments to $470 for a two-bedroom apartment, all of which are leased unfurnished on a yearly basis. Rent includes water, sewage, trash removal, basic cable TV, interior and exterior maintenance and use of all recreational facilities. No pets are allowed.

Potential Nalcrest residents must be retired and able to take care of normal housekeeping chores as well as themselves. Also, those offered apartments must be members in good standing with the NALC.

For information, call 863-696-1121. An application form was included in the February *Postal Record* and is also available at nalc.org.

Update on injured Iowa carrier

Greg Kline is getting better, slowly.

The letter carrier from Bettendorf, IA, suffered serious injuries just days before Christmas after he was struck by a van while delivering the mail in Davenport. Kline is now at home and has begun intensive physical therapy sessions.

Dave Burke, president of Davenport Branch 506, said even though Kline's therapy has just started, the 23-year carrier and shop steward has "already started sniffing out grievances."

Kline, a husband and father of two girls, also said as much during his recent chat with NALC President Fredric Rolando.

Kline was struck Dec. 22 while crossing a street on his route and sustained numerous injures and bone fractures. So severe was his condition that he had to be flown by medevac to the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics for treatment.

Donations and cards may now be sent to this new address: Greg Kline, Ascentra Credit Union, 1710 Grant Street, Bettendorf, IA 52722.

"There's still a long road ahead for him," Burke said. "For now, his family is happy to have him home."

Collins introduces FECA reform bill

On Feb. 2, Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), the ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, introduced legislation to reform the federal government's workers' compensation program.

Her bill, the Federal Workers' Compensation Reform Act of 2011, would require a "transition" to regular retirement under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) or the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) for federal and postal employees, who receive benefits under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA) as a result of workplace injuries, once they reach their retirement age under Social Security.

Collins has argued that workers who have been permanently disabled by their injuries and who will never return to work should not be covered indefinitely by FECA, a program that is designed to provide income for workers injured on the job until they recover and return to work. The senator points to some 1,000 postal employees over the age of 70 who are still receiving FECA benefits, which are greater than retirement benefits provided by CSRS and FERS.

The NALC cannot support the legislation as drafted. It makes no provision for the loss of regular retirement benefits under CSRS and FERS suffered by FECA recipients who are separated from the Postal Service—since such injured workers get no years-of-service credit over the period of their injuries once separated, and since their annuities are based on their high-3 average salaries at the time of their separation, not at the time of regular retirement.

This loss of retirement income is compounded for FECA recipients covered by CSRS because those employees are unable to participate in the Thrift Savings Plan or to accrue benefits under Social Security—both of which make up two-thirds of the retirement package earned by FERS employees.

"We believe that any reform of the FECA program that requires a transition to retirement must be carefully constructed to ensure a fair retirement for injured workers," NALC President Fredric V. Rolando said. "It should not punish workers for being injured in the line of duty."

"NALC is committed to working with Sen. Collins and Chairman Joe Lieberman to achieve this result should the committee take up this legislation," the president added.