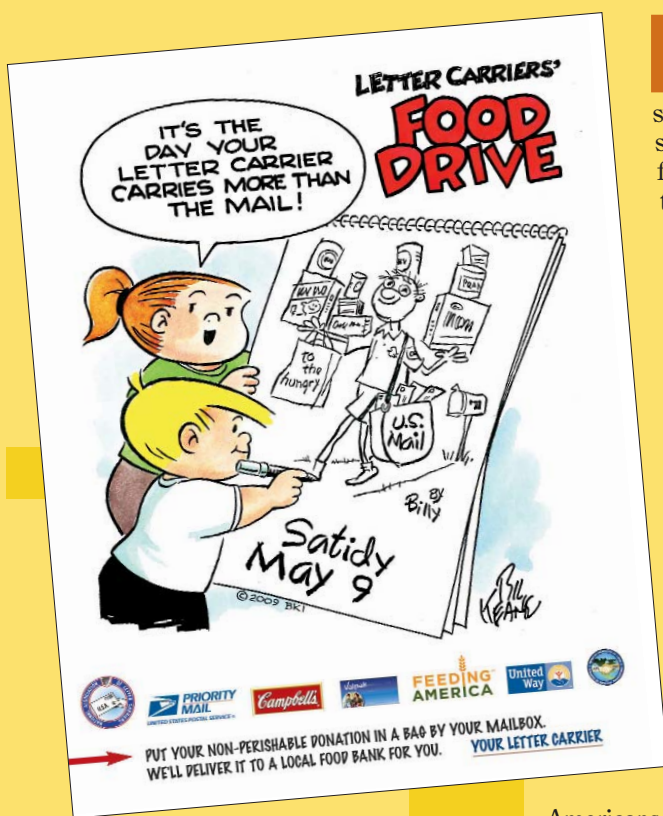


Food drive scheduled just in time for millions caught in economic vise



Branch planning for the NALC National Food Drive on May 9 is in full swing and it doesn't come too soon for millions of American families trapped in the vise of the nation's economic crisis.

As *The Postal Record* went to press, the number of registered branches for the 2009 drive had jumped to more than 1,100. The goal this year is simple yet compelling—surpass last year's record total of 73.1 million pounds of nonperishable food.

The second Saturday in May is the one day each year when most Americans stop and think about hunger, thanks to the letter carriers' food drive. All across the country, people pause to reflect on how fortunate they are and to remember the more than 35.5 million

Americans—men, women and children; working and unemployed; homeowners and homeless—who are food insecure, meaning they can not depend on obtaining either adequate or nutritious food.

"More than ever, food banks, pantries and shelters need our help," said NALC President William H. Young. "As more and more families count on them for support, they're counting on us and we must not back off on our commitment."

The majority of people using food banks are the working poor, often families with two family members employed. The cause of their distress usually is a combination of the high cost of transportation, housing and medical care—and their low wages, reduced hours, or both.

Vicki Escarra, president of Feeding America (formerly America's Second

Harvest), said that the NALC's partnership with the nation's food bank network is absolutely essential to meeting the basic needs of millions of Americans at risk of hunger. The drive set a record in 2008 despite a sputtering economy and soaring fuel prices, she noted.

"This year we are faced with new and more severe challenges as unemployment reaches staggering levels, driving demand up at the agencies we support by an average of 30 percent over last year," Escarra wrote to President Young.

The deepening recession and the loss of jobs has created a double whammy—while the number of families in need has exploded, donations to food banks, pantries and shelters have collapsed.

"Over the past few months, more and more people from communities across the nation are turning to food banks for assistance," said United Way of America President Brian A. Gallagher. "In fact, food banks are seeing an unprecedented crisis as requests have risen by 20 to 25 percent for each of the past six months while donations decrease."

Carriers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands will again make a huge difference in the battle against hunger. With the help of rural carriers, other postal employees and numerous volunteers on May 9, they will stock food banks, pantries and shelters for the summer months.

During the past 16 years, carriers have collected nearly a *billion* pounds of food donations—909 million pounds—from postal customers and delivered the goods to community food distribution outlets.

The NALC drive originated in 1991, patterned after a project of Phoenix, Arizona Branch 576. The drive went nationwide two years later, with 11 million

The NALC and Campbell Soup Company will again honor the top branches in collections based on 10 membership categories. NALC-Campbell Soup plaques will be presented to the winning branches and Campbell Soup will provide a 1,000-can donation of soup to a food bank or pantry designated by each winning branch.

The top branches in these 10 membership categories will receive awards:

- Category I — 1 to 49 members
- Category II — 50-99 members
- Category III — 100 to 199 members
- Category IV — 200 to 349 members
- Category V — 350 to 499 members
- Category VI — 500 to 699 members
- Category VII — 700 to 999 members
- Category VIII — 1,000 to 1,499 members
- Category IX — 1,500 to 1,999 members
- Category X — 2,000 members or more

pounds of food collected—an amount considered amazing at the time, but now a pale fraction of the annual tally.

In the drive's 17th anniversary year, President Young said he is optimistic that NALC members across the country will surpass last year's 73.1 million pound total, thanks in part to the national supporters of the drive—the U.S. Postal Service's Priority Mail, Campbell Soup Company, Valpak Direct Marketing Systems, the AFL-CIO, United Way of America and its local United Ways, and Feeding America.

In a letter to President Young, Postmaster General John E. Potter expressed the Service's strong support of the drive.

"With current economic conditions, even more Americans may be struggling to provide the essentials for their families and together we can help them," Potter said. "With your leadership and the commitment of thousands of letter carriers, rural letter carriers, postal and community volunteers, plus the involvement of our corporate partners, we will succeed."

AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney also backed the drive and asked the labor federation's affiliates, state federations and central labor councils to join the NALC in promoting and conducting the event. "This drive is especially important this year to those who have lost their jobs in this economy and to the millions more who face economic uncertainty," he said.

Campbell Soup President Douglas R. Conant assured President Young that Campbell's shares the passion for ensuring the health and welfare of individuals all across the nation.

"These communities are where our products are sold, our employees work and our friends and families live," Conant said. "Our shared focus on these goals has never been more important than in

the challenging economic times we are now experiencing."

Valpak CEO Greg Bicket said his company's role in the drive "is our way of saying 'thank you' to the men and women who work tirelessly to deliver America's mail. We are pleased once again to support this valuable effort."

Drive materials delivered

The official Coordinator's Manual and other materials have been sent to food drive coordinators of those branches that have registered for the 2009 drive. (Branches must register each year if they plan to participate.)

Included in the packet, sent via Priority Mail, are forms for ordering free Campbell Soup/Priority Mail postcards to alert patrons to the collection (Spanish versions are available), and a form for ordering the official poster, available at cost. Also in the packet is a new DVD about the food drive for use at branch meetings, stand-ups in the workplace and at local civic organization meetings.

The NALC has also received a drawing from famed syndicated cartoonists Bil and Jeff Keane to help promote the drive. A black-and-white slick of the cartoon, along with additional wordage and logos of the official national partners, is included in the packet, too. The cartoon will be featured on the official food drive poster and incorporated into the postcard design.

Full-color and gray-scale digital versions of the cartoon artwork also are available, as is the official "Stamp Out Hunger" logo, which depicts a large postage stamp. ✉

Questions regarding the food drive should be directed to National Food Drive Coordinator Drew Von Bergen at 202-662-2489 or at vonbergen@nalc.org.