



Contracting out delivery service threatens survival of the USPS

Breaking
the
bond
of
trust

Reliable. Honest. Friendly.
Observant. Responsible.

Dedicated to the community.

Those are just a few ways to describe America's letter carriers, a group that has been repeatedly named the most trustworthy public servants. In the days after 9/11, when letter carriers led the nation back to normal daily life, they also secured their spot among the most respected—joining fire fighters and law enforcement officers at the top of the list.

Respected. Trustworthy.

Trust, in fact, is a critical factor in the equation that runs from the patron/citizen through the professional letter carrier to the U.S. Postal Service and back again. Protecting the sanctity and security of the U.S. Mail is a principle as old as the republic, and the career letter carrier is the front line of defense.

Letter carriers do more than deliver the mail. They perform countless acts of heroism, display extraordinary compassion and render countless hours of personal community service. It is no exaggeration to say they are known and loved—and trusted.

Today, the Postal Service is breaking that bond of trust in cities and towns nationwide by handing the mail over to providers of "Contract Delivery Service," just about anyone who claims they can do the job on the cheap.

From coast to coast, horror stories are already emerging about undelivered mail and unsavory characters hired as subcontractors. What is going on here? Has bottom-line mania overwhelmed good sense? Can we stop the Postal Service from destroying itself by throwing away the trust earned over 232 years of honest, dependable service?



From the front door of the Branch 1071 union hall on 39th Street in Miami, Mike Gill can see the skeletons of high-rises reaching into the sky. “The Postal Service told us that all new growth like that was going to be contracted out,” said Gill, South Florida Branch 1071 president and an NALC national trustee, even “in-fill inside current city delivery boundaries.”

Gill, who heads a branch with more than 4,000 active carriers, gave an example. “There’s one new development with 7,000 deliveries, 14-, 15-story high-rises plus some town homes. Practically a small city in itself.”

The USPS intends to award those deliveries to independent Contract Delivery Service operators, as it already has with other new developments—and re-development projects—throughout south Florida. “It’s going on all over, Miami, Hollywood, some rural delivery territory, too,” he said.

In southern California, Charles Miller, president of Garden Grove Branch 1100, carries the story a step further. “In the city of Orange, there’s a 900-delivery complex of ▶

Top: The view from the Miami Branch 1071 union hall, where the skyline shows construction on Midtown Center, a multi-use complex that will house residences and businesses. The Postal Service has already declared that deliveries for these buildings will be contracted out.

Above: Br. 1071 Steward Chris Alger in front of the Metropolis Towers, which would be on her route had they not been contracted out.

Miami photos courtesy of Javier Rodriguez

Warning about contracting out

Several hundred NALC members of Portland Branch 82, postal customers and supporters from other craft unions staged an energetic informational picket at the Beaverton, OR post office March 15 to warn the public of the dangerous Postal Service decision to contract out deliveries for a new 374-unit development in suburban Beaverton. The pickets pointed to the threat contracting out poses to the security of the mail, especially important in a state with a Vote by Mail system. Region 2 NBA Paul Price told the crowd, "The Postal Service needs to wake up before it's too late" and recognize it is undermining its own credibility by turning the mail

over to unscreened, cut-rate contract workers. Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski and Secretary of State Bill Bradbury, along with U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, sent forceful letters of support. The picket was the culmination of a week-long media blitz. Branch 82 member Jim Williams, recently retired NALC Executive Vice President, was interviewed on Air America radio the day before the picket. Branch President L.C. Hansen gave a long interview to the Northwest Labor Press, and an op-ed piece from the branch appeared in two local newspapers, which helped break the story into the blogosphere.

Photos courtesy of Peter Shapiro



"You could say they're being penny-wise and pound-foolish, but that is too mild," NALC President Bill Young said. "Postal management's obsession with the bottom line has gone over the line, right into lunacy."

"I'm afraid that if the Postal Service keeps stumbling down this path of contracting out, it will fall right off the cliff," he said. "That's why we're fighting as hard as we can to stop this headlong rush toward contracting out."

For the Postal Service to be successful, the public must have confidence in the institution, President Young said. That will be hard to maintain if the USPS keeps extending CDS.

"Can we entrust the nation's mail to low-wage, untrained and uncommitted workers? Is this the

delivery service Americans will choose for their private financial documents, bank statements, credit cards, catalog orders—even their prescriptions?" Young asked. "The answer to those questions is a very loud 'No!'"

In some cases contract delivery is warranted, NALC Executive Vice President Fred Rolando said, but generally only in isolated locations, not downtown condominiums or single-family housing developments.

Security, safety, service

Rolando ticked off three key areas where reliance on contractors undermines the public's trust and endangers survival of the USPS—security, safety and service. ▶

The New Jersey carriers met with other lawmakers during a day of lobbying, spreading the word about the contracting out issue (*see page 18*).

President Young has met with mailing industry officials and found widespread support. He said the mailers believe, as he does, that future letter carriers must be fully motivated and possess even greater—not lesser—skills than today's carriers if the USPS is to survive.

The NALC leader also has drawn a parallel between the USPS and the national scandal swirling around Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, which is an example of what happens when

government jobs are contracted out.

"The shocking revelations of how contractors have mis-managed Walter Reed should have alerted those who see contracting out as the correct path for the Postal Service to step back and reassess this decision," Young said. "I see no evidence that is occurring and that troubles me greatly."

"It took just a couple of years to ruin Walter Reed," he said. "How long do they think they will need to destroy the Postal Service that so many of us rely upon for the efficient, secure and safe delivery of our mail?" ✉



The ever-evolving Miami skyline has become a battleground for contracting out service.

“This is a time when you can’t carry a sealed bottle of water onto an airplane, but a stranger can roam the neighborhood, have access to the mail stream, and deliver any sort of package unchallenged. I just don’t get it,” he said. On the other hand, “City letter carriers are a known commodity in their neighborhoods.”

The contractors use their own vehicles, which are not subject to daily inspections or verification of insurance, Rolando said. If they are involved in an accident, there’s no doubt the USPS would be the victim of the bad publicity, further eroding public confidence.

As for who is handling the mail, Garden Grove President Miller said, “We joke that contract delivery is the only place where Osama bin Laden could get a job. But that’s not too far-fetched.”

Miller and other Branch 1100 members tailed the contractor and saw him “pick up a couple of guys standing around at the Home Depot” to make deliveries. There are only two requirements for the delivery jobs, “being 21 and a resident of the county. Not citizenship, not even a clean police record. Is the public going to feel safe? What about identity theft?” he asked.

In Florida, Miami’s President Gill said some winning bidders are “subcontracting the deliveries out to someone else—there’s no continuity, and obviously there’s a security risk.”

Service also is a concern. “What level of dedication are you going to get? Letter carriers are in the Postal Service as a career, to make a good life, provide for their families, earn a secure retirement,” Rolando said. “For the contractors, it’s nothing but a temporary job they can walk away from anytime. The Postal Service or Burger King, it makes no difference to them.”

Carrier-based programs like Customer Connect support the USPS directly, but career letter carriers do much more than deliver the mail, building the goodwill essential to the survival of any service-based business—the nationwide NALC Food Drive, MDA fundraising, Carrier Alert, and the actions that merit recognition as NALC’s Heroes of the Year (for examples, see the *Proud to Serve* section, pages 20-28).

The key word, Rolando said, is “accountability. Accountability for the mail and accountability for their conduct. If patrons have an issue, they know their letter carriers and where to contact them. They know that their carrier will be coming back tomorrow and the day after. They know the career carrier has a stake in providing good service and supporting the community.

“The contractor? For \$9 an hour and no benefits, it’s here today, gone who-knows-where tomorrow.” ☒

The \$82 difference

Everyone involved works hard to make sure the listings in the annual COLCPE issue of *The Postal Record* are accurate. But somehow, the February 2007 edition shortchanged Detroit Branch 1 member Ralph Kotoff by \$82 in toting up his 2006 contributions—no small sum in itself, but that’s not the real story.

That \$82 was the difference between \$2,418 and \$2,500 dollars!

“This is one of our very best COLCPE

contributors,” President Bill Young reminded the *Postal Record* editors.

’Nuff said—and many thanks to Brother Ralph Kotoff, an active carrier and 30-year NALC member, for his generous support of the letter carriers’ political action fund.

To be listed in the 2008 Special COLCPE Issue, sign up for automatic contributions. You also will become eligible for prizes, including a trip to the 2008 Super Bowl. See the inside back cover for details. ☒