



A Bold Vision for Tough Times



Letter carriers' past political successes and future economic concerns were just two of the hot topics on the minds of nearly 1,600 NALC activists who met in Las Vegas April 25-26 for a weekend national training conference and rap session.

Representatives from branches all across the United States gathered at the Luxor Hotel to take part in workshops covering some of the most serious matters facing letter carriers, including the fair adjustment of delivery routes and the financial survival of the United States Postal Service.

And a surprise awaited those who attended the Sunday morning rap: NALC President William H. Young announced his intent to retire by the end of the year and hand over the union's reins to Executive Vice President Fredric V. Rolando.

"I've served as a full-time officer for this union for half my life—31 of my 62 years," said Young, who had hinted about retiring during appearances before smaller groups in recent months.

"I know you'll step up to support Fred when the time comes," he told the crowd.

The *NALC Constitution* stipulates that in years when there is no national convention, the president shall call a national conference, attended by branch and state association presidents or their representatives.

Right: President Young (r) addresses the rap session crowd.

Below: Executive Vice President Fred Rolando leads a presentation on the Modified Interim Alternate Route Adjustment Process.



A chance to learn

The weekend opened with workshop registration Friday evening, as delegates lined up out the doorway and deep into the corridor to sign up for spots in the four programs for Saturday. Topics included the Modified Interim Alternate Route Adjustment Process (MIARAP), a Contract Administration Unit briefing, the union's community service agenda, and a review of how the economic crisis impacts USPS. Courses were held concurrently Saturday morning and repeated during the afternoon to allow participants to attend multiple sessions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the MIARAP programs were the best-attended, since the NALC and USPS had only recently signed a memorandum of agreement outlining the new process. Nearly 500 letter carriers packed each round led by Rolando, who has coordinated NALC's multi-year effort to reform the route adjustment process, and Director of City Delivery Dale Hart. They gave a rundown of past attempts to find a fair, less confrontational method for adjusting routes, outlined the MIARAP fundamentals, then discussed plans for training both NALC and USPS representatives to make sure it rolls out successfully. *(Rolando discusses carrier consultations under MIARAP in his column on page 31.)*

Also popular were the two Contract Administration sessions. Vice President Gary Mullins, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer George Mignosi, Director of Safety and Health Brian Hellman and Director of Life Insurance Myra Warren discussed key memoranda of agreement and city delivery issue settlements that have been reached since last summer's national convention in Boston.

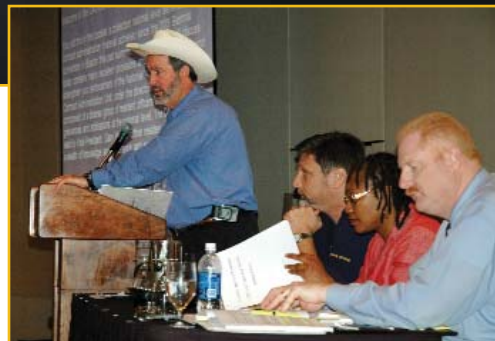
Secretary-Treasurer Jane Broendel and NALC Chief of Staff Jim Sauber

delivered a presentation and answered questions about the precarious financial situation imperiling both the nation and the Postal Service. They outlined pending legislation that is "incredibly important to the future of the Service and the country," Broendel said. One measure is H.R. 22, the bill to relieve some of USPS' financial stress related to pre-funding its retiree health benefit obligation. Another is the Employee Free Choice Act, which, if passed, would make it easier for workers to form unions *(related stories, pages 14 and 17)*.

Many participants also checked out the sessions on the special ways letter carriers serve their communities above and beyond delivering the mail. Director of Health Benefits Timothy O'Malley, Director of Retired Members Ernie Kirkland and Assistant to the President Linda Giordano reviewed the NALC's long history of support for the Muscular Dystrophy Association and the annual letter carrier food drive, as well as many branches' involvement with other charitable organizations and activities such as the Toys for Tots campaign.

Talking it over

At 9 a.m. sharp Sunday, the rap session began with the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by a brief invocation and the singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner." President Young then took the podium to introduce his fellow Resident National Officers, plus the National Business Agents and National Trustees. (Region 2 National Business Agent Paul Price had been excused from attending because his wife had recently given birth to twins.) Young also recognized President Emeritus Vincent R. Sombrotto, who was seated on the stage. The delegation gave Sombrotto, NALC's president from 1979 to 2002, a standing ovation.



Members of the Contract Administration Unit, (l-r) Vice President Gary Mullins, Director of Safety and Health Brian Hellman, Director of Life Insurance Myra Warren and Assistant Secretary-Treasurer George Mignosi led the CAU workshop.



Above: NALC Chief of Staff Jim Sauber explains a point during the economic presentation, as Secretary-Treasurer Jane Broendel listens.

Below: Director of Retirees Ernie Kirkland (l), with Director of Health Benefits Timothy O'Malley, answers questions during the community service workshop.





A member asks a question during the MIARAP training seminar.



Young then showed a video of Postal Board of Governors Chair Carolyn Gallagher's March 25 testimony before the House subcommittee that oversees the Postal Service. Gallagher was one of several USPS officials, including Postmaster General John E. Potter, who told the panel that reducing mail delivery to five days a week may be necessary to address the Service's economic woes. The video then showed Young's convincing, point-by-point rebuttal to Gallagher's testimony, which he delivered to the subcommittee later the same day.

"I know we'd all love to have Saturday and Sunday off," Young remarked following the video's conclusion. "But Congress will never approve five-day delivery, because they understand it would be a dire threat to the USPS. Besides, there's no guarantee they'd give up Saturday—our lightest volume day is usually Tuesday."

Rivals ready to swoop

"Business and our patrons expect delivery six days a week," he declared in his testimony. "If we didn't do it, someone else would swoop in and do it for us," further eroding USPS revenues.

Addressing the larger economic crisis, Young said that "it was not working men and women who caused this recession, who got us where we are today. Corporate greed got us where we are."

"Most of our members understand the economy today," he said. "They know that, in this economic climate, we have to ask ourselves not, 'What will we gain?' but, 'What can we hold onto?' But with Barack Obama as president, I feel we have a real chance to turn the economy around and to rebuild the middle class."

Following the video, Young thanked the many NALC members who worked

hard last year to help elect a labor-friendly president and solid pro-worker majorities in both the House and Senate. In particular, Young praised the 250-plus letter carriers released to work full time on the AFL-CIO's Labor 2008 campaign, in addition to the 30,000 active and retired letter carriers who donned the now-familiar "NALC blue" Carrier Corps T-shirts and worked to get out the vote for labor-friendly candidates.

"We are the beneficiaries of their hard work," he said. Young noted with pride that the NALC is the 15th largest union in the AFL-CIO, "yet no union released more people for a longer period than the NALC did for Labor 2008."

A major factor in the union's political success is letter carriers' generous support of COLCPE, their political action fund, he said. "When I started as president in 2002, we had \$1 million to spend per election cycle, and COLCPE was funded 60 to 65 percent by our retirees.

"Now that we've ramped up our support efforts, last year we were able to spend \$3 million, and more of our active members are doing their part," he said.

Young gave Region 8 NBA Lew Drass special recognition. "Lew is the business agent for Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi—not exactly a hotbed for union support," Young said. "But Lew's pushed hard, and now 12.2 percent of his region's carriers give to COLCPE. That's more than double the national rate."

Passing the torch

"The time has come for me to step down as your national president," Young then announced, to the surprise of many in the audience.

"While I'm still healthy, and while I can enjoy it, I'm going to play a few rounds of golf and give Fred his turn at



the wheel,” he said. “I told him that I would stay out of his way, but that I would never be more than a phone call away if he needed it—the same thing Vince told me when he handed me the reins back in 2002.”

Young reflected that during his years of service as a letter carrier and as a full-time union officer, “I’ve been blessed to go a lot of places and meet a lot of people. A little while ago, I was even invited to the White House—my first visit there ever.”

Rolando has plenty of challenges ahead, Young said, including talks on a new National Agreement in 2011. In those negotiations, he said, “we will do what we have always done—fight for the best possible contract for our members.”

Young again touted the idea of bringing all letter carriers into the NALC’s Health Benefit Plan. “That could save the Postal Service \$400 million-plus per year right there,” he said, “a trade-off that could go a long way toward protecting carrier pay and benefits.”

Adjusting routes

Observing that most letter carriers would much rather have stable routes, the president said, “For the first time, the NALC has a place at the table for making fair and equitable route adjustments. That’s why we all need to support the Modified Interim Alternate Route Adjustment Process—it’s the future.”

Acknowledging that “some members don’t like the new process” and a few grouse that “their national leaders are out of touch,” he said, “Let me ask you this: What positive result do you think comes from bashing the leaders of this union?”

“The NALC is the most democratic union in America,” he said. “If you have a question or a concern about anything, all you have to do is pick up the phone. You call my office, you’ll get me—

maybe not right away, but I will take your call as soon as I can.”

Questions and answers

Next, Young took questions from the floor:

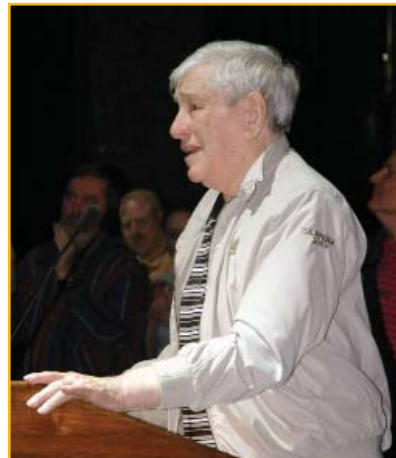
◆ **On using the Internet:** “We put things up on the web and we use the e-Activist Network,” he said. “I don’t react to the blogs, though, because there’s too much anonymity—I could be talking to Jack Potter for all I know.”

◆ **On problems with the National Reassessment Process:** “Since clerks on NRP often get assigned to the carrier craft, we’re working with the APWU to address some of the games management is playing with those people. Any agreement we come to must address every contract violation.”

◆ **On the roll-out of the Flats Sequencing System (FSS):** “The Postal Service needs to reevaluate FSS implementation in the face of declining mail volume.... We might have to eventually get an arbitrator to declare when FSS has been implemented nationwide, as a trigger to say those 8,000 FSS TEs are officially done—just like we had to do when Delivery Point Sequence was implemented.”

◆ **On rumors of a letter carrier furlough:** “That can’t happen without either an agreement from the NALC or an act of Congress.”

“It has been my privilege to be president of the greatest union in America,” Young said as he drew the session to a close after two-and-a-half hours. “We’ve tried to lay out a bold vision here this weekend that will help us navigate the tough times that still lie ahead. And I know that we can achieve anything by sticking together—the way we always have.” ☒



President Emeritus Vincent Sombrotto briefly addressed the gathering.