

Reviewing contract details and setting course for the future

Nearly 2,000 local leaders gathered in Las Vegas last month for the NALC's largest-ever training session, an intensive series of workshops and a wide-open general session on the new National Agreement, with a special emphasis on how it fits with NALC's vision for the future of the union and the Postal Service.

President William H. Young congratulated the participants for making the meeting "the biggest training conference in the history of the NALC" and, noting that Thanksgiving Day was near, declared, "We certainly have much to be grateful for. The new contract immediately springs to mind, but we should be thankful for every brother and sister letter carrier in this country. Thanks to all of them, this union is succeeding at a time when many others are struggling."

The struggles of America's working families were a recurring theme in Young's remarks during the three-hour general session on Sunday morning, November 18.

Looking out over a huge ballroom packed to near-capacity, the NALC leader asked, "How do we achieve long-term job security for the men and women we represent? I think we need to do two things: First, we have to find ways to strengthen the United States Postal Service in the age of the Internet. Second, we have to do our part to help rebuild the American middle class," by helping to rebuild the union movement and by instigating political change.

"The Road Ahead" was the theme of the conference, which opened Saturday morning with four workshops on contract-related topics, including building a strategic partnership with the USPS,



implementation of machine-sorted flats (FSS), the use of Transitional Employees, the implementation of "Shared Services," and NALC's strategy for protecting and improving health benefits.

Each class was repeated three times throughout the day to maximize the opportunities for participants to see the presentations by NALC's resident national officers and ask questions. More than 1,800 signed up for each round of workshops—the equivalent of more than 5,000 individual sessions.

In some areas, definitive answers are not yet possible. For example, there were many specific and hypothetical questions about the use of TEs during FSS implementation and as part of the elimination of casuals.

The NALC is working with the USPS on honing interpretations of the TE provisions of the 2006-2011 agreement. This is not unusual when new concepts are added to a contract, Young said. A question-and-answer style document of agreed-upon interpretations on TEs will be completed soon and incorporated into the *Joint Contract Administration Manual*, or *JCAM*, he said.

"It makes more sense to me that we get the Postal Service to agree and put that in writing rather than shoot from the hip," Young explained during a two-hour,

Above: President William H. Young explains his vision of "The Road Ahead" for the union.

Below: A record number of members came to the conference, attending workshops and packing the hall to hear Young's presentation and ask him questions.





no-holds-barred Q&A session following his remarks Sunday morning.

The NALC leader laid the groundwork for the discussion with a review of the union's successes over the past year, including the 2006 election victories, the campaign to stop the spread of Contract Delivery Service, and the agreement on a new five-year contract.

He then turned to the future and to "the great challenges facing this union: the need to strengthen the Postal Service as an institution and the duty we have to rebuild the American middle class."

"Both tasks are essential for our long-term job security," he told the attentive crowd, "and both require massive political change."

"Strengthening the Postal Service will not be enough," he warned. "Make no mistake, a shrinking middle class is a direct threat to every letter carrier. No matter how well the Postal Service is doing, if wages and benefits are falling in the overall economy, the demand for concessions will come."

On the political front, Young noted the NALC's prominent role in 2006 and said, "The entire labor movement deserves a lot of credit for winning back the Congress, but we can proudly say that no other union did more than the NALC."

Expanding use of the e-Activist Network, growth in the COLCPE political fund, and the burgeoning Carrier Corps of political volunteers are clear signals NALC will be even more active and prominent in 2008.

Winning substantial worker-friendly majorities in both the House and Senate will be priorities, but capturing the White House is critically important. Young pointed out that President Bush—"the most anti-union president in history"—not only blocked the Employee Free Choice Act to make it easier to form unions, he also saddled the Postal Service with Board of Governors Chairman Jim Miller.

By contrast, Hillary Clinton, who has been endorsed by NALC, is an avowed supporter of EFCA and has promised to

consult with postal unions to ensure that her appointments to the BOG are friends of workers who want to preserve the USPS, not privatize it.

Similarly, Young cited the major concessions yielded by the UAW and how they were connected to the nation's health care crisis. "Your health care premiums are 20 percent higher to pay for the cost of caring for millions of uninsured individuals," he said. "With a universal system, you could see lower premiums or better benefits."

To bolster the Postal Service, Young cited NALC-backed legislative reforms to save USPS billions of dollars on retiree

The ballroom at Paris in Las Vegas was filled with NALC members.

Director of City Delivery Dale Hart leads the training session, "Back to the Future: Work Methods and the Next Wave of Automation" with Secretary-Treasurer Jane Broendel.



Photos by Sean McCormally

health liabilities, military pension benefits, and Medicare Part D subsidies.

Likewise, the renewed commitment to Customer Connect and active NALC support for nationwide "Vote by Mail" look ahead to USPS' future.

As for those who complain about the union "helping management," Young said, "This is about us, not them. We need to protect our jobs and our families' livelihoods." ✉