

Down to the wire

December 31 marks both the end of 2009 and the end of NALC's annual COLCPE contest that will award \$1,000 gift cards to six NALC members in the branches that have the best records of signing up new contributors.

The goal is to strengthen the letter carrier political action fund by boosting the number of members who make automatic contributions at the "Gimme 5 for COLCPE" level or higher—\$5 per pay period via payroll deduction or electronic funds transfer (EFT) from a checking account. For retired members, it's \$5 each month from annuity payments or by EFT.

Come January, branches with the highest percentage of COLCPE contributors in five size categories will each hold a raffle to award a \$1,000 American Express gift card to a Gimme 5-level contributor. Another \$1,000 card will go to a Gimme 5 member drawn at random from all branches with fewer than 50 members, and a seventh \$1,000 prize will go a regular donor in the branch that shows the greatest percentage increase in donors. The top branches will also receive laptop computers to use for union business.

The special COLCPE edition of *The Postal Record* in February will list the contest winners. You can find contest rules and detailed branch standings at nalc.org. ☒

Note: Contributions to the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education are 100 percent voluntary and are not tax-deductible. No union dues money is used to support political candidates.

2,000 OR MORE MEMBERS:

San Diego, CA Br. 70
South Florida Br. 1071
Minneapolis, MN Br. 9
Atlanta, GA Br. 73
Seattle, WA Br. 79

1,000 TO 1,999 MEMBERS:

Austin, TX Br. 181
Nashville, TN Br. 4
Louisville, KY Br. 14
Massachusetts Northeast Merged Br. 25
Portland, OR Br. 82

500 TO 999 MEMBERS:

Honolulu, HI Br. 860
Birmingham, AL Br. 530
Mid-Michigan Br. 256
Salt Lake City, UT Br. 111
New Orleans, LA Br. 124

100 TO 499 MEMBERS:

Newport, RI Br. 57
Aurora, IL Br. 219
Lafayette, LA Br. 1760
Houma-Thibodaux-Lockport, LA Br. 2464
Eugene, OR Br. 916

50 TO 99 MEMBERS:

Hattiesburg, MS Br. 938
Wahiawa, HI Br. 4837
Zanesville, OH Br. 63
Danville, VA Br. 595
Longview, WA Br. 2214

BRANCHES WITH GREATEST GROWTH:

Sioux Falls, SD Br. 491
Lafayette, LA Br. 1760
Newport, RI Br. 57
Temple, TX Br. 643
Concord, NH Br. 72

Walter E. Couillard — 1924–2009



Walter E. Couillard, a former NALC director of retired members, died October 28 at his home in Richfield, Minnesota. He was 85.

Couillard served two terms as director of retired members, from 1986 to 1994, but his work on behalf of NALC members stretched over more than 60 years, dating back to 1947. Called Walt by his friends, he was affectionately known in his home Minneapolis Branch 9 as "Mr. Everything."

During his career, he was president of Branch 9, and held several other branch positions; national field director (now called national business agent) for the Minneapolis Region; and Minnesota state association president. In May 2000, he was inducted into the Branch 9 Hall of Fame.

Couillard was a gunnery sergeant in the Marine Corps, serving in World War II, then recalled to duty in the Korean War, where he was a participant in the Inchon landing and the battle of the Chosin Reservoir.

In addition to his NALC activities, Couillard served as state president for the National Association of Retired Federal Employees.

He is survived by his wife, Edie, one daughter and six sons, two of whom are active letter carriers, 18 grandchildren, two great-grandchildren and a sister.

Internment was at Ft. Snelling National Cemetery. Memorial contributions may be made to the Richfield Foundation Jenny Sandahl Scholarship; c/o Suzanne Couillard-Sandahl & Associates; 7400 Lyndale Ave. South, Suite 120; Richfield, MN 55423. ☒

COLCPE issue reminder:

February 2010's *Postal Record* will again pay tribute to members who give to the union's political action fund. That means there will be no Branch Items, nor State, Retiree or Auxiliary reports in that issue. Scribes and other correspondents should hold their submissions for the March issue. (Election notices and Mutual Exchange ads will appear as usual.)



'A horrible year'

USPS loses \$3.8 billion in 2009

If not for the NALC-led drive on Capitol Hill to enact H.R. 22, which reduced the exorbitant cost of pre-funding future retiree health benefits by \$4 billion, the \$3.8 billion loss reported by the Postal Service for FY 2009 would have been much worse.

Still, the \$3.8 billion in red ink announced on November 16 was \$1 billion larger than a year ago.

Mail volume in 2009 plunged to 177.1 billion pieces, compared to 202.7 billion pieces in 2008, a 12.7 percent decline. It was the worst decline in mail volume since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

"There is no way to sugar-coat it. It was a horrible year," NALC President Fred Rolando said. "The housing collapse and meltdown on Wall Street hit the most mail-intensive sectors of the economy," he noted, "and the deep recession that followed may have accelerated the drive by many mailers to seek electronic substitutes for mail."

With further revenue losses and volume declines expected in 2010, Postmaster General John E. Potter said the USPS will continue to move aggressively to meet its fiscal challenges. After reducing total work hours by 115 million in 2009, the equivalent of 65,000 full-time employees, the USPS expects to slash hours by more than 90 million next year.

Potter said the USPS knows "our customers are facing the same economic challenges," and that's why the Service will not raise prices in 2010 for First-Class and Standard Mail and its other market-dominant products.

The Postal Service's independent auditor, Ernst & Young, said that questions remain about the ability of the Postal Service to generate "sufficient liquidity" to make the \$5.5 billion retiree health benefits payment due on the last day of FY 2010.

President Rolando said USPS's year-end report underscores the need to enact a long-term fix to the retiree pre-funding obligation. "We appreciate the short-term relief provided by H.R. 22, but Congress must order the Office of Personnel Management to review the pre-funding provisions of the law to both more accurately measure the true cost of future benefits, which it grossly exaggerated, and provide for a more reasonable and sustainable schedule for pre-funding," he said.

Rolando expressed hope that the economy will begin to turn around in 2010, but cautioned letter carriers that a full recovery will take time: "We will have our work cut out for us in the years ahead to restore the Postal Service and protect our long-term job security. We will have to fight for legislative reforms and make the right decisions at the bargaining table." ☒

Open Seasons coming to a close

DECEMBER 14 IS THE FINAL DAY OF Open Season for letter carriers to make their choice of health plans for the coming year. The NALC Health Benefit Plan—operated by your union—provides excellent benefits and unparalleled customer service. A special insert in last month's *Postal Record* described what the plan has to offer and the official brochure provides all the details.

With a 60-year history of serving letter carriers, the NALC Health Benefit Plan deserves a close examination as you make your health insurance decision for 2010.

The open season for letter carriers and other postal employees to enroll in or modify their Flexible Spending Accounts runs to December 27.

The two types of FSAs—for health care and for dependent care—allow participants to pay out-of-pocket medical costs and day care expenses with "pre-tax" dollars. All letter carriers should have received a brochure last month outlining the money-saving programs and ways to sign up. ☒