

## Better future is our goal, but USPS just bailed out



*William H. Young*

**D**ecember 7 already had a bad reputation before last month—the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, the “day that will live in infamy”—but the U.S. Postal Service smeared it even more with a letter delivered to my office that crushed our effort to find a better way to adjust letter carrier routes.

We knew the letter was coming. For weeks, rumors from the field said postal management was about to pull the plug on our route inspection memorandum and order traditional route inspections for all offices that had not entered into local level agreements to inspect routes. That is exactly what they did on December 7, 2004, bailing out through the escape clause rather than continue working together.

The issue at stake here goes far beyond route counts. An entire management philosophy was being tested. Could the men in charge at the highest levels of the Postal Service really pull the trigger on a deal to make a fundamental change in the way the parties cooperate with each other? We had hoped recent actions had generated the necessary good will to push forward on this project. No such luck.

Understand what caused this effort to fail. We encountered managers who stonewalled the local process—in two regions not a single agreement was reached. Despite earlier assurances they would deal with these obstructionists, top management was unable or unwilling to do so and the obstructionists have now won the day. That means most adjustments in 2005 will be based on the unilateral, management-dominated process with one primary goal: to reduce routes to conform to work hour budgets, regardless of the applicable handbook provisions and real-world mail counts.

**So here is where we stand. I have already** warned that DOIS is misleading management into making decisions not in the best interest of the Postal Service or the men and women who work there. But the headquarters bean counters have their numbers, the Area VPs have their marching orders, and now all that remains is to find complacent letter carriers who will roll over and accept

these new demands. Apparently top management is convinced that our members will not resist.

I don't think so. And just to make sure, I instructed your Director of City Delivery to spend his Christmas holiday in much the same way his predecessor did around 1990, developing a comprehensive training program to assure letter carriers' rights are protected as we endure the inspection process next year. We know carriers can be the masters of the process. Experience has taught us the ins and outs, and we fare better than they do when we take the time to educate ourselves and insist they adhere to all applicable provisions of the handbooks and manuals.

**I want to thank all those branch presidents** who worked in good faith to reach local agreements. I hope those agreements work out better for your members than the traditional process. I thank those local managers who displayed the courage to enter into those agreements. I am certain that the environment in your offices will be superior to those places where letter carriers know who bears the responsibility for this failure.

I see no sense in continuing to look for new processes to count and inspect routes. We cannot make progress alone, and we have no willing partner here in Washington. I told top management this unilateral approach would not ensure reaching their targets and that when they come to that realization, we will be ready to resume discussing new ways to approach this old problem.

Until then we will police every single inspection that occurs, insisting all provisions of the M-39 and M-41 are followed, and initiate grievances each and every time they are not. We will achieve adjustments that are fair and comply fully with the National Agreement.

People make decisions the best way they know how and they stand responsible for those decisions. When confronted with really tough decisions some retreat to the past, finding a safe haven there, instead of daring to change the old ways and looking for new, more productive means. We are waiting for a partner who is looking to the future. ☒