

Passing the baton to a new generation



William H. Young

There have been 17 presidents of the NALC, counting me, since our great union was founded in 1889. The ties of solidarity that connect us to one another also connect us through the years to those who preceded us and those who will follow. Now it is time for me to pass the baton of leadership to a new generation of leaders. As I made clear over the past year, I intended to retire in 2009, when the time was right. Now is that time, some 44 years after I started out in the Post Office Department in 1965. I will retire on July 3, 2009, and Fred Rolando will become the 18th president of our union.

It has been the honor of my life to serve the city letter carriers of this country in various NALC capacities for 40 years, beginning in 1969 as a shop steward in San Luis Obispo, California, and concluding with the past six-and-a-half years as your National President. Although I am clearly biased, letter carriers represent what

is best about America—our diversity, our commitment to hard work and community service, and our dedication to serving America. As proud as I have been to call myself the President of the National Association of Letter Carriers, I am even more proud to call myself a letter carrier.

I will leave it to others to judge my tenure as president, but I am proud to say that our union is better organized than ever and is in excellent financial shape—despite the meltdown on Wall Street in 2008. Although we face many difficult challenges going forward, the

union has the resources to be successful. Our political and legislative program takes a backseat to none in the entire labor movement. Our community service activism is without peer. And we have an asset that no other union can match—the united membership of the NALC, which never fails to rise to the occasion, no matter how difficult the challenge, as our campaigns for postal reform and against contracting out demonstrated.

I am also proud of the quality of relations we have built with postal management at the national level. The “DRT revolution” we developed in the late

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1990s has helped us navigate some truly troubled times, including the anthrax mail attacks of 2001, the recession of 2001-2002, the conflict over Contract Delivery Service and others. Progress with managers at the local level has been slower to come, but disputes are inevitable and learning to solve problems without destructive rancor is essential, especially at this time of turmoil in the national economy.

The future of the Postal Service is in jeopardy, as it has often been in the past, but I am confident that the American public and the Congress understand that

the USPS is a national treasure that binds us together and is well worth preserving. I have no doubt that so long as you all support Brother Rolando and his team the way you have supported me, NALC will play a decisive role in ensuring its survival and prosperity.

It has not been easy to choose the “right time” to retire, but your mind and your body begin to tell you things, and I have made this decision, like I have tried to make every other union decision, by considering what is in the best interest of the organization and its members. Having spent the better part of six years thinking about ways to prepare the next generation of NALC leaders, beginning with the Leadership Academy and continuing with the appointments I have made and the mentoring I have conducted, I can step aside knowing that our union’s future will be in very good hands, starting with my successor, Fred Rolando.

Fred has dedicated his life to our union as well. He is as smart and talented a trade union leader as any I have ever met. Having earned my respect, I am confident that he will earn yours. I want to thank Fred for stepping into this job at such a challenging time. It actually reminds me of when I assumed the presidency in those difficult days after the 9/11 attacks and the onset of the last recession. Like me, Fred will not have to do the job alone. He will have 27 other experienced members of the Executive Council at his side to help. I want to thank these men and women for their faithful service to the NALC and for the support they have given me.

While I take all the blame for any failures in leadership over my tenure, our successes in recent years were collective ones that depended on the



Executive Vice President Fred Rolando and President Young review a piece of official correspondence.

tremendous unity of our membership. Fred will not only have his fellow Council members at his side; I will be fully available to him as a source of counsel and advice. I will, however, follow the lead of President Emeritus Vincent Sombrotto, who let me do the job my way while providing unceasing support—for which I will be forever grateful.

I have given my all to improving the lives of letter carriers, but have received far more in return: The fulfillment of a life dedicated to making the American dream real for hundreds of thousands of workers, the friendships forged in countless battles and campaigns on behalf of working people, the joys and sorrows of solidarity affirmed and denied, and the ability to provide for my beloved family. I want to conclude by thanking my wife, Debbie, and my children, Erin, Will, Paula and Selena, for allowing me to expand our family to include America’s letter carriers. I love them all dearly, just as I love my entire NALC family. May God bless you all, and God bless the National Association of Letter Carriers. ✉