

Food Drive planning enters final phase



With the NALC's 21st annual National Food Drive now just a few short weeks away, the pace of the behind-the-scenes work to make it go as smoothly as possible is reaching a fever pitch in hundreds of branches across the country.

"On the second Saturday of May each year, thousands of letter carriers step forward and join our co-workers, family members, friends and community partners to pick up those all-important and often heavy sacks of donated non-perishable food items left by mailboxes," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "To get us there takes the dedication of hundreds of branch food drive coordinators, who have spent the last few months ordering and mailing countless customer-reminder postcards, putting up food drive flyers and posters, and so much more—often after spending the day delivering the mail."

We do all of this because we know how important it is, Rolando said. "When we decided to take our food drive nationwide more than two decades ago, food banks and community service organizations told us that the best time for us to do it would be when people aren't really thinking about it—to remind people that, sadly, the need for food is year-round.

"In November and December—around the holidays—many folks get caught up in a spirit of giving, so food pantries and other such organization see a major upswing in food donations," he said. "But by May, their shelves begin to empty out."

As men and women who touch every neighborhood in America six days a week, letter carriers far too often see firsthand how poverty and hunger affect the customers we serve.

"Plus, many disadvantaged children, who depend on their schools for breakfast and lunch, will soon be on summer break, losing access to those free or subsidized meals," Rolando

said, "which places increased pressure on food pantries and similar charitable organizations.

"So on May 11, many of us might go home that night dealing with a few extra aches and pains," he said, "but it's all worth it when we remember that we're helping to make sure someone will soon be getting the food they need, for themselves and their families."

Help from friends

The NALC National Food Drive is the country's largest one-day food-collection effort. Last year, we picked up more than 70 million pounds of non-perishable food donations, which brought our grand total from more than two decades of collections to 1.2 billion pounds.

"Such a massive effort is nearly impossible for us to pull off alone," Rolando said, which is why NALC is extremely grateful for the support we receive from our national and regional food drive partners: the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, Valpak, United Way Worldwide, Campbell Soup, the AFL-CIO, the USPS, Feeding America, Uncle Bob's Self Storage, AARP and its "Drive to End Hunger" campaign, GLS Companies (a full-service commercial printing firm), Source Direct Plastics (manufacturer of plastic grocery bags used in many areas of the country), the Publix grocery store chain and Valassis/Red Plum.

See the next page for a special column by Pam Donato, NALC's community and membership outreach coordinator, who has some terrific tips for ensuring that your local food drive is a success—whether you're a branch food drive coordinator or one of the thousands of letter carriers who will be on your route on Saturday, May 11, delivering the mail as always and picking up sacks of non-perishable food. For more resources and information, visit the food drive page at nalc.org. **PR**