

USPS Connect Local



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In the last six months, the Postal Service has restarted many city delivery initiatives that had previously been put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to use this month's article to tell you about one of these initiatives and the NALC activities related to this test.

In June, the Postal Service notified me that it was going to test a new service, called USPS Connect Local, which is targeted to neighborhood business customers. With consumers shopping online more than ever, USPS says that neighborhood businesses are looking to find new and affordable ways to compete on shipping speed, price and convenience to meet customer

demand for local delivery.

The test began on July 19 in seven locations in the Dallas and Houston metro areas. During the first week of the test, NALC Headquarters city delivery staff, regional representatives and local union officials visited all seven initial sites to learn about the test process.

USPS Connect Local is designed for small and micro-business customers who ship locally and want same- or next-day delivery service in their surrounding area. These businesses could include non-profit or community service providers, as well as specialty businesses such as clothing boutiques, pharmacies, hardware stores, jewelry shops and food banks. Businesses that USPS hopes to solicit might include a neighborhood pharmacy that needs to deliver time-sensitive medications to a patient or a neighborhood candy shop that wants to ensure that gifts arrive on time to local recipients. It also is designed for institutions such as non-profit or community service providers, as well as schools.

Business customers participating in USPS Connect Local can use the Click-N-Ship application to ship parcels at either the Parcel Select or Parcel Select Lightweight rate. During the test, parcels are accepted from the customer at the back dock and not at the retail counter. Connect Local parcels are not entered into the traditional mail stream, but they are staged and handled separately within the delivery unit. These parcels are then distributed to the appropriate delivery route for same- or next-day delivery by the carrier. City carriers deliver these parcels as they would any other parcel; there is no change to parcel delivery methods. Currently, there is no method for the customer to request that these parcels be picked up by a letter carrier; however, this option may be considered in the

future if USPS expands the service. Customers wanting same-day delivery to the ZIP codes serviced from the drop-off facility may drop off parcels at the local delivery unit between 5 and 7 a.m. Packages dropped off after 7 a.m. will be scheduled for delivery on the next business day.



A poster advertises the new USPS Connect program to customers.

For this test, the Postal Service has created special USPS Connect Local signage, marketing materials, shipping labels and reusable mailing bags to be used by participating customers. Using Click-N-Ship, the customer can prepay postage with a credit card, print a shipping label and receive tracking numbers. There are no minimum or maximum number of packages

required; however, USPS encourages customers to mail at least 10 parcels a day. While USPS offers specific, distinctive Connect Local packaging, the customers are not required to use the packaging when using the service. Additionally, USPS has created a new Lead Card insert that letter carriers can offer customers to promote the features and benefits of the USPS Connect Local service.

On Aug. 9, USPS expanded the test to Wave 2, an additional 20 Dallas and Houston metro area locations. Waves 3 and 4 of the test, which began the last two weeks of August, added an additional 356 delivery units. USPS anticipates a continued phased expansion of the program, adding additional locations each week throughout Texas until the end of September. USPS indicated that a total of 855 delivery units will offer varying levels of Connect Local service. Some delivery units will offer same- and next-day delivery, while others will offer only next-day service. USPS intends for the testing to last approximately six months.

The Postal Service hopes that with local delivery, neighborhood businesses can provide the convenience their customers expect and assist them in growing their businesses. In turn, the Postal Service will generate revenue, build brand loyalty and increase shipping volume. I am hopeful that USPS Connect Local will help solidify the Postal Service as the shipper of choice for consumers and create additional job security for city letter carriers.