

Mentoring pilot program underway

NALC and the Postal Service have launched a joint pilot program designed to provide newly hired city letter carriers the opportunity to have mentoring relationships with experienced city carriers, through which feedback, coaching and positive reinforcement can be shared.

During negotiations for the 2019-2023 National Agreement, NALC put forth a bargaining proposal to create a new employee mentoring program for city letter carriers. It is NALC's opinion that mentoring new letter carriers plays an important role in their professional development, which in turn benefits not only the new employee, but USPS and its customers as well. Mentoring also builds better relationships among co-workers and fosters a better work environment and culture. A mentoring relationship between an experienced letter carrier and a new employee can provide that new letter carrier with a necessary resource to ask questions, get feedback, and otherwise assist in his or her journey to becoming a professional letter carrier.

NALC's proposal was not agreed upon with USPS during negotiations; however, the parties did reach agreement to pursue the idea under the new City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force, established for the purposes of jointly seeking methods to improve the cultural and operational environment in city delivery offices. After ratification of the National Agreement on March 8, a joint subcommittee of the task force was formed for the specific purpose of exploring ideas on how to improve city carrier assistant retention rates, as well as the possibility of jointly developing and discussing implementation options for a mentorship program for new employees

with the intention of improving their onboarding experience.

As a result of these discussions, NALC and USPS agreed on Aug. 23 to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to pilot a mentoring program for newly hired city letter carriers in several locations throughout the country. The new MOU, Re: New Employee Mentoring Program, establishes and outlines the testing of the program in 38 installations located in California, Iowa, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and Texas.

Soon after the program was established with the signing of the MOU, a joint stand-up talk was created and presented to the employees in each of the selected locations. The purpose of the stand-up talk was to inform those employees of the program's guidelines and to begin soliciting experienced letter carriers to volunteer as mentors to new city carriers.

Seasoned carriers interested in serving as mentors submit their names to their postmaster or branch president, or their designees, for consideration. Mentors are then jointly selected by their NALC national business agent and USPS district manager, or their designees, based on the following criteria:

- Sufficient understanding of USPS policies, rules and regulations.
 - Ability to convey a positive image and attitude.
 - Demonstrated good communication skills, safe working practices and regular attendance.
 - Commitment to a four-month mentoring relationship, during which time the mentor will make himself or herself available for telephonic and/or in-person discussions during regularly scheduled work hours.
 - Willingness to meet, both independently and with mentee participation, with management concerning the work performance of mentee.
 - Ability and willingness to successfully complete a mentor training program jointly developed by the national parties.
- When new city carriers arrive at their installation, the local parties facilitate mentor-mentee relationships by jointly pairing them with an experienced letter carrier. Mentoring relationships established by this pilot program include the following:
- All newly hired city letter carriers in the pilot sites will be informed of this program as soon as practicable upon their start in the delivery unit. When practicable, the mentor will participate in the mentee's tour of the delivery unit, introducing the new employee to colleagues and providing him or her with an overview of the workroom floor.
 - The mentor and mentee should meet regularly, as needed, to discuss the mentee's experiences and to address any work-related concerns or issues he or she may be experiencing. Such requests should not be unreasonably denied.
 - The mentor should provide encouragement and advice to the new employee regarding his or her performance and ability to adapt to the requirements of being a city letter carrier.
 - During the first 120 calendar days of a mentee's employment as a city letter carrier, whenever possible, any discussions related to the performance of a mentee (positive or negative), including 30-, 60- and

80-day evaluations as described by *Handbook EL-312*, Employment and Placement, Section 584, Employee Evaluation, should have the mentor present.

- When practicable, prior to any voluntary or involuntary separation of a mentee participant in the pilot program, the mentor, mentee and appropriate management representative should meet to discuss the reasons for the potential separation and whether there are possible alternatives or resolutions to address the underlying issues.

While mentor and mentee interaction is always paid time on the clock, participation in this program is completely voluntary. Additionally, while NALC and USPS have a joint expectation that mentoring relationships will last for a period of four calendar months, the mentorship may be terminated by either the mentor or

mentee at any time. In these circumstances, when practicable, efforts will be made to jointly assign a new mentor to the newly hired carrier. For a detailed explanation of everything the pilot program entails, see M-01961 in NALC's Materials Reference System at nalc.org/mrs.

"High turnover among our new letter carriers has been an ongoing issue since the city carrier assistant position was created in 2013," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Through the City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force, we are working jointly with USPS toward our common goal of improving retention."

Research concerning mentoring programs has shown that mentoring relationships increase retention rates and help employees adapt to new workplaces. Employees who have workplace mentors have been found to be more likely to experience greater job satisfaction, and mentor-

ing relationships can help eliminate obstacles, difficulties and stumbling blocks that new employees may encounter. Additionally, effective mentoring programs provide opportunities for new employees to freely ask questions and gain information needed to effectively perform their jobs, and also help to build effective and diverse organizations.

"Like the New Employee Experience and Retention Program, which we began testing in several locations earlier this year, this is another example of our collaborative efforts to help transform USPS for the benefit of both the Service and its employees," Rolando added. "The New Employee Mentoring Program allows our experienced city letter carriers to share their experience, knowledge, skills and passion with our newest city letter carriers—welcoming them to our ranks and offering a helping hand as they begin their new journey." **PR**

November magazine to honor Veterans Group members

In 2015, NALC created the NALC Veterans Group to acknowledge and inform the military veterans who served their country and continue to do so by trading their military uniforms for letter carrier uniforms. Veterans of the U.S. armed forces comprise almost a quarter of the NALC membership.

The Veterans Group was designed to provide NALC members who are military veterans with access to the information and tools specific to veterans' rights and benefits within the U.S. Postal Service, as well as a sense of camaraderie.

Since that 2015 launch, thousands of members have signed up to be part of

the group and received the special pin showing their status. More recently, group members receive the *Veterans Guide*, filled with information to help veterans with their unique issues.

In the next issue of *The Postal Record*, to celebrate Veterans Day—our national holiday recognizing the service of veterans—NALC will publish the names of all of these Veterans Group members.

Any veteran who wishes to be included, but who has not yet joined the group, can take action now and join at nalc.org/veterans. If you are a member of the group and do not wish to have your name listed, please email your request to veteransgroup@nalc.org. **PR**

