

Serious business in a 'happy place'



Walt Disney famously vowed to create the “happiest place on Earth” when he set out to build Disneyland in Anaheim, California, in the 1950s. I, for one, will be extremely happy to be among thousands of letter carriers—friends, allies and leaders—when we gather in Anaheim next month for the 67th Biennial Convention of the NALC. But that happiness will be tempered by the extremely serious business we have before us at the convention.

I suspect that, outside of the conventions held during the Great Depression of the 1930s and perhaps the one that followed the Great Postal Strike of 1970, our union has never faced more difficult issues than we do now. It is not just that the USPS has been through a major trauma resulting from the worst economic crisis since the days of Herbert Hoover. But it is also that the future of mail delivery in the United States is being challenged by a technological revolution at a time when the Congress of the United States appears to be frozen by political gridlock. Our goal for the convention must be for us to develop a new vision for the Postal Service and to mobilize our leaders to help make it a reality.

The agenda in Anaheim will be jam packed with big issues that the NALC must confront with courage and energy. The most immediate challenge will be to save the Postal Service, along with 25,000 letter carrier jobs, by preserving Saturday collections and delivery. All across America, branch activists are working right now to defeat the misguided proposal of postal management to implement five-day delivery next year.

The “Save Saturday Delivery” campaign has two fronts: The Postal Regulatory Commission, which is reviewing the USPS proposal and is expected to issue an advisory opinion in the fall; and the United States Congress, which is the only body that can authorize five-day delivery by repealing legislation that mandates Monday through Saturday services. One key objective at the convention will be to equip every delegate with the knowl-

edge and resources to mobilize every member back home to help us win this fight.

Other legislative priorities will also merit considerable attention. We expect to have legislation introduced early this month to finally reform the crushing burden of pre-funding future retiree health benefits by recovering up to \$75 billion in surplus pension costs that were wrongly charged to the Postal Service by the Office of Personnel Management.

The financial viability of the Postal Service will depend on these reforms and we will urge the delegates to be leaders in their branches on the union’s grass roots lobbying efforts. Stabilizing the Postal Service financially is the crucial first step to framing the debate about the future business model of the Postal Service.

Elections will also be on the agenda in Anaheim—both our union elections and the crucial mid-term elections for Congress. Delegates will nominate candidates for union office at the national and regional levels—which will give members a chance this fall to choose the leaders they believe will best represent letter carriers.

Delegates will also have a chance to train and prepare to turn out the vote for pro-letter carrier candidates in both parties in November, when all 435 members of the House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate run for re-election. All elections are crucial. But when massive deficits caused by a deep recession expose our health benefits and pensions to budget cuts, and when a recovery of mail volume depends on putting more than 20 million American workers who remain unemployed or under-employed back to work, they are more important than ever.

Finally, at the convention we will kick off a debate on how the union should approach the most difficult round of collective bargaining in the history of the NALC in 2011. As we have for more than 40 years, we will be challenged to find creative and practical solutions at the bargaining table. I have no doubt that we will rise to the occasion. I can’t wait to get started in California. 