

A LIFE IN THE RING

NALC members often rest easier knowing that if Postal Service management ever steps out of line, a dedicated shop steward is always ready to fight to protect letter carriers' rights under the National Agreement.

The members of Tulsa, Oklahoma Branch 1358, however, might have a slight advantage over their brother and sister carriers elsewhere across America. That's because one of their own shop stewards, Allen Hutchinson, knows a little something about winning a fight, thanks to his successful part-time passion for amateur boxing.

Hutchinson, who turned 62 in April, started his career carrying mail in 1997, the last nine or so years in the southwest Tulsa suburb of Sapulpa. His boxing interest, though, has truly been his life-long pursuit, a road his father steered him onto when the carrier was just 15.

"He started me in boxing to help me stay out of trouble," said Hutchinson with a chuckle. "My father knew something about boxing, and in a week or two, I'd picked up the basics."

With practice, Hutchinson quickly mastered his boxing technique and was soon on his way toward fighting bouts throughout the West and Southwest. Along the way, he met some success, picking up a couple of Golden Gloves amateur boxing championship titles in Arizona and San Francisco—and also earning his professional nickname, "Snakebite."

And he had a few brushes with fame as well. "In Arizona, I met some big-name boxers," Hutchinson said, including "Sugar Ray" Leonard, who eventually went on to win a number of world welterweight and middleweight titles throughout the 1980s.

Later, Hutchinson signed up for an eight-year stint in the Navy, where he spent his off hours continuing to perfect his technique. Eventually, he improved to the point where he was able to successfully claim championship crowns in Las Vegas regional and 12th Naval District tournaments. He was also a runner-up in the All-Navy Championship.

"Even after the Navy, I would still enter a fight here and there" to keep skillful, he said.

Fighting shape

More recently, when he's not delivering mail, Snakebite has maintained his conditioning by taking part in tournaments in Missouri, Kansas and Arizona. And he has continued his winning ways: For two years in a row, he won the master's division (ages 53 to 63) championship belt in the World Championships of Amateur Boxers held in Kansas City, Missouri—the latter decision coming in August 2008 after Hutchinson knocked out his opponent in the second round.

Through exercise and watching what he eats, he sticks to his 160-pound weight class. "I have long days," Snakebite said. "I'll get up at 5:30 in the morning, carry my route, then get away in the evening for training for a couple of hours before getting to bed around 10:30."

"I also referee and judge amateur bouts as well," he said, adding that he sees his doctor every year for a physical, and also keeps a close eye on his blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Hutchinson and his wife are the proud parents of three adult sons. One is a police officer, while the other two have found success in the private sector.

"My wife and I have tried to pass on my father's values on to our boys," he said. "I always spent as much time with them as I could when they were young, and I still do now," he said.

The effort is an easy one that has paid off, he said. "It's amazing what fathers can do when they just spend time with their sons," he marveled. ☒

Oklahoma steward fights (literally) to honor his father

