

ONE BILLION POUNDS



OF CARING

For 18 years, letter carriers represented by the National Association of Letter Carriers have sacrificed their time—not to mention their backs, shoulders, arms, legs and feet—on the second Saturday in May to carry out one of the most meaningful humanitarian events in America: delivering food to families in need.

Can by can, box by box, container by container, the donations that had been left next to the mailboxes of postal customers along carriers' mail routes piled up, first at postal stations, then in community food banks, pantries and shelters where the food will provide nutrition to hungry families—men, women and children—throughout the coming summer months.

By the time the 2010 drive ended on Saturday, May 8, the nearly two-decades-old effort had reached a pinna-

cle that seemed unimaginable when the first pilot drive was held in 10 cities in 1991—more than a billion pounds of non-perishable items had been transferred from a giving and charitable public to local food distribution centers, thanks to letter carriers.

That the billion-pound threshold would be achieved became apparent within only a few days after the more than 1,400 NALC branches concluded their drives, as coordinators from about one-fourth of the participating branches submitted preliminary reports that

18TH ANNUAL FOOD DRIVE

showed 19,724,393 pounds had already been counted. The total at the end of the 2009 drive was 982.7 million pounds, so even these partial tallies easily pushed the overall 18-year total above the one billion-pound mark.

As a result, Food Drive Day 2010 was a particularly historic occasion in the union's ongoing effort to help "stamp out hunger."

Many helping hands

NALC President Fred Rolando praised all active and retired members, their counterparts in the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA), and the countless other volunteers whose dedication and compassion to help feed needy families have been enduring hallmarks of the drive's success.

"You all were fantastic," Rolando said. "I'm sure there were a lot of sore backs and tired legs by the end of the day, but there also was the satisfaction of knowing that you sacrificed for a good cause."

"Our union and its members are proud to provide a helping hand to the millions of citizens who recognize that hunger in America is a continuing problem and want to assist their neighbors in time of need," Rolando said. "Collecting these donations from the mailboxes and taking them to local food banks and pantries is in keeping with our motto of 'Delivering for America.'"

From the NALC's South Pacific outpost in Guam, through the giant food drive states of California and Florida, to the Mississippi River Valley and up into New England, reports came into NALC Headquarters of record collections—due mainly to some very good weather across the country and increased public awareness of the great need for food donations, plus the expansion of delivery of plastic bags to customers alongside the traditional Campbell Soup-USPS postcards.

"I really think the people of the Ozarks just dug deeper to help the people," food drive coordinator Tammie Yates of

Springfield, Missouri Branch 203 told her local *News-Leader* newspaper.

At the Windsor Food Pantry in Colorado, director Brenda Heckman was appreciative of the letter carriers' effort.

"It has restored our shelves," she was quoted on coloradoan.com. "We were running low on things, but we're back in business now."

Tom Newell of the Denton, Texas Community Food Center said the drive was "definitely a success," but he also put it in perspective for KDAF-TV, saying the food would run out shortly because "summertime is typically a challenging time as far as keeping food stocked."

Also reflecting the dire state of many food banks and pantries were comments from Hawaii Food Bank director Polly Kauahi to KITV after her organization received more than 200,000 pounds of donations in Honolulu. She asked island residents to keep the donations coming.

"Those [food] lines have grown in the recent years and they continue to grow as the economy is still tight for people that are over-working, under-working, and just working as hard as they can to put food on their table," Kauahi said.

Results stream in

In 2009, a record 73.4 million pounds of food was delivered to community food banks and pantries thanks to the drive.

Final official results of this year's campaign, which was conducted in more than 10,000 cities and towns in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico, were scheduled to be announced on June 1, after this issue of *The Postal Record* went to press. A complete report on the drive, including branch-by-branch weight totals and photos, will appear in the July issue.

Although NALC does not encourage collecting monetary donations along routes as part of the food drive, some customers nevertheless left checks or cash in envelopes. Branches were allowed to convert any donations at a rate of one pound per dollar to



Opposite page (top-bottom): Columbus, Ohio Branch 78's Jason Fry collects donations from a generous patron; quite the haul in Branch 2462, Van Nuys, California; and Fresno, California Branch 231 member Cindy Cooper unloads at Hughes Station.

Above: Branch 129 Baton Rouge, Louisiana's Tom King and Charmaine Mitchell work together with clerk Lisa Matthews.

Below: San Francisco, California Branch 214's Wing Woo, a 55-year retired carrier, comes back to help out.

Bottom: Branch 248 Asheville, North Carolina carrier David McElrath makes room for more food.





Counterclockwise from top r: Rep. Ron Klein (D-FL) led the kickoff in Pompano Beach for South Florida Branch 1071; Branch 157, Philadelphia carriers and managers team up to launch the drive; Vincennes, Indiana Branch 377 member Bill Stanley unloads at the post office back dock; Sen. Al Franken (D-MN) thanks Minneapolis, Minnesota Branch 9 President Pam Donato for the work the carriers do; and Secaucus Mayor Michael Gonnelli lends a hand to New Jersey Merged Branch 38 carriers Jay Tipton, Mark McGrady and Jersey City Branch 42 food drive coordinator Raj Nagpal.



include in the total collection amount they reported.

The final reports mailed by branches to NALC Headquarters on special yellow forms, or faxed or e-mailed by May 25, will be the only amounts used to determine the top branches in 10 membership categories that will receive an NALC award plaque at the union's biennial convention in Anaheim, California, in August. Each of those branches will also receive a 1,000-can donation of soup that will be delivered to the local food bank or pantry of their choice, courtesy of the Campbell Soup Company, a longtime major co-sponsor and national partner of the NALC Food Drive.

Invaluable support

President Rolando expressed the union's special appreciation to Campbell's and to all the national partners in the drive, including the U.S. Postal Service, the NRLCA, Valpak, United Way Worldwide and local United Ways, the AFL-CIO and the Feeding America food bank network.

He also thanked "Family Circus" cartoonists Bil and Jeff Keane, who again provided artwork to promote the food drive, as well as husband-and-wife actors David Arquette and Courteney Cox, National Hot Rod Association driver Ashley Force Hood, and "American Idol" host and radio personality Ryan Seacrest, all of whom generously endorsed the drive.

The 2010 drive was a success due to several factors, not least of which was the new national partner status conferred on the NRLCA. Although thousands of rural carriers have assisted in the drive for many years, numerous NALC branch coordinators noted that even more rural carriers were eager to participate this year and that there seemed to be a renewed sense of enthusiasm among them. Thanks to its new national partner standing, the NRLCA logo was included for the first time this year on all food drive promotional materials.

Letter carriers delivered more than 126 million postcards, sponsored by Campbell Soup and the United States Postal Service's Priority Mail, to homes across the nation just before the drive's date, again providing a last-minute reminder to customers to place bags of non-perishable food at their mailboxes on May 8. And even before the postcards went out, another longtime national partner, Valpak, mailed more than 44 million envelopes containing marketing items and coupons, each emblazoned with a food drive promotion on the front of the envelope.

An ongoing effort

The national, coordinated effort by the NALC to help fight hunger in America grew out of discussions in 1991 by a number of leaders at the time, including NALC President Vincent R. Sombrotto, AFL-CIO Community Services Director Joseph Velasquez and Postmaster General Anthony Frank. A pilot drive was held in 10 cities in October that same year, modeled on a successful one that had been conducted by Phoenix, Arizona Branch 576. The 10-city pilot proved so successful that work began immediately on turning it into a nationwide effort.

Input from food banks and pantries suggested that late spring would be the best time to conduct such a drive, since by then most food banks in the country begin to run out of the donations they received the previous fall and winter, during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday periods.

A revamped drive was organized for May 1993 with a goal of having at least one NALC branch participating in each of the 50 states. The result was astounding: More than 11 million pounds of food was collected—a one-day record in the United States—with more than 220 union branches getting involved. The drive then continued to grow, surpassing the 70 million-pound mark in each of the last five years and now vaulting beyond the one billion-pound benchmark. ☒