

Letter from the Editor

This is the first installment of what will be a regular feature, and I'd like to use it today to say hello, introduce myself and discuss communications.

I'm excited to be working with you. I've long regarded the National Association of Letter Carriers as one of the best-run and most important labor unions in the country, and that's been reinforced in the unusually (one hopes) busy two months I've been here.

I got to spend all of three days learning my way around Headquarters before heading to California for the biennial convention, where I was struck by the energy, seriousness of purpose and democratic spirit.

Since returning, I've seen the talented communications staff put out *The Postal Record's* post-convention double edition, helped publicize our exceptional National Heroes, and played a small role in facilitating President Fredric Rolando's pushback against misleading media treatment of our issues.

After this brief but lively period, I can tell that this is one solid, cohesive and competent union—but then again I already sensed that. When I began reporting on the labor beat some two decades ago, one of the first national leaders I regularly sought out was Vince Sombrotto, because he was making a difference.

So, on a personal level, coming to the NALC as Director of Communications and Media Relations completes a loop that began quite a while ago. (For background details, see article on staff changes in last month's *Postal Record*, page 18).

To the task at hand: This is a critical time for labor and, as you know, for the NALC—in terms of legislation, politics, the economy and the future of the United States Postal Service.

If there's one lesson I've taken from covering unions for more than 20 years, teaching labor and communications, writing a book two years ago about the labor movement, addressing unions about how they can revitalize themselves and appearing on media outlets to explain labor's relevance, it's this: Communications matters.

Labor's ability to get its message out affects everything else unions do, from bargaining to organizing to electoral campaigns. Why? If people believe that labor is a relic from another era, or merely a special interest, they'll tune unions out.

But if they understand that unions promote productivity and safety and quality, and that restoring labor-management balance is in the national interest, we'll be perceived quite differently. Helping people connect the dots between a robust labor movement and a thriving middle class is labor's top challenge.

Now let's get practical. The NALC's Communications Department has been reorganized to handle both internal and external communications. The former includes *The Postal Record*, the *Bulletin* and more, while the latter involves influencing public—and political—opinion, largely through the media.

Within the union, we could benefit from more two-way communication. *The Postal Record*, a magazine any union would be proud to publish, does a superb job informing members. At the same time, I'd like to encourage you to inform us—of your opinions, your suggestions, compelling topics we should write about and your concerns on the job. That may alert us to unique stories; conversely, it may help us spot patterns that tell a significant tale.

We'd be delighted to hear from rank-and-file members, branch officers and others. On our end, we'd like to help as desired with your editorial efforts, including newsletters or websites. I can be reached at dine@nalc.org or 202-662-2850.

Turning to the media, few unions have more powerful stories to relate than the NALC, whether letter carriers' acts of caring or the real financial situation of the USPS. We need to help reporters, from local to national, tell those stories. When that involves you, we'd like to assist—individually or by discussing general media strategies in this space.

We'll also use this column to flag a theme in the current edition, seek information for a future story, or examine pertinent news coverage.

On the latter, a recent TV program unfairly targeted postal workers and misinformed about the USPS. President Rolando asked to rebut those comments on a following show, but was constantly interrupted. He could easily have said, "Heck with these guys;" instead, he accepted a second invitation. Given a chance to actually speak, he was sufficiently forceful and persuasive that the entire panel sided with him. Everything about this was impressive. ✉



PHILIP DINE

EDITORIAL STAFF:

Managing Editor Philip Dine
Designer/Web Editor Mike Shea
Internet Communications Coordinator
Joe Conway
Writer/Editor Rick Hodges
Editorial Assistant Jenessa Kildall

The Postal Record (ISSN 0032-5376) is published monthly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

Subscription included in membership dues. First-class subscription available for \$20 per year (contact Membership Department).

© 2010 by the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Circulation: 287,000. Union-printed using soy-based inks.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS? Contact the Membership Department.