

SOLDIER ON

THE YEAR AHEAD: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



Many letter carriers would point to 1970, the year of the wild-cat strike that lifted the craft into the middle class, as the most important year for our union in recent memory. But 2011 might take its place. This year, we face some of the greatest challenges ever, all at once. They include the worst recession in 80 years, several years of decreasing mail volume, a newly antagonistic Congress, an expiring national contract, open season on public employees and their unions, and a Postal Service management team that seems determined to make things worse by cutting a day of service.

Still, letter carriers soldier on despite the challenges. It's in our nature. When it comes to preserving six-day delivery, we have pledged to save the Postal Service from itself if need be. We will respond to our detractors in Congress with our e-Activist and lobbying efforts and by renewing our political clout. We will negotiate our new contract with the long-term interests of letter carriers and the Postal Service in mind. Headquarters, helped by many of you, will work to get our message out even as we continue to confront every distortion, attack or one-sided report in the media with aggressive replies that tell the truth about our issues and our profession. And our commitment to supporting our communities through charity work and everyday heroism will grow.

The next few pages offer a sketch of some of the important activities of your union over the next year.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Again this year, the U.S. Postal Service will end up squeezed between declining revenue and another \$5.5 billion payment to pre-fund retiree health benefits. NALC will continue its efforts

to persuade Congress to fix the problem by allowing the Office of Personnel Management to correct the overcharge of up to \$75 billion for pension costs related to service performed by the taxpayer-supported Post Office Department before 1971. The Service could then transfer that surplus into the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefit Fund, satisfying the pre-funding requirement. A bill to accomplish this was introduced last year by Rep. Stephen Lynch (D-MA), but has yet to be enacted.

NALC will also oppose vigorously any effort to reduce six-day mail delivery service. Congress could lift the current legal requirement to provide six-day delivery or make other changes that affect service, so our vigilance on that issue will continue this year and into the future. We also will oppose any efforts in Congress either to interfere with our negotiations with the Service on a new National Agreement or to bias the interest arbitration process.

"The new Congress isn't as friendly to labor, but we aren't giving one inch of ground this year," NALC President Fredric Rolando said.

NALC's lobbyists will also keep their eyes on the federal budget and federal workers' issues as efforts to reduce deficits move forward, and they will protect the interests of letter carriers in the debate over tax reform, retirement and health care.

(For more information, see the Save Saturday Delivery story on page 7.)

CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

The National Agreement expires this fall, and NALC will face one of the toughest environments in memory in which to negotiate a new contract.

The Postal Service is likely to push for concessions, citing declines in mail volume and the lingering recession.

Though President Obama's proposed freeze in federal wages doesn't cover postal workers, it puts pressure on us in negotiations.

The difficulties faced in the negotiations by our sister unions, the American Postal Workers Union and National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, foreshadow difficult times for us (*see the negotiations update on page 14*).

"NALC will do what it has always done—fight for a fair contract that rewards letter carriers for what they do for the Postal Service," Rolando said.

A national rap session to discuss issues such as contract negotiations will be held this year. Look for an announcement of the date and city in a future issue of *The Postal Record*.

POLITICAL ACTION

As the new year begins, NALC's political focus will remain on holding members of Congress accountable on the issues that affect letter carriers. The Department of Legislative and Political Affairs will continue to work with our national business agents, state chairs, branch presidents, congressional district liaisons and local activists to promote the interests of our members through all aspects of the political process.

The political stakes for letter carriers have never been higher. As federal workers, the future of our employer is largely in the hands of Congress. That's why supporting the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education (COLCPE) is critical.

In the aftermath of last year's unfortunate election results, we will face renewed pressure from anti-labor forces in their bid to win the White House and control of the Senate. Candidates who are willing to stand with working families and for a strong U.S. Postal Service need our help to win.

That's where COLCPE comes in. By law, money from union dues cannot be used to donate to campaigns, so COLCPE provides direct financial support to pro-labor candidates from both parties. Funds from COLCPE also allow letter carriers to be released temporarily to work on campaigns.

The 2010 midterm elections set spending records, and 2012 will surely

top them. To assure that our candidates stay competitive, COLCPE must replenish the funds it spent last year and be ready for the next battle.

Because it is separate from union dues, COLCPE depends entirely on the voluntary donations of letter carriers. Given the size of NALC's membership, the potential for political power through COLCPE is huge—if everyone participates. Giving just \$5 per pay period as part of the "Gimme 5" campaign makes a letter carrier part of the solution.

Last year, COLCPE pitted state against state in a contest for the highest percentage of participation by letter carriers in the Gimme 5 program. The winning state association will receive three \$200 American Express gift cards to be given away to three randomly chosen Gimme 5 donors in the state. Look for an announcement of the winner in the February *Postal Record*.

ADVOCACY

The NALC's communications and media relations effort will be a multi-pronged one meant to:

- Help get our president and other leaders out there to continue to visibly and effectively make our case.
- Explain the USPS' financial situation, Saturday delivery and other key issues to reporters and media outlets.
- Respond to unfair or incomplete news stories or opinion pieces and set the record straight.
- Publicize the good deeds of letter carriers.

The goal is to increase public understanding of our issues, influence public opinion and boost political support.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Letter carriers won't run out of opportunities to serve the community this year.

After reaching the 1-billion-pound mark last year, letter carriers across the country will help "Stamp Out Hunger" for the 19th year of the union's food drive. This year's food collection occurs on May 14—as always, the second Saturday of May. (A different date was erroneously listed in some publications.)

Rural carriers, who participated in some areas in 2010, will collect nationwide this year. With their help, NALC



hopes to top last year's record of 77.1 million pounds of food collected.

For the second year, the NALC's MDA Bowlathon raised thousands of dollars for muscular dystrophy (*see page 16 for results*). This year's bowlathon will be held on Sunday, Nov. 6. The goal is to increase the number of branches that bowl for MDA that day and to boost the total fundraising tally from this fun event.

If that's not enough, NALC will announce a "Fill the Satchel" event this year to raise money for MDA, similar to the "fill the boot" street collections that local firefighters often use. Headquarters will provide details on this event soon.

A national officer will visit the winning branch in each category of MDA fundraising for 2011 to recognize and help celebrate the achievement.

Of course, collecting food and funds isn't the only way letter carriers serve. Every year, letter carriers save lives on their routes as they encounter emergencies, and this year is sure to be no different. After selecting in July the heroes to represent all the carriers who protected the lives of their customers in the previous 12 months, NALC will honor these men and women at a Heroes of the Year ceremony tentatively set for the first week of October in Washington.

As part of the effort to protect lives, NALC will reignite the Carrier Alert program this year. Customers with health problems or other risks can sign up for the program to ask for letter carriers to watch for problems, such as uncollected mail in mailboxes, and summon help if necessary. The goal is to strengthen the Carrier Alert program by expanding the number of regions participating in the program and the number of postal patrons in need who sign up for it.

In partnership with the USPS, NALC will unveil a new and improved "Wee Deliver" program this year to educate youngsters about the value of the USPS and letter carriers. The Wee Deliver program brings schoolchildren the story of the Postal Service through teaching tools such as field trips to the local post office, mock post offices in schools run by students, writing and mailing letters, finding pen pals, and activity books.

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Since its first class in 2005, the NALC Leadership Academy has brought more than 300 letter carriers to the National Labor College campus in Silver Spring, MD, to train the next generation of NALC leaders. The students for the two sessions of the 2012 Leadership Academy have been chosen by Headquarters and will be announced in a future issue of *The Postal Record*.

Twice a year, classes composed of two students from each of NALC's 15 regions participate in three one-week sessions of seminars taught by union officers and staff. They learn about NALC history, the National Agreement, and workplace issues, and they also focus on sharpening their leadership and communication skills. Between their sessions at the National Labor College, students work on "homework" assignments and projects designed to build on everything they learn in the classroom.

POSTAL REGULATORY COMMISSION

While Congress is not required to follow the advice of the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC), the panel's advisory opinions still hold a good deal of weight. This past year, the PRC held hearings nationwide on the proposal by the Postal Service to drop Saturday mail delivery. Several NALC leaders and rank-and-file members testified at the field hearings in support of preserving six-day service, and thousands of letter carriers sent comments to the commission.

The PRC was expected to issue a final report with recommendations to Congress after this issue of *The Postal Record* went to press. If the commission backs six-day delivery, it will send a strong message to Congress and the USPS that abandoning a day of service is a bad idea that shouldn't see the light of day. If the PRC endorses the proposal, however, it could draw new battle lines for NALC's struggle to save Saturday delivery. ☐