Tracking membership and dues: A tough job getting tougher

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Branch and state association leaders, especially those with responsibility for financial affairs, are quite familiar with how the Postal Service's shrinking of the city carrier craft has affected branch and state association finances over the last several years. Fewer carriers means fewer active members, and that results in less dues money.

Believe me, your national union also has seen its revenue shrink.

Of course, now that the Postal Service has resumed hiring, with thousands of city carrier assistants added to the rolls since late February, finances have shored up, at least to some extent. I'm aware that management's adding carriers to the rolls hasn't changed how management acts, since in many parts of the country, postmasters and supervisors are leaning on their CCAs, creating new problems for branch leaders. I commend those branches that already are going to bat for our CCAs.

The future of NALC branches, state associations and headquarters will depend on our commitment to organizing the unorganized, both CCAs and those letter carriers who are not new to our craft. Only by continuing to organize *all* letter carriers can the NALC remain strong, not only financially but also organizationally—protecting carriers on the workroom floor and here in Washington where laws are enacted or, as is more likely these days, not enacted.

But with the semi-good news about the Service's hiring come some problems, especially here at headquarters, where the administration of NALC's membership rolls has become increasingly complicated and burdensome.

Part of the reason is the advent of the CCAs, and management's ineptness in ensuring that Form 50s are cut timely, Form 1187s are processed accurately, and the dues are deducted and directed to the appropriate branch, or at least the appropriate union.

Both our branches and the national union also wrestle with problems arising from a management restructuring program that began even before the arbitration award that created the CCAs. I'm referring to the Delivery Unit Optimization program, which encourages management to shift carriers from one station to another. The consequences, as many branch leaders well know, is that members of one branch end up working in a station with members from another branch. Depending on decisions made at the national and local levels, these situations lead to branch mergers, consolidations, transferring of members from one branch to another, or having members of two branches co-exist—working out of the same station.

For branches, the Delivery Unit Optimization program has been a headache. For the NALC Membership Department, as well as our Information Technology Department, this has been a very large headache because in these cases, keeping dues flowing to the appropriate branches is extremely time-consuming and labor intensive.

As the national officer responsible for supervising NALC's Membership Department and for overseeing membership issues, I have been fortunate the past seven years to have as Director of Membership Wayne Nicely, virtually a "lifer" at NALC. Wayne started working in the NALC's Supply Department in December 1975, within three years after graduating from high school. In March 1988, Wayne bid for, and was awarded (yes, these are union-represented jobs), a position in the Membership Department, and in June 2006 became the department's director.

Wayne's knowledge of complex membership issues and the intricate (and not always smooth) interactions between the union's membership records and the Postal Service's Human Resources Shared Services Center and Finance departments in Greensboro, NC, and Eagan, MN, respectively, as well as his good working relationship with our sister unions, has made him an invaluable employee. Not only is he extremely knowledgeable, competent and dedicated, he was a pleasure to work with over the years.

I write "was" because Wayne retired at the end of May; his new status as a grandfather of one, with another on the way, suggesting he spend more time at home and less time unraveling complex membership issues.

I will miss Wayne personally. Branch and state officers who have had the privilege to interact with Wayne either on the phone, at conventions or at branch secretary-treasurer seminars where he taught many letter carriers about dues, membership forms, rosters and other membership-related issues will miss him as well. I am sure they join me in wishing Wayne a long, healthy and happy retirement. Fortunately, they will find Wayne's replacement, Joseph Barbour, more than up to the job. Joseph is also a longtime NALC employee, both with the Mutual Benefit Association and NALC's Membership and Finance Departments, and he brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the position.

Joseph will need all that knowledge and experience because membership and dues issues aren't going to become any easier—as many branch officers understand all too well.