

21st annual
Food Drive

Help for the hungry



Left: It's in the bag for Lincoln, NE Br. 8's Dan Parde.

Above: Region 9 National Business Agent Judy Willoughby and NALC President Fredric Rolando pitch in at the South Florida Br. 1071 drive.

Below: A good haul for Hopkinsville, KY Br. 836.

On Saturday, May 11, thousands of NALC members all across America once again took part in our annual Letter Carriers' Food Drive, as generous customers on our routes left bags of food by their mailboxes for us to pick up and distribute to food banks in our communities.

"I'm extremely proud of our letter carriers, some of whom had to face and overcome significant challenges this year to help make the nation's largest one-day food drive a success," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Working with local volunteers, and helped by retired members, NALC Auxiliary members, family members, friends and neighbors—not to mention the drive's sponsors and the other postal unions—thousands of us on May 11 did what it took to make sure food got picked up and delivered to food

banks and other charities in communities around the country.

"Just picking up and delivering the mail is hard enough," Rolando said. "What gives us comfort and extra strength in this annual effort is the knowledge that, thanks to our hard work and long hours, hungry families in our communities won't have to worry about where their next meals will come from—for a little while, at least."

A proud tradition

The 21st annual drive was held as usual on the second Saturday in May, with letter carriers from more than 1,400 branches taking part in nearly every municipality, state, district and territory.

"We always pick the second Saturday in May because that's a





Above: All smiles for the letter carriers and volunteers at Spirit Lake, IA Br. 3463.

Above right: NALC Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr. (l) returned to his home branch of Garden Grove, CA Br. 1100 to help carrier Javier Alfaro with the drive.

Below: Jim Kirby carried the food while Debbie Dehaan carried the mail in Kenosha, WI Br. 574.

Bottom: An army of volunteers sorted the collections for Waipahu, HI Br. 4683.



time of the year that the food supplies are the lowest,” New York City Branch 36 member David Velazquez told his local Fox TV affiliate two days before the drive. “And here in the Northeast area, we had Hurricane Sandy, so a lot more people are looking for food.”

One in six Americans isn’t sure where his or her next meal will come from, and school programs that provide free or reduced-cost meals to students do not usually keep running over the summer break. This makes our timely effort even more necessary—and appreciated.

“We really need canned meat and canned fruits and vegetables badly,” Hoosier Hills Food Bank Executive Director Julio Alonso told the Bloomington, IN, *Herald-Times* on May 7. “I just walked through our distribution floor, and our available supply of canned goods consists of 22 institutional-size cans of ketchup and two institutional-size cans of bamboo shoots.”

In Florida, Tampa Bay Harvest Executive Director Will Carey told *The Tampa Tribune* on May 11 that he is amazed by letter carriers’ dedication

to the drive. “I mean, they’re already picking up mail and then six to seven pounds of donations—that’s a whole lot of extra labor,” he said. “They’re not required to do this, but they volunteer their time to make things better.”

A welcome effort

Although official branch collection results were still coming in to Headquarters as this issue of *The Postal Record* was being prepared, initial reports showed that some areas were showing increases in donations over last year’s drive, while others saw slight drop-offs. Even so, the sentiment echoed by many, such as Food for Lane County, OR’s Dawn Marie Woodward, is that all amounts are welcome, large or small.

“We have a need for donations every day,” Woodward told KMTR-TV on May 11. “So, this drive was just one that gives us a big push and a security blanket, so to speak, going into the next couple of months.”

Sioux Falls, SD Branch 491 Food Drive Coordinator Eric Wicks told KELO-TV that, for him and many others, it’s their favorite day to be a letter carrier.

“The mailman is really a part of your community, a person in your neighborhood,” Wicks said on May 10, “so our guys, they care about the people they serve—and this is just one more way to show that.”

The need for food is great in rural communities as well as cities and towns. For example, a 2013 report by the non-profit Food Research and Action Center ranks Bakersfield, CA, No. 1 among America’s metropolitan areas for food hardship. That’s one reason why Bakersfield Branch 782’s Randy Courson considers the drive time well spent.

“You may be feeding someone on your route,” Courson told KERO-TV on Food Drive Day. “You never know.”

In Walterboro, SC, Branch 6123 letter carrier Jeff Musgrave found his community’s generosity to be “unbelievable.”



Right: Chicago, IL Mayor Rahm Emanuel helped to promote the food drive by donating a bag of food to a Branch 11 carrier.

Far right: The food stacked up for Lafayette, IN Br. 466.

Below right: Thumbs up from this Central Florida Br. 1091 member.

Bottom right: The custom poster for Pawtucket, RI Br. 55's drive.



“My truck was full and most of the others were the same way,” Musgrave told *The Press and Standard* on May 14, adding that one of his fellow carriers was asked to pull his LLV up next to a car whose trunk was filled with food. “There were some really cool things like that happening all day. People went all out on this one.”

A group effort

“While this is our national drive,” President Rolando said, “we really do get by with a little help—make that a lot of help—from our friends and national sponsors.”

Among those providing crucial backing to branches, volunteers and the entire food drive effort this year were the National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association, U.S. Postal Service, AARP, United Way, AFL-CIO and Feeding America.

Uncle Bob’s Self-Storage, with its more than 400 facilities in 25 states, provided dozens of communities with food transportation and storage support, while Minneapolis-based GLS Companies helped by providing durable lawn signs and other marketing materials. And food drive–branded plastic bags, like the ones manufactured by Source Direct Plastics and distributed by the Publix grocery store chain and AARP, proved invaluable—as drive reminders as well as food containers. (While paper bags indeed are friendlier to the environment, plastic ones are more durable and better suited to withstand the various weather conditions letter carriers can encounter.)

AARP also produced a news feed for radio stations to use to promote the drive.

Mailers from Valassis/Red Plum and Valpak put food drive reminders right in the hands of postal customers, which helped to supplement the save-the-date postcards sent by scores of branches.

Longtime food drive partner Campbell Soup Co. helped as well by donating 1 million cans of soup to the effort,

and it played a key role in the online promotional campaign. In fact, social media factored large in this year’s drive, as food drive posts to NALC’s Twitter account (twitter.com/nalc_national) were retweeted countless times by our Twitter followers. Meanwhile, the official food drive poster artwork prepared by “Family Circus” cartoonist Jeff Kean went “viral” after it was posted to our Facebook page (facebook.com/nalc.national) on April 30—thanks to a ripple effect of “shares,” nearly 400,000 people wound up seeing the image.

A drive that delivers

Last year, letter carriers picked up and distributed more than 70 million pounds of food, bringing the 20-year total to more than 1.2 billion pounds. And with generally good weather across the country on May 11 (save for some occasionally heavy showers across the Eastern and Gulf coasts), hopes were high that customer generosity, coupled with a slowly recovering economy, might translate into another good performance.

“Finding out how much we collected this year certainly is an important way to measure our success,” President Rolando said. “But doing our best to feed as many of our hungry customers as possible, to sustain them through the summer months and hopefully beyond—that’s our true goal.”

Note: This year’s drive took place before this magazine went to press, and branch collection results were due at NALC Headquarters by May 24—after press time. Next month’s *Postal Record* will contain a full report on this year’s drive, with total branch-by-branch results and dozens of photos. **PR**

