

Legacies



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Benjamin Franklin once said, “If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead, either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.”

I’ve actually been thinking a lot about legacies this summer. In August, NALC was proud to participate in commemorating the 50th anniversary of the historic 1963 March on Washington. The building was host to branch members who traveled to DC to participate in a rally on Saturday, Aug. 24.

Then on Monday, Aug. 26, the NALC hosted a reception with author and playwright Calvin A. Ramsey on the history and the importance of the Green Book—a creation of letter carrier Victor H. Green to assist African-American travelers during the era of Jim Crow.

Last month’s *Postal Record* featured a story about Victor Green. Ramsey wrote a play, *The Green Book*, and a children’s book, *Ruth and the Green Book*, to help teach the importance of Green’s work.

Then on Wednesday, Aug. 28, the commemorative March on Washington actually passed directly in front of NALC Headquarters as employees greeted and cheered the crowd as it went by. Many of the marchers stopped to take pictures of our “welcoming committee.”

Later that day, I managed to catch on television President Obama giving his speech just a few blocks away from our building at the Lincoln Memorial. As I stood there listening, all I could think of was how I wished I could go back in time to slip a note into Dr. Martin Luther King’s suit pocket. I wanted to tell him that his “I Have a Dream” speech would be honored in 50 years by the first African-American president of the United States. He deserved to know.

Victor Green wrote something worth reading. Dr. King did something worth writing.

In 1970, letter carriers also did something. They walked away from their routes to protest decades of low letter carrier wages and poor working conditions. They did it even though they faced the possibility of losing their jobs. They did it even though they faced the possibility of going to jail.

Their actions were brave, and they changed history. But the legacy of these letter carriers is not confined to that week when the nation’s mail service stood still. That moment was just the beginning of their true legacy because, with it, they set a course for what a letter carrier is today.

Letter carriers are the most trusted federal employees. This does not happen by accident; it is a distinction that

is earned over and over again each and every day on the job. It is the product of a good, middle-class wage with the promise of retirement—the very reason turnover is low and trust is high.

Letter carriers go above and beyond the job each and every day as guardians of our customers and our neighborhoods. We run into burning buildings, rescue victims of accidents, thwart crimes, watch over the elderly, help lost children and save lives. Why? Because we wear the uniform and we live by a code—a code that was taught to us by our fellow carriers, our mentors and our retirees. I don’t know about you, but I didn’t learn how to be a letter carrier from a USPS manual. Someone taught me what it meant to be a letter carrier. And it’s my job—and yours—to pay it forward.

What those carriers did in 1970 was the beginning of a legacy that still lives today. But what some members of Congress are trying to do right now is erase it all.

In the Senate, S. 1486, introduced by Sens. Tom Carper (D-DE) and Tom Coburn (R-OK), would allow the Postal Service to reduce mail delivery to five or fewer days within one year, threaten the privacy of American mailboxes and open the door to deregulation and the loss of universal service, end door-to-door service to all U.S. businesses and phase out home delivery to tens of millions of Americans, promotes a two-tier workforce by subjecting federal pension and health care benefits to negotiation and arbitration while assisting the Postal Service in its efforts to leave the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, fails to adequately address pre-funding—the main cause of the postal financial crisis—and, as a final kicker, unfairly treats federal workers who are injured on the job.

In the House, H.R. 2748, introduced by Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), also would slash service to Americans, eliminate 100,000 jobs, interfere with collective bargaining and actually make the pre-funding obligation worse than it is today.

These disastrous bills must be defeated. Each and every one of us must get involved. What if only a handful of carriers had walked out that door in 1970?

Those carriers in 1970 were willing to risk their jobs and their freedom for you. Is it really asking too much to sign up as an e-Activist, write a letter to your member of Congress or give to COLCPE?

Those carriers—many of them now our retirees—created a legacy. You and I have only kept it alive. Don’t let our enemies destroy it. Don’t let that note slipped into their suit pockets say that it was all for nothing.

Do something worth reading. Do something worth writing.