

# A day in the life



**Jim Williams**

**“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”**  
—character Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

With apologies to the Beatles, NALC members experienced a day in the life of 21 children and young adults last month in Apopka, FL, when we attended a camp for kids with muscular dystrophies. We took the opportunity to, in a small way, climb into their skin. These campers shared their lives with us while they enjoyed the outdoors.

The Muscular Dystrophy Association sponsors more than 90 camps every summer across the country to provide an opportunity for kids to spend a week experiencing an environment that many of us with healthy children take for granted. These camps are fully staffed by medical personnel, and each child is assigned his or her own counselor who helps with everyday needs for the whole week. This type of care allows parents who are caretakers to have a week off as well, without undue worry, and to recharge their emotional and physical batteries.

NALC was well represented at the Sponsor Day. Each camp designates a day where sponsors can show up and spend time at camp with the kids. On Wednesday, President Rolando, Assistant to the President for Community Services and Membership Outreach Pam Donato, and nu-



NALC President Fredric Rolando visits with a participant at an MDA camp in Apopka, FL, on Sponsor Day.

merous NALC branch members showed up to take part in art projects done by the campers. The results of the art work will be sent to MDA headquarters to produce an art piece that will be representative of letter carriers. That piece of art will hang in MDA headquarters and represent the NALC.

Included in the group of branch members were those from local branches who attend this MDA camp almost every year. In addition, representatives of the branches who were category winners in 2012 were there.

The most amazing part of the day, though, was spending time with the kids and counselors. The positive outlook displayed by the campers, in the face of their physical difficulties, caused us all to appreciate them and their outlook on life.

We also met many young people who had set aside a week of their lives to be counselors for the MDA kids. I spoke to one young man who was spending his third year as a counselor. He shared that he found great satisfaction in helping these kids get one week a year where they could be a regular kid instead of feeling like they were different. They spent time with others who were going through the same struggles and challenges. The kids do not feel so alone.

All in all, everyone who attended walked away with a greater appreciation for the work MDA does in the hearts and lives of those with MD. If you get the chance, make the time to attend an MDA camp and experience the joy of spending a day in their lives.

## A friend passes

**I had the honor of attending a memorial service recently for a dear friend who passed away unexpectedly.** Tom Gates, president of Branch 916 in Eugene, OR, died peacefully in his sleep. Tom was a tough guy who loved this union with a whole heart. As an RAA and national business agent in Region 2, I had a unique opportunity to know Tom Gates. He cared deeply for people and was a mentor to many. At the memorial service, it became clear that his investment in others had resulted in a better NALC. Tom worked with former Director of Safety and Health Al Ferranto initially on the national Safety Task Force and with every director since Al retired.

As director of education for the Oregon State Association, Tom was tireless in his desire to see letter carriers learn about their jobs and develop the skills necessary to defend themselves and others.

I know I will miss him, and our sympathies go out to his wife, Jan, who supported him fully through his years of service.