

CONNECTING@BRANCHWEBSITES

With the NALC's brand new website (nalc.org) up and running, it's a good time to look at how some branches have created useful, attractive sites on the World Wide Web and at how these sites connect carriers to their branches.

"You can't bury your head in the sand," Massachusetts Northeast Merged Branch 25 President **Dave Barbuzzi** said. With many people carrying a smartphone in their pocket all day, letter carriers expect some kind of web presence at the branch level as well as from Headquarters; and for busy branches, a website is essential for getting news, forms and documents to members. "There's no time on the

aware of the problems, concerns and interests of fellow carriers," he said. "I try to incorporate any information that may be relevant to our work environment."

Barbuzzi said the branch tries to put as much useful information on the site as possible. With just one or two clicks, Branch 25 carriers and stewards can find many of the most common documents, handbooks and forms they need—from the National Agreement to the *Joint Contract Administration Manual (JCAM)* to route inspection manuals to pay charts. (He is careful not to post sensitive documents that shouldn't be public.)

its website this year. "We somewhat redesigned the website, cleaning up the interface and using widgets on some of the pages to get more information on a page rather than members having to search through multiple pages to find things," **Jeff Lee**, the branch's first vice president, said.

Branch 1100 first launched its website (nalcbranch1100.org) in 2008. The site won second place in the 2014 branch publication contest for websites.

"I knew absolutely nothing about building websites," Lee said, but was the most knowledgeable about computers among the branch officers, so the job fell to him. "I have always been known as the tech guy around the branch office. A local community college was teaching Adobe Dreamweaver classes, so the branch enrolled me in community college.

"We don't have every possible handbook and manual on the site; however, we try to have whatever is necessary to connect with the current needs of the membership," Lee said. "Often members call about the Family and Medical Leave Act form and our locally developed special route inspection request forms. We direct the members to our website if they have access to a computer. Our shop stewards constantly access the website to do research and download local branch forms."

Lee wants to improve the site even more by creating a mobile version for carriers out on their routes. For instance, he said, "If a letter carrier sustains an on-the-job injury, they could look right to their phone and know what their rights are or how to handle a dispute with their supervisor."

Launching or redesigning a website is just the beginning, he added—regular updates are essential. "Keep the

The screenshot shows the website for the Massachusetts Northeast Merged Branch 25 of the National Association of Letter Carriers. The page features a blue header with the branch name and logo. A navigation menu on the left includes links for Home Page, Branch Officers, Branch 25 Photos, Branch Contact Info, Carriers' Page, Stewards' Page, NALC Website, NALC Health Benefit Plan, COLCPE: Contribute, Join E-Activist, E-Activist Archive, Contact Your Senator, Contact Your Congressman, and Useful Links. The main content area displays a calendar for November 2014, with the 14th highlighted. Below the calendar are two news articles: one about a USPS cyber-intrusion and another about a national day of action for postal unions. The footer includes a copyright notice for 2014.

workroom floor anymore" to distribute information any other way, Barbuzzi said.

The site, nalcbranch25.com, won third place in NALC's 2014 branch publication contest for websites. Winners were recognized at the national convention in Philadelphia in July.

Branch 25 went online in 2012, and the site's webmaster, **Mike Shields**, upgraded the look and content recently. "Being a city carrier for the past 15 years, I am well

"We try to make it not too cluttered, and not more than a click away for the information," Barbuzzi said.

Shields shared some advice for maintaining a branch website: "On making a website—never stop educating yourself on the tools and technology of web design," he said. "On maintaining a site—stay on top of it; stay on top of it; stay on top of it!"

Like Branch 25 and Headquarters, Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 overhauled

The home pages for nalcbranch25.com (opposite page), nalcbranch1100.org (above) and nalc916.com (below).

information relevant and current. I have seen so many branches launch a website with the best of intentions, and after a short time the information is outdated and stale.”

Though he runs the site on his own, Lee said his design process looks to the future: “I try to make everything simple enough so someone can take over in case something happens where I am unable to maintain the site.”

As with Lee, Eugene, OR Branch 916 webmaster **Ricky Horton** fell into his role because of his technical knowledge.

“I have never taken a web design class or anything like that,” he said. “I learned to write HTML [web] code years ago on my own. I built my first website for a group of online gaming friends back in the ‘90s.”

Horton finds time to maintain his branch’s site (nalc916.com) while also serving as branch president and president of the Oregon State Association. He launched the site a decade ago; this year, it won first place in the 2014 branch publication contest for websites.

“When I first built the site, I got a lot of input from the membership with a survey I conducted,” he said. He uses input from members to improve the site, but not every suggestion: “Every once in a while, someone will ask if I can put or change something on the site. I always think about how much time it will take to do what they ask and if anyone else would be interested in it.”

Branch members rely on his site for news, documents, updates for upcoming events, and photos, he said, adding, “They love the photo section. People like seeing themselves on the web, even if it’s only at a branch picnic.”

Horton has more improvements in store: “I am always trying to make the site more user-friendly.” He has added to the site new ways to contact officers and stewards. “I also made it so the site can be viewed with a smartphone, and the user can call the phone numbers listed just by clicking on the phone number,” he said.

Horton offered suggestions to branch webmasters for creating an award-winning website: “Take your time and learn how to use the code to your advantage. If you can afford the cost and the time, take a class on basic website design.

“Keep the site simple and easy to use. Don’t have outside advertisements on your site, such as Google ads, etc. People get bombarded with ads everywhere else on the web; there is no need for it on a branch site,” Horton said.

Above all, webmasters should remember their audience, he said. “Make the site for the members, not just you—listen to their input. Put links on it that matter—links that your rank-and-file carrier would go to the site in search of. And try not to mirror the nalc.org site too much. Keep the information on the site branch-oriented, info that matters to your members.” **PR**