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 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 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.)

“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!”

Launching or redesigning a website is just the beginning, he added—regular updates are essential. “Keep the
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 I have seen so many branches launch a website with the best of intentions, and after a short time the information is outdated and stale.”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. “I learned how to use the code to your advantage. If you can afford the cost and the time, take a class on basic website design. 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.”

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.

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