

Inside Headquarters Regional offices

The *Postal Record* occasionally brings you articles about the letter carriers and staff members who work for you at NALC Headquarters in Washington, DC. This month, we focus on the people who work hard to serve letter carriers all across the country in the NALC's 15 regional offices.

NALC's national administration is grouped into 15 regions, each directed by an elected national business agent (NBA). Every region also employs at least two regional administrative assistants (RAAs), and many regions also rely on letter carriers working part-time or as volunteers to pitch in. Each employs a full-time secretary who helps members or directs their calls to someone who can help and keeps the office running smoothly. Acting under the national president's direction, NBAs have extensive authority over union affairs in their regions and are members

of the NALC Executive Council. Each NBA's primary responsibility is contract administration—handling grievances, presenting at arbitrations and dealing with regional postal management. They also provide skilled services to the field by responding to branch officers' requests for advice and assistance.

"As a representative for working people, an NBA's job is about more than just paperwork or meeting with managers," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "NBAs often become closely involved in the joys and frustrations of letter carriers, whether on the job or at home with family."

"You have to have a heart to do this job," Region 5 NBA Danny Pittman said. "We take calls every day from letter carriers about everything under the sun."

Pittman, a U.S. Army veteran who served in Vietnam before joining the Postal Service in 1978, said his job comes with emotional highs and lows. On one hand, he can share the happiness when NALC succeeds in defending a member against job loss or unfair discipline. "The best part of the job is listening to the members, helping and seeing results. That kind of pulls at your heart," he said.

The flipside, though, is sharing bad news or even dealing with tragedy. Pittman still vividly remembers his emotional



talk with the widow of a carrier who died of heat-related stress in his region last summer in his region.

In Pittman's office in St. Louis, which serves Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska and Missouri, and in the other 14 regional offices, the NBAs, RAAs and regional staff members work for you—and they work hard.

Region 1 NBA Christopher Jackson puts in 10 to 12 hours each day, plus Saturdays, to meet the needs of his large region—California, Guam, Hawaii and Nevada. “We handle 100 cases a month just going into arbitration, and get calls left and right from the membership about the contract,” Jackson, a Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member, said.

“At any given moment on any day, we're handling so many individual issues at one time that union members visiting our office have said they were completely shocked,” said Region 13 NBA Timothy Dowdy, whose region covers Delaware; Maryland; Virginia; Washington, DC, and West Virginia. Dowdy started his career as a carrier in Virginia Beach, VA, in 1977. “In the month of January, for example, there was only one day—a single Sunday—when I was not working or traveling.” But the satisfaction he gets from the job, Dowdy said, outweighs the difficulties.

Regional offices do “countless individual things” for members, Dowdy said, which fall mostly into two categories: helping local officers and stewards with information, coaching and training, and communicating directly with carriers to help them with their problems.

With large territories to cover, NBAs and RAAs spend a good chunk of their time on the road. “Travel is a killer,” Region 2 NBA Paul Price said. Price's region includes five Northwestern states plus Alaska. Being a letter carrier, though, he makes do. “Weather can be very problematic, but our regional office has never closed because of weather. I have walked a few miles in the ice after the car got stuck,” he said.



Price, who works from the regional office in Vancouver, WA, followed in the footsteps of his father, who was a steward and officer for Portland, OR Branch 82 and worked for a time in the same station as his son. “Being an NBA is like being a cross between police precinct commander, teacher and psychologist,” Price said, “not to mention an airline pilot who waits at the airport so he can sit in packed airplanes and stay in different hotels each night.”

The travel and hours are required because of the broad responsibilities of the regional offices and the need to help carriers one at a time. With the help of two RAAs and a secretary, Region 7 NBA Chris Wittenburg said, his office serves 250 branches in four states and still manages to offer personal service. “The Region 7 office handles and administers many responsibilities; chief among them are training, arbitration, grievance handling and representing the membership at the USPS district and area levels,” he said. Wittenburg hails from St. Paul, MN Branch 28 and works from the regional office in Minneapolis. “While we are stretched at times, based on the responsibilities, we are always available to assist the NALC membership in whatever way possible.”

“The typical day or week in an NBA office is extremely busy and hectic,” Region 6 NBA Patrick Carroll said. Though he receives a large number of daily phone calls, he said, “I make it a policy that every call that comes in should be answered that same day.” Carroll has served since 2005 representing the Kentucky-Indiana-



Pictured are Region 5 NBA Danny Pittman's office (above) and Region 15 NBA Larry Cirelli's office (opposite page).

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Michigan (“K-I-M”) region, following a long career as an activist in South Macomb, MI Branch 4374.

Despite all the effort the regional offices put into serving carriers, they can’t fix every problem in the Postal Service on their own. “The worst part of my job is dealing with carriers who, because of USPS staffing shortages, are forced to work overtime, missing their family events, and I cannot give them an immediate fix to that problem,” Carroll said. “The USPS, because of its staffing shortages, has taken the human element out of the Postal Service with the continual mandating of overtime.

“The rank-and-file letter carrier should know that they can call our office and their needs will be taken care of,” he added. “There are some things that we cannot fix contractually, but every member will get a 100-percent effort by our team to assist them in their needs.”

Ultimately, NBAs do what other union representatives do, just on a larger scale, Region 9 NBA Judy Willoughby said. “An NBA is just a union rep,” she said. “The title doesn’t matter that much to me.” Willoughby is an Army veteran who started carrying mail in 1980; her region covers Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.

The typical NBA or RAA started his or her union activism career after either encountering difficulties in the workplace or seeing other carriers who encountered them, and then signing up as a steward or running for a branch office to help.

“I hate bullies,” Region 15 NBA Larry Cirelli said. “I grew up reading Superman, Batman and other hero comics. My first week in the Postal Service as a carrier, I saw a supervisor yelling at a carrier who couldn’t defend himself. I got involved and have been doing the same ever since.” Region 15 serves carriers in

the New York City metropolitan area, eastern Connecticut and northern New Jersey, as well as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Cirelli came up the ranks from New Jersey Merged Branch 38.

“I started in a hell-hole of a station where no one wanted to go; you were stuck there until you got seniority. Men and women cried on the workroom floor on a daily basis,” recalled Price. “It pissed me off, and 30 years later I’m still pissed off.”

The influx of new carriers, many with little or no knowledge of their rights, is bringing new challenges to regional offices. For instance, the unusually large amounts of snow and ice that have hit the southern states that make up Region 8—Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee—this winter led to many calls from city carrier assistants (CCAs) about how to handle a situation where they can’t make it to work or have trouble delivering the mail due to weather—and what to do if their pay is docked or they are disciplined for it. “CCAs haven’t dealt with a lot of this stuff,” said Region 8 NBA Pete Moss, a former president of Gulf Coast Merged Branch 1374 who helped carriers in the region deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Of course, regional offices in northern climates have dealt with unusually bad weather and temperatures, too, such as the cold snap in Illinois, the lone state in Region 3 served by NBA Neal Tisdale, who has been a letter carrier and NALC activist in the state since 1978. Aside from the weather, Region 3 is working to settle some of the 550 or so grievances waiting for arbitration there in order to speed their resolution, and pushing for promotion of CCAs to career status.

Converting CCAs is also a top priority for Region 14 (western Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Maine,

New Hampshire and Vermont) which is headed by NBA John J. Casciano, who has served his region as NBA since 1998 and carried mail since 1982. The regional staff members are also busy with route inspection training throughout New England.

Regional offices take many calls from carriers and are happy to help with problems, but sometimes they have to refer a carrier to a steward or branch officer to start the process properly. For instance, a grievance starts with a local steward.

“The NALC’s structure starts locally with shop stewards and branch officers and president. The regional office interacts with the USPS at the district and area levels as well as the local and branch levels of the NALC,” Region 11 NBA Daniel E. Toth said. On the other hand, “the average carrier should know that the regional office is available to them at any time. Members have the ability to speak directly to their national business agent or a member of his or her staff to discuss their issues.” Toth is a former president of Lorain, OH Branch 583 and also served as director of education for the Ohio State Association. His region serves carriers in upstate New York and Ohio.

Region 12 NBA William Lucini agreed. “The member should let their steward or branch president know” about a problem, but regional office staff are ready and willing to listen and set them on the right path. “Our job is to help them any way we can,” he said, adding that this help may involve regional offices assisting branches in dealing with problems. Lucini, who serves carriers in Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey from his Philadelphia office, is a Navy veteran with more than three decades of experience as an NALC activist.

In some cases, a call to both the branch and regional office is a good idea. For instance, a carrier injured on the job might

At right are all of the full-time employees who work at the NBA regional offices throughout the country.

seek immediate advice from the regional office, since many branches have less experience helping a carrier with a workers' compensation claim, Willoughby said. "We can make sure they go on the right path."

As with the tragedy of the carrier who died of heat-related stress in Pittman's region, regional staff members sometimes confront life-or-death issues. In Region 2, Price recalls his region's response to incidents of violence at postal facilities in the 1990s, winning an arbitration that led to a joint statement on violence in the workplace similar to the one at the national level that was won a year later. "We pushed the envelope beyond any imaginable expectations," he said, "and that's what we're most proud of."

Then there are the incidents that are just plain strange. "In Fairbanks, Alaska," Price said, "the tires on the postal rigs got so cold they broke. Not deflated, not leaked—they broke!" Price has also helped carriers who were assaulted by moose, and one who was bitten by a venomous spider.

"The most outrageous situation that I have encountered was a time when an exotic animal owner released dangerous animals—lions, tigers, bears, panthers—into a small community," Toth recalled. Nobody was hurt in the 2011 incident in Zanesville, OH, but most of the animals had to be killed in the interest of public safety. "The USPS suspended park-and-loop deliveries until authorities resolved the situation," he said.

Region 10 NBA Kathy Baldwin, a Texan from Beaumont, TX Branch 842, serves carriers in her home state and New Mexico. Several years ago, Baldwin found herself dealing with a station in Houston that had removed a third of its carriers for allegedly throwing away mail. After months of grievances and four arbitra-

tions, the charges were shown to be groundless and all the carriers got their jobs back with full back pay.

"It felt good to see them finally get their justice," she said.

"The most thrilling part of the job is the negotiations with a management counterpart to save someone's job," Cirelli said. "There is so much riding on it. You literally have someone's future in your hands."

And when they win, the satisfaction of helping others makes it worth the effort for a long time. Region 4 NBA Roger W. Bledsoe, an Oklahoma City, OK Branch 458 member whose region covers Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Oklahoma and Wyoming, recalls running into a carrier at a grocery store who was shopping with his family. Bledsoe had helped the carrier several years before. The carrier introduced Bledsoe to his wife and children as "the person who saved my job."

"The collapse in volume and revenue, excessing of employees, legislative strain, and restructure of the letter carrier craft have been very disruptive to the membership and have put an enormous amount of pressure on the NALC leadership," Wittenburg said. "The leadership has navigated the complexities of our challenges and we have weathered the storm with effective professionalism. The support and faith in the leadership by the rank-and-file members is what I'm most proud of."

"You have to sacrifice a lot of things, but it's rewarding in the end," Moss said. "If I had to do it again? Yeah, I'd do it again."

All NBAs spoke highly of the professional work of the RAAs, secretaries and volunteers who make NALC's efforts at the regional level possible. The full-time staff members at each regional office are listed at right. **PR**

Region 1

Christopher Jackson, NBA
James Henry, RAA
Brian Voigt, RAA
Bryant Almario, RAA
Sherry Basson, Secretary

Region 2

Paul Price, NBA
Coby Jones, RAA
Mike Wahlquist, RAA
Cathee Chamberlin, Secretary

Region 3

Neal Tisdale, NBA
Tony Hutson, RAA
Kenneth Miller, RAA
Shirley Jones, Secretary

Region 4

Roger W. Bledsoe, NBA
Dan Versluis, RAA
Ray Tillman, RAA
Bethany Ugartechea, Secretary

Region 5

Danny Pittman, NBA
J. Mark Sims, RAA
Mike Birkett, RAA
Cheryl Stout, Secretary

Region 6

Patrick C. Carroll, NBA
Jeff Fultz, RAA
Troy Clark, RAA
Iris LeMelle, Secretary

Region 7

Chris Wittenburg, NBA
Jason Karnopp, RAA
Troy Fredenburg, RAA
Kathy Spiess, Secretary

Region 8

Pete Moss, NBA
Monica L. Walker, RAA
Steve Lassan, RAA
Sandra Hall, Secretary

Region 9

Judy Willoughby, NBA
Paul Barner, RAA
Kenneth Gibbs, RAA
Jeff Siciunas, RAA
Bonnie Waesco, Secretary

Region 10

Kathy Baldwin, NBA
Javier Bemal, RAA
Ken Claxton, RAA
Genice Tully, Secretary

Region 11

Daniel E. Toth, NBA
Mark Camilli, RAA
Ron Adams, RAA
Darla Gerace, Secretary

Region 12

William J. Lucini, NBA
Dave Napadano, RAA
Ray McDonald, RAA
Fran Hojfo, Secretary

Region 13

Timothy W. Dowdy, NBA
Hugh McElroy, RAA
Vada Preston, RAA
Yvonne Stevens, Secretary

Region 14

John J. Casciano, NBA
Jerry Ugone, RAA
Rick DiCecca, RAA
Elaine Keigher, Secretary

Region 15

Larry Cirelli, NBA
Bruce Didriksen, RAA
Tom Matthews, RAA
Orlando Gonzalez, RAA
Phyllis Fox, Secretary