

It's 'crunch time' for the food drive

As this *Postal Record* reaches your mailbox, the 23rd annual Letter Carriers' "Stamp Out Hunger" Food Drive on Saturday, May 9, is just weeks away.

"Aside from Food Drive Day itself, this is possibly one of the busiest times of year for your branch's food drive coordinator," NALC President Fredric Rolando said.

And with coordinators continuing to check items off of their to-do lists in the run-up to May 9, Rolando said, look for them to begin to lean even more on their fellow letter carriers and volunteers for help in continuing to make the country's largest one-day food-collection effort a success.

"We're proud of the hard work we do each year to help feed our less fortunate, customers in need," the president said. "Now that we're in the home stretch, I hope all NALC members will step up and help out in any way they can."

Enthusiasm, commitment, support and communication are the keys to an effective food drive, and just as we have for more than two decades, letter carriers across the country will be called upon to do what we need to keep spirits up and energy flowing for what has become one of the most visible things we do as NALC members.

Last year's drive resulted in the collection of nearly 73 million pounds of non-perishable food left by customers' mailboxes. Thanks to that generosity, since the national drive began in 1992 letter carriers have picked up and delivered to local food banks more than 1.3 billion pounds of food.

Getting the word out

With the lack of a national food drive sponsor this year to help foot the bill for "save the date" food drive

postcards (see last month's *Postal Record*), there had been serious concerns that not every address in America would receive a reminder to once again set out sacks of food on the second Saturday in May.

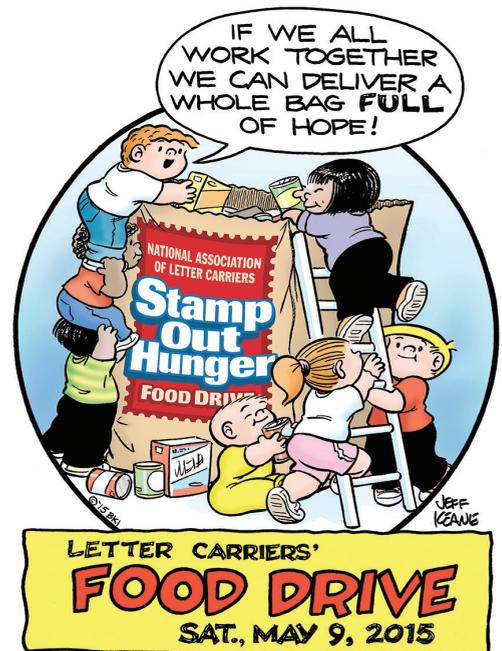
"We're not out of the woods yet in that regard," said NALC Community and Membership Outreach Coordinator Pam Donato, the national coordinator for the food drive. "Because of the efforts and leadership of so many, things are looking up for us there."

National food drive sponsor Feeding America spearheaded a successful campaign of seeking contributions from their affiliate foodbanks in communities across the country. Many NALC branches also had a measure of success in demonstrating the value of the food drive to garner some financial backing from the local chapters of another national sponsor, United Way Worldwide, as well as union labor bodies and the Salvation Army offices in their communities. (The U.S. Postal Service, the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association and the AFL-CIO are the drive's other national sponsors.)

A lot of NALC branches themselves dug deep and made generous contributions toward postcard production.

"These branches, as well as our charitable organization partners, understand the value of spreading word about the drive," Donato said, "and we're grateful that so many were willing to make an investment that could pay off in a big way on Food Drive Day—in the form of filled food pantry shelves.

"Fortunately, a charitable venture as prominent as our food drive is pretty easy to sell," Donato said.



Meanwhile, USPS continues to foot the bill for postcard postage by allowing them to be mailed under the special G-10 permit granted by new Postmaster General Megan Brennan.

Another proven medium for advertising the food drive is specially marked bags. Where such bags are distributed, letter carriers have seen dramatic increases in the amount of food collected over previous, bag-less years. But bags are much more expensive to produce than postcards, so it's almost always necessary for branches to solicit local grocery stores or other such organizations for sponsorships to help pay for them.

Visit nalc.org/food for tips on conducting a successful food drive, plus a host of resources including the coordinators' manual, support documents, graphics, solicitation videos and answers to frequently asked questions. Get in touch with Donato at 202-662-2489 or at donato@nalc.org if you need further help. **PR**