

Effort—and impact



Philip
Dine

When I discussed last month the “tour de force” that letter carriers recently had engaged in to influence the national conversation about the status of the U.S. Postal Service, I thought it would stand for a while as the model.

Turns out it was just a warmup.

As you’ll recall, we examined how President Rolando had dominated the response to the USPS quarterly financial report, helping set the tone for how it was reported to—and thus perceived by—the American public. That occurred because one journalist after another sought his reaction and his analysis. As a result, the news stories were replete with concepts such as operating profit, the pre-funding mandate and the need to strengthen

the now-profitable networks.

The stage for this type of reporting and interpretation had been set by the work that letter carriers at all levels of the NALC did in the weeks leading up to the financial report, getting the truth out about the Postal Service through print and broadcast media outlets, whether national, regional or local in scope.

A tough act to follow. But then you proceeded in recent weeks to surpass it, in both scope and impact—producing impressive results at a critical time. Just two examples: a branch president had letters to the editor published in four newspapers in his state in less than two weeks and a national business agent was interviewed at length on a popular radio talk show.

Let’s start with one key push. As communities across the country fought to retain their mail-processing plants, President Rolando engaged the residents and small-business owners, the civic leaders and elected officials, through op-ed pieces and letters to the editor that localized the struggles before nationalizing them.

These areas already are attuned to the issue, so his commentaries drew attention. And he put their local struggles in a broader context, which gave them hope because they realized they weren’t alone. It also increased their determination, because they understood that slowing the mail is part of a larger assault on their postal services that also involves Saturday and door delivery. Perhaps most important, it provided ammunition for their struggle, because rather than simply pleading to retain their facilities, they possessed facts and figures showing why service reductions aren’t necessary given the rising operating profits.

He did this via the *Toledo Blade*, *Florida Times-Union*, *Omaha World-Herald*, *Southeast Missourian*, *Kingman (AZ) Daily Miner*, *Lubbock (TX) Avalanche-Journal* and Federal News Radio, among

others. (He also was quoted prominently in a joint *Forbes* magazine/PBS website story on the new postmaster general.)

These efforts have transformed how countless communities see their particular fights—from “not in my backyard” competitions with rival towns over whose mail facility survives, to common cause with allies voicing a common battle cry: The services we receive aren’t causing the red ink; it’s Washington’s flawed policies. Scattered communities became part of a growing movement.

I won’t claim that this singlehandedly drove USPS’ surprise decision to retreat from its plan to consolidate dozens of processing plants nationwide—but I also won’t pretend that it played no role.

It’s important to note that President Rolando has made clear through subsequent commentary pieces that the battle is far from won—this was a temporary reprieve, plus the threats to Saturday and door delivery continue. The difference is that now these communities are armed with a compelling rationale moving forward.

No less impressive has been the work of letter carriers throughout the country. Among them: Carmel, IN Branch 888 President Ronnie Roush hit a grand slam with letters in four Hoosier newspapers, while Idaho State Association John Paige continued to help Gem State editors fill their editorial pages.

Region 4 NBA Roger Bledsoe informed listeners in Oklahoma City about the Postal Service on KTOK’s Gwin Faulconer-Lipper radio show, and NALC Director of Retired Members Ron Watson was quoted in the *Washington Post* after testifying before a House hearing on possible changes in workers’ compensation for federal employees.

Duluth, MN Branch 114 retired letter carriers Gaynelle Johnson and Arden Stabs co-wrote a letter to the editor for the *Duluth News Tribune*. Tuscaloosa, AL Branch 1096 letter carrier Eddie Pratt had a letter to the editor in the *Tuscaloosa News* expressing appreciation for those involved in the food drive; and the life-saving actions of Merced, CA Branch 1340 letter carrier Penny Guillory on her route were described by the *Merced Sun-Star*.

Because you’re not only delivering mail but also delivering a message, those who would degrade and slash and ultimately privatize a vital institution face a much-tougher landscape.

EDITORIAL STAFF:
Managing Editor Philip Dine
Designer/Web Editor Mike Shea
Internet Communications Coordinator
Joe Conway
Writer/Editor Rick Hodges
Editorial Assistant Jenessa Kildall

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