

Deepening our MDA relationship



Jim Williams

Last month, I joined with President Rolando and Community and Membership Outreach Coordinator Pam Donato in Chicago to meet with the staff and CEO of the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Steven M. Derks, who heads MDA, was with us all day, and we discussed many issues that needed clarification. It was also an opportunity to strategically plan for the foreseeable future.

In 1952, NALC became the first national sponsor of MDA. Since that time, we have kept our pledge to be with MDA until cures are found for the 43 diseases under the MDA umbrella. We mean to keep that commitment.

All the representatives from MDA took our visit seriously and stressed their goal of deepening our relationship as we go forward. Many ideas were discussed, and some of them will be rolling out over the coming months.

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The first I can announce now. One thing I have noticed over the years is that branches and letter carriers become aware of and support the vision of MDA when they personally know one of the families affected by muscular disease. We are kicking off a program we call “Branch Buddies,” which will assign an MDA family to the largest 50 branches that are currently involved with MDA. While we are in no way limiting this program to the top 50, we will start there and expand based on branch interest. That is, if you are not one of the initial 50, your branch can still participate by contacting your MDA coordinator.

So what does having a branch buddy look like? I am aware that branches have a monthly MDA report. What about having your branch buddy and their family show up at a branch meeting quarterly? If you have a branch picnic or other social event, invite the family and your MDA coordinator to attend. Certainly that would also include whatever fundraisers are planned during the year. We hope that by including a family impacted by muscular disease that those who are on the periphery would catch the vision we

have for MDA. The first 50 branches will be hearing from their MDA counterparts soon. Please consider actively pursuing this opportunity!

The second item we discussed was the internal decision of MDA to no longer produce and broadcast the MDA Labor Day telethon. After listening to Mr. Derks explain the reasoning, we were convinced it was the right thing to do. The following is a portion of that explanation:

In its heyday, the MDA telethon sparked an era of giving and volunteerism across America inspired by courageous MDA families who became household heroes. Compassion flowed. Celebrities brought star power. Firefighters, mail carriers and fraternal groups said, ‘yes’ to an invitation to partner. Corporations and their customers got engaged. Parents used the telethon to help teach their kids the importance of giving back.

Today, we reflect on this remarkable history and our mission as we again change and move forward. Specifically, we have announced we no longer will produce and broadcast the MDA Labor Day weekend telethon, our Show of Strength. And while many people may not know the telethon or have watched it in recent years, we want our longtime, loyal telethon supporters to know this is a decision we do not take lightly.

So while we may transition from the telethon, we will never depart from our life-changing work helping kids and adults from day one and by assisting families in hometowns across America. The infectious, familial, can-do spirit in our volunteers, families, staff and supporters inspires us to do more together. The same spirit of innovation that got the show started drives us today. Our imperative is to connect in fresh and meaningful ways with our current supporters and a new generation to help propel new discoveries.

As we make this transition, please know we are deeply grateful for your past support and leadership. And we humbly request your help in our ongoing fight to free kids and adults from the harm of debilitating muscle diseases—and someday free them of the diseases themselves.

Finally, let me announce that our data was wrong concerning one of our category winners in last month’s *Postal Record*. The Category 10 winner should have been Branch 580, Hammond, IN. It raised \$4,335.

The winners will be joining President Rolando at an MDA summer camp in Florida this month. I’ll be writing about that experience in a subsequent article.