

# The importance of community service



**Jim Williams**

**A**s I wind down my involvement as NALC's national liaison to the Muscular Dystrophy Association, I felt that it would be important to examine why we're involved as a union in community service. Or more importantly, why are some branches not involved with MDA, the NALC food drive or other efforts to benefit those less fortunate than we are?

I know we are all busy. The demands of life are always present in our lives. But one of the great things about a union is that by joining together, we can accomplish things we cannot do by ourselves. My experience is that a comparably small group of people does the majority of the work in our branches.

That truth seems to cut against the very nature of what a union should be.

When I talk to branch leaders about their branches' lack of involvement with MDA, it inevitably comes down to a couple of reasons. Either they've had a negative experience with an MDA representative, or they cannot find someone to head up their efforts.

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Branch officers and stewards are generally overworked. That is why it is vital that we get people involved who are not interested in the grievance procedure. They are out there if we look. The vast majority of branch members who are not helping in community service have great skills that could benefit those less fortunate. Are we keeping our eye on others who can help?

For those branches that involve themselves in community service, I've found that there are some similarities. I think it has a lot to do with the special qualities that letter carriers seem to innately demonstrate. Letter carriers respond to the members' needs time and time again. Why do we do it? What qualities do letter carriers have that set us apart?

**In my long career in the NALC, I've concluded that at least three qualities cause us to be distinctive.** First, we have a history that has been carried down from generation to generation. That shared history has given us a perspective different from many other groups of workers. In fact, we may take it for granted. Do you know the history of your union? Your branch leaders do. They understand the price that has been paid to give us what we have. More importantly, we know we've been through tough times before and prevailed. History has taught us to keep on keeping on. Our shared history is our strength.

Second, letter carriers care about their communities. Every day, we deliver to America in ways more profound than most workers can imagine. We see our neighbors' hurts, victories and changes. We see their needs more clearly because we're there. Every year, NALC honors those who have performed heroic deeds to help their neighbors. Inevitably, they say words like, "Anyone would have done what I did." The simple truth is that not everyone would have done what they did. Each month, *The Postal Record* writes about some of these deeds.

Another example is the NALC food drive. We stock the cupboards of America every May. We do it because we see the need.

Third, letter carriers are activists. What is an activist? The dictionary describes an activist as "a person who vigorously and sometimes aggressively pursues a political or social goal." When you read *The Postal Record*, you cannot help being impressed with the way letter carriers get involved. From political action to community service, we are active in all aspects of where we live and work. And most of the time, no one knows about those acts of service.

So how does all this fit in with our efforts for the Muscular Dystrophy Association? I'm glad you asked. At a time when our focus is so divided because the needs are so great, help me to keep MDA on the radar screen. We have a history with MDA. We committed to be there for these kids and adults until a cure is found. Together with MDA, we deliver help and hope to many. We have a shared history.

Letter carriers help because we care about the communities where we serve. I hope you have met a family dealing with the hurt and shock of muscular dystrophy. Then you will see how your support directly impacts those around you.

Finally, we work with MDA because letter carriers get the job done. We are activists in the truest sense. So, if your branch is not involved with MDA, will you consider doing at least something for these families? Start small and grow your involvement!