

The future is now with CCAs



Fredric V. Rolando

As a young-at-heart and reluctantly aging Baby Boomer, I've noticed something pretty amazing going on in the NALC. A flood of new young members has come into our union in recent years. I see them at union meetings and NALC functions all around the country, a welcome sight after years when the lack of any hiring failed to offset normal attrition and caused our bargaining unit to shrink.

The numbers back me up—tens of thousands of city carrier assistants have been hired in the past couple of years. Quite remarkably, there are now more than 31,000 letter carriers under the age of 35 in our union,

compared with fewer than 18,000 three years ago. In fact, the share of our active bargaining unit under the age of 40 is now about the same (27 percent) as the share of our city carrier workforce over the age of 55. Today, there are 10,000-plus more city carriers than there were three years ago.

As we head into next year's round of collective bargaining and as we prepare to mobilize for a crucial national election that will determine the long-term viability of the U.S. Postal Service, the injection of fresh blood into our union is a welcome development indeed. But it also poses challenges, since there is a flipside to these demographic trends: As young carriers come in, we are losing senior carriers and experienced union leaders to retirement.

There are thousands of shop steward positions and other branch officer slots to be filled. There are tens of thousands of new carriers to be organized and—more importantly—integrated into an actively engaged union membership. The labor relations and legislative challenges we face are more difficult than ever and the need for quality branch leaders and a well-trained, highly motivated army of activists is greater than ever.

Consider the next round of bargaining. About 25 percent of our membership has never been through a period of contract negotiations. Yet, thousands of young carriers already are reaping the benefits of such negotiations. More than 25,000 former CCAs have been converted to career status over the past two years. As a result, they already are benefiting from the gains we achieved through the past 40 years of collective bargaining.

As we enter the next round of contract negotiations in Feb-

ruary, the presence of some 30,000 CCAs in our bargaining unit means that, for the first time, we will be bargaining for a non-career workforce with a defined future in the Postal Service. That's because in 2012 we successfully extracted a pathway to career status from the interest arbitration process that simply did not exist for transitional employees (TEs) in the past. Thanks to that mitigating victory during the Das arbitration, non-career carriers now become career carriers, complete with general pay raises, regular step increases and cost-of-living adjustments, as well as full pension and health-care coverage under government-wide benefit programs.

And as we head into a general election year, nobody has more at stake in who controls Congress and who resides in the White House than do CCAs and young career city carriers. The very future of the Postal Service hangs in the balance. That future will depend on our ability to mobilize our members of all ages—and other working people in general—to elect political leaders who support a strong Postal Service and collective-bargaining rights for letter carriers and other postal employees.

So how we handle the ongoing generational transition going on within the Postal Service is critical. We have made great strides in lifting our organizing percentage among non-career carriers. CCAs are much better organized than TEs were five years ago. But we must do more. For that reason, I will be writing to branch leaders later this month to urge them to invest in the NALC's future by committing resources to send CCA and former-CCA activists to a national CCA conference early next year.

The conference will have two primary goals. First, we want to solicit input from the newest generation of letter carriers on our objectives in the next round of bargaining. Of course, as we seek to address inadequate pay, excessive work hours, high turnover and other problems unique to CCAs, we also will aim to reward *all* carriers for their contributions to the success of the Postal Service, and will continue our fight against subcontracting and other threats to city carrier living standards. Second, we want to provide training on the many ways CCAs can get involved in the NALC. There is a role for *everybody*, whatever their interests. In the years ahead, we will need new organizers, shop stewards, branch officers, legislative activists, MDA and food drive volunteers, and we will have countless other roles to fill.

My generation of letter carriers has proudly risen to the occasion to carry on the rich tradition of the NALC. We have many years of service ahead of us, but it is never too early to prepare for the future. And with the arrival of tens of thousands of CCAs, the future is now.