

From opinion to news



**Philip
Dine**

The nation's editorial page editors owe you, America's letter carriers, a debt of gratitude for helping them fill their pages with your letters and your commentary pieces, week after week.

Sounds reasonable, right?

Well, now I'll put on my old city editor's hat and mark that up in red, because it both misstates and understates what you've done.

Actually, the editorial pages would be full even had you never put pen to paper to inform the public about the real situation at the U.S. Postal Service. The truth is that there's no dearth of submissions of letters to the editor or of op-ed pieces. On the contrary, there's vig-

orous competition to get a letter or commentary in newspapers big and small, because residents, public officials, business leaders and others want to get their views out and influence others—and the editorial pages are among the most-read real estate in the paper.

So the way many of you have become occasional or even regular voices in explaining what people need to know about the Postal Service's finances, value and relevance moving forward is that much more impressive. It's no easy task to get published—even once, let alone multiple times as some of you have—and your batting average is exceptional.

And from the perspective of the editors of these pages, you're raising the quality of their work by addressing vital topics in well-argued pieces that resonate with their readers and that therefore help the newspapers—and magazines—carry out their journalistic missions.

I'm not surmising or assuming this; I know it to be the case because I hear regularly from editors about how compelling your submissions are and how you've helped them inform and connect with readers on a topic they care about. By the way, I hear that just as much from editors of conservative publications as of liberal ones.

We've focused heavily on the editorial and op-ed pages for several reasons. We can do so in our own voice, we control the message, and it's the place to respond to misleading coverage or to praise a newspaper for getting it right even as we fill in the rest of the story.

But this isn't the only place in the paper where we can influence the national discussion on postal issues.

The bulk of any newspaper consists not of opinions in the form of editorials, letters to the editor or commentary pieces but rather of news—national and international re-

ports, state and local stories, business stories, sports and feature stories.

NALC's interaction with news reporters largely has been on the national level, with the dozen or so postal beat reporters. When there's likely to be coverage of events—such as the Postal Service's quarterly and annual financial reports, congressional hearings or new legislation—we'll provide reporters with information beforehand to help them put things in context, and then our president or other national leaders will comment for their news stories.

On occasion, regional or local reporters call our Communications and Media Relations Department seeking to interview an NALC officer or a letter carrier in their community regarding whatever postal issue is in the news. Invariably you'll do so if asked—and do so well, whether it's a print, TV or radio outlet.

At this point, there's no reason we can't take some initiative in expanding our local and regional outreach to news reporters. What I envision here doesn't involve postal finances or legislation but rather the human aspect—a story about a letter carrier who's done something heroic on the route, a branch helping improve the community, a military veteran wearing his second uniform as he or she continues to serve the public.

This could complement your efforts to inform people about the overall status of the Postal Service—adding a new flavor to the coverage and helping localize and humanize the value of USPS and letter carriers.

Your suggestions should be vetted with branch or state officers, who should in most instances be the ones to approach a news outlet. And please consult with me as well, so we can discuss the merits of the possible story and the best way to interest the media.

Meanwhile, let's make even greater use of the editorial pages to inform the public of the big picture involving USPS.

For those of you who've been waiting to get involved, you now have two distinct ways to do so. I'll welcome your ideas!

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