

*"I wish I had known about this!"*

*"Why didn't you tell me it was coming?"*

# Loud and clear: Clear communication can lead to restocked food banks, pantries

**T**he Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger® Food Drive is held each year on the second Saturday in May. This year, that's Saturday, May 14.

But on Food Drive Day and the days that follow—if past drives serve as any indication—many of us likely will hear customers' comments similar to those above.

"So many of us put so much time and effort into the food drive each year that it's hard to understand how the people we see on our routes at least six days a week could not know about it," NALC President Fredric Rolando said.

But just think of how many things grab your own attention at any given moment, he said. Often, it's more than one thing at a time.

"That's why making sure we do what we can to spread the word about the food drive is so crucial to ensuring its success," Rolando said.

Thanks to backing this year from our new national food drive partner, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), every postal customer this year should receive a postcard in the mail that serves as a tangible food drive reminder. And courtesy of a generous grant again this year by another important national partner, the U.S. Postal Service, the postcards are sent postage-paid through the use of the special G-10 permit. (The other national partners are the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, United Way Worldwide, AFL-CIO, Valpak and Valassis.)

"The postcard is great," the president said, "but it's really just one

piece of our larger communication strategy." Working with local post offices to make sure the postcards are distributed in a timely manner also is crucial, he said.

If the situation presents itself, Rolando said, carriers should take advantage of that special one-on-one relationship we have with our customers to let them know about the drive.

"If you're handing a customer a

doesn't get a special food drive bag—at least not yet.

In the meantime, though, letter carriers can still count on traditional, tried-and-true marketing materials to help effectively get the word out about the food drive.

"The Frank Doolittle Company, for example, sells a wide range of food drive T-shirts, buttons, lapel pins, hats, signs and banners," NALC Director of

Community Services Pam Donato said. "With the permission of your local managers, work with your fellow employees—in the letter carrier craft and as well as the others—to get them to wear food drive gear on the day of the drive as well as in the days leading up to it.

"Also, ask your postmaster if you can tape food drive posters on walls or bulletin boards in the public areas of your office—maybe by the clerk windows or

out by the post office boxes," Donato said. "You might even be allowed to put a sign out in the front yard.

"And be on the lookout for businesses that allow notices to be placed in their windows or community boards," she said. "If folks see our official Family Circus cartoon there, it could really spark some interest in the drive." Also, if a local store's employees are represented by UFCW, she said, don't hesitate to take advantage of our two unions' partnership in the drive to get notices about the event placed on public-facing bulletin boards.

The food drive tool kit on [nalc.org](http://nalc.org) also contains a number of items you can download and print for yourself, including flyers in English and Spanish.

**Fill A Bag. Help Feed Families.**

**1. Collect and bag nonperishable\* food items**  
Coloque los alimentos no perecederos en una bolsa junto a su buzón de correo

**2. Place by mailbox for letter carrier to deliver to a local food bank or pantry**  
El cartero las entregará a un banco de alimentos local

\*Donate items like canned meats, fish, soup, juice, vegetables, pasta, cereal, peanut butter and rice. Please do not include items that have expired or are in glass containers.

**Saturday, May 14, 2016**

AFL-CIO valpak LIVE UNITED LOCAL 3400 PANTRIES Valassis

letter or package in person," he said, "something as simple saying, 'Don't forget the food drive is on Saturday,' could go a long way toward gaining the drive a place on that person's mental calendar."

## Everywhere, signs

Bags, of course, also contribute mightily to food drive success. Paper or plastic, if a postal customer receives a specially marked food drive bag in the mail or at the grocery store, it often can double or even triple that patron's donation.

But bags can be expensive, and it usually takes the generosity of a local or regional sponsor to help defray the costs. That's why every postal customer

An image from the food drive public service announcement featuring letter carriers, Edward James Olmos and members of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union.



## #StampOutHunger

Even as busy as people are these days, many still manage to carve out a chunk of time to interact with social media.

“We can get ‘em there, too,” Donato said.

For the last several years, the food drive has had an official presence on Facebook ([facebook.com/StampOutHunger](https://facebook.com/StampOutHunger)) and Twitter ([twitter.com/StampOutHunger](https://twitter.com/StampOutHunger)).

“More than 102,000 people have clicked ‘like’ on our Facebook page,” she said. “This year, we’ve created a Facebook event for the food drive. Those who RSVP for it should see a Facebook reminder pop up on their own pages several days before the drive itself.”

Plus, when you RSVP to a Facebook event, the site automatically notes on your personal page that you’ve done so—and depending on your Facebook settings, that means that all of your friends could see that you’re participating in the food drive, something that could inspire them to check out the drive for themselves.

The drive also plans once again to create an online “flash mob” through the Thunderclap website.

“A few weeks before the drive,” Donato said, “we’ll post invitations on our Facebook and Twitter accounts, asking followers to join the Thunderclap campaign.”

The day before the drive, those who signed on to the Thunderclap site will have a food drive reminder automatically posted on their behalf on their Facebook and/or Twitter accounts, with the hope that as people see these reminders, they’ll share or retweet them.

“The last time we used Thunderclap, in 2014,” Donato said, “online reminders wound up being delivered to more than 1.5 million social media users.”

New to our social media stable this year is an Instagram account, called StampOutHunger. A Bethesda, MD-based firm, Dogum Design, has volunteered to create a line of engaging, Instagram-ready images that will help promote the food drive in a sort of online countdown to Saturday, May 14.

“We’re hoping that customers and letter carriers alike will take full advantage of all the social media tools at their disposal to spread the word about the food drive,” Donato said.

## So say we all

One of the patrons on Van Nuys, CA Branch 2462 letter carrier Larry Dolabson’s route is acclaimed actor Edward James Olmos. For a number of years, Olmos has been a major booster of the Letter Carriers’ Food Drive, not only putting bags of food by his mailbox annually on the second Saturday in May but also appearing in local public service announcements ahead of the event to promote it. And he has always showed an interest in doing more to support the drive.

So this year, Dolabson and his wife, Janette, the president of Branch 2462, worked with NALC Headquarters to have Olmos become the food drive’s national celebrity spokesperson. A few months ago, the actor—accompanied by a number of NALC and UFCW members—recorded public service announcements (PSAs) that will soon be available for television and radio

stations to use as food drive promotional advertisements.

In the PSAs, Olmos explains to the audience how easy it is to help stamp out hunger. He recorded 30- and 60-second versions in English and Spanish. The videos will be posted at [nalc.org/food](https://nalc.org/food). While any broadcast station is free to download and use the announcements—and of course they are highly encouraged to do so—plans are underway to work with an outside firm to get the PSAs to run at specific times, free of charge, on targeted TV stations throughout the United States.

“Letter carriers are communicators,” President Rolando said. “Our job is to deliver messages—in envelopes or boxes—to every address in this country at least six days a week. I am confident that we will all do our very best to help ensure that every postal customer is fully aware that our annual food drive will take place once again this year on the second Saturday in May.”

For those customers who still might miss the message and the drive, Donato has some reassuring words: “In most cases, let those folks know that we’ll gladly accept a make-up bag of food set out by the mailbox on the following Monday, or they can take the food directly to their nearest post office or local food bank.”

Last year’s drive gathered 70.6 million pounds of food, bringing the grand total to more than 1.4 billion pounds since the annual national drive began in 1993. Questions? Need help? Contact your branch or regional food drive coordinator; the latest contact lists are posted at [nalc.org/food](https://nalc.org/food). **PR**