

Looking ahead at what 2016 holds in store for carriers

As 2015 comes to an end and 2016 begins, *The Postal Record* presents this look ahead to the challenges and opportunities that letter carriers will face in the new year.

"We will be busy in 2016," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Contract negotiations, a national convention and a presidential election are all just months away, and everyone, from the national officers to carriers just starting the job, will have many opportunities to help advance our cause."

Contract negotiations

The term of the 2011-2016 National Agreement between NALC and the Postal Service runs through May 20, so NALC will formally begin negotiations on a new contract soon—though work on a new agreement began right after the current contract was resolved by the arbitration panel. The current agreement was finalized through

binding arbitration by arbitrator Shyam Das and is often called the "Das

award." Arbitration, by law, is the final step if NALC and USPS fail to reach a deal through negotiations.

The current contract created a new category of employees, city carrier assistants, who have a path to career status. Following the Das award, NALC successfully negotiated a series of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) providing both a mechanism and timeline for conversion of CCAs to full-time career positions. To date, more than 30,000 CCAs have been converted to career status in accordance with the Das award and resulting MOUs.

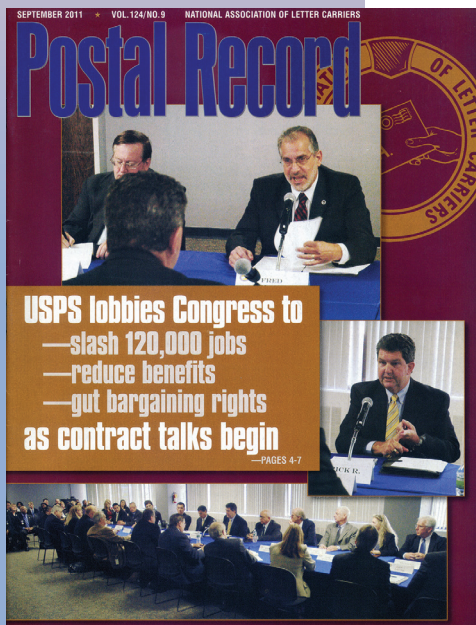
"NALC has been working tirelessly to improve the lot of CCAs since the Das award was handed down," President Rolando said, "and that effort will continue when we enter formal negotiations for a new national agreement this year."

As always, issues such as letter carriers' pay, benefits, work rules and safety will be on the table during negotiations.

Presidential election

The long process of choosing the next president of the United States will officially begin Feb. 1 with the Iowa caucuses and will culminate on Election Day, Nov. 8, when voters will cast ballots not only for president, but also for all 435 House members and 34 senators.

NALC sent detailed questionnaires about issues important to letter carriers



to every declared presidential candidate from both major parties last fall. The answers of those who responded appeared in the November 2015 issue of *The Postal Record*. That issue also contained a “reader poll” mail-in card for letter carriers to indicate which candidate they preferred and send it to NALC Headquarters. Based on the results of the mail-in survey, a scientific poll of NALC members, the quality of the candidates’ responses to our questionnaire and their electability, the Executive Council will discuss whether and when NALC should endorse a candidate.

“The outcome of elections matter so much to letter carriers, not only because Congress and the president hold sway over our collective-bargaining rights, but as employees of the federal government, we are directly susceptible to their policies,” Rolando said. “I strongly urge every letter carrier to get involved by supporting the Letter Carrier Political Fund, working in campaigns, and of course, registering to vote and getting to the polls for both the primaries and in November.”

Legislation

While most members of Congress will be busy running for re-election this year, they also will still consider legislation that could affect letter carriers. One of the leading bills is the Improving Postal Operations, Service and Transparency Act—“iPost”—introduced by Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE), ranking member of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs. Carper’s bill, S. 2051, includes many proposed changes to address lingering issues in postal operations and financing, including a partial solution to the pre-funding of future retiree health benefits that has distracted from

USPS’ financial success in recent years. The bill is far from perfect, but it is at least a starting point, Rolando said.

“NALC appreciates the tireless efforts of Sen. Carper and his staff to craft a bill that will advance the process of achieving much-needed postal reform,” the president said. “While Carper’s new bill contains several provisions we cannot support and raises a number of serious concerns for letter carriers and the larger federal employee community, we believe it is a good place to begin the conversation about how to preserve and strengthen the Postal Service for the American people while protecting the legitimate interests of all the key stakeholders.”

See the October 2015 issue of *The Postal Record* for a detailed analysis of Carper’s bill.

The larger question is whether Congress will manage to function at all this year. Even without the specter of elections, Congress has struggled to perform even its most vital functions, like keeping the government running, so it may not get around to considering a postal bill by year’s end. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) is likely to face the task of corralling restless, and often rebellious, Republican members.

“Sometimes the chaos in Congress ends up serving us well, since passing no bill is often better than passing a bad one,” Rolando said. “As in the past, NALC and our sister unions and allies are working to assure that any legislation relating to federal employees, collective bargaining or the Postal Service that manages to reach the president’s desk will make the Postal Service more prosperous and our lives better.”



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National convention

Thousands of letter carrier delegates from branches in every state, the District of Columbia and the territories will gather at the Los Angeles Convention Center Aug. 15-19 for NALC's 70th biennial convention.

The convention is the supreme governing body of the union, and delegates in L.A. will consider and vote on resolutions and amendments to the *NALC Constitution*. Delegates also will likely discuss the elections and contract negotiations. Many also will attend a host of training sessions and seminars on a wealth of subjects offered each day before and after delegates convene in general session.

Look for information about the convention in upcoming issues of *The Postal Record*.

Letter carrier training

The NALC is dedicated to giving union activist letter carriers the tools they need to succeed through training, and that commitment will continue this year. A wide variety of training is planned for 2016. Here are some of the opportunities available to members.

Since 2005, NALC's Leadership Academy has brought together letter carriers representing each NALC region for comprehensive instruction in leadership skills to develop the next generation of union leaders.

Later this year, Class 21 will assemble at the Maritime Center near Baltimore for three one-week sessions. The 30 attendees—two from each

region—will develop their skills in areas such as organizing, union administration, public speaking, writing and the National Agreement. Between sessions, they will work on take-home projects with the help of letter carrier mentors from their regions.

NALC will hold its first-ever national city carrier assistant (CCA) conference this month in St. Louis. At the conference, CCAs will learn more about the letter carrier job, their rights and benefits as CCAs, the transition involved in becoming career letter carriers, as well as NALC history and opportunities within the union.

"This conference affords branches an opportunity to invest in our newest generation of NALC members, who will provide their perspective on a variety of NALC issues," Rolando said.

NALC Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine and Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Judy Willoughby will hold expanded branch officer trainings. This training goes beyond the secretary-treasurer educational seminars that NALC has conducted for many years. The three-and-a-half-day sessions are tailored to assist branch secretary-treasurers and other branch (and state) officers who are chiefly responsible for financial administration. Special sessions for branch presidents, vice presidents, recording secretaries, financial secretaries and trustees have been added.

The new training includes sessions on the *NALC Constitution* and branch bylaws, internal controls, ethics, fraud prevention and detection, Department of Labor and LMRDA reporting, running a branch meeting, preparing LM forms and 990s, auditing branch records, managing branch finances, member notification requirements, fiduciary issues and practices, record

keeping, branch elections and legal issues. The first training this year will be held this month in Las Vegas. Additional sessions will be announced later this year.

NALC activists who have some experience in enforcing the National Agreement through Formal Step A grievances will sharpen their skills at “Advanced Formal A and Beyond” training. The program will teach participants to look at every Formal Step A case file from an arbitration advocate’s point of view and show them what it is like to serve as a Step B representative, including mock arbitration hearings.

The first session is scheduled for this month, with two more scheduled for Sept. 18-23 and Oct. 16-21. Applications for the fall sessions are still open; to apply, fill out and mail the form at nalc.org: Select the “Contract Administration Unit” link under the “Workplace Issues” tab.

Public service

Building on our tradition of public service, letter carriers will continue their support for the communities we serve through NALC’s community service programs.

“Letter carriers continue to show how important we are to the communities we serve,” Rolando said. “I’m so proud of the engagement and dedication that so many of us show every year all over the country.”

Hunger affects about 49 million people around the country, including millions of children, senior citizens and military veterans. Far too many people remain unemployed or underemployed and need food assistance, and so pantry shelves filled up through winter-holiday generosity often are bare by late spring. And with most school meal

programs suspended during summer months, millions of children must find alternate sources of nutrition.

That’s why we will once again hold the nation’s largest one-day food drive on the second Saturday in May (May 14), with a goal of exceeding last year’s total collection of almost 71 million pounds of food. This year’s Letter Carriers’ Food Drive will mark the 24th year that NALC and its partners will collect food to restock the nation’s food banks, pantries and shelters—more than 1.4 billion pounds of food so far.

Throughout 2016, branches will sponsor a host of events to support the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the union’s only official charity, including bowlathons and fill-the-satchel efforts. As always, branch MDA coordinators and volunteers will conceive of many creative fundraising events and organize them to boost support for MDA even higher.

The Postal Record will continue to bring readers stories about everyday letter carriers heroes who save lives, look out for children and the elderly, and are the eyes and ears of communities across our country. In recognition of all the heroic ways letter carriers serve their communities, NALC will honor the most amazing letter carriers as part of its Heroes of the Year ceremony this fall.

“We have so much in store this year, and we’ve tried to prepare for every challenge coming our way,” Rolando said. “But there are always unanticipated problems, and overcoming those will require dedication and unity on the part of every NALC member.” **PR**

