

# A trio of tasks



**Philip  
Dine**

**F**or whatever reason, journalists tend to deal with things in threes. A reporter gives his city editor a story about waste in local government that includes two examples, he'll be told to add another one. If the story has four examples, he'll be instructed to delete one.

Perhaps it's my journalistic training, but as I see it there are three things we need to emphasize as we get our message out between now and November's election.

One is continued vigilance. While journalists are doing better in presenting an objective picture of the U.S. Postal Service, the need for us to remain vigilant never has been greater.

That's because outside commentators and pundits with an anti-government bent, frustrated by their inability to destroy the Postal Service, have become more aggressive, and because as more journalists write about USPS, inevitably they'll make mistakes.

It's also because the stakes are so high. Politicians running for office are heavy consumers of the news, as are politically engaged citizens who'll be voting—and we need to make sure that what they read, watch and hear from media outlets is accurate.

A good example: *Money* magazine recently had an online story that gratuitously disparaged USPS and its employees. In an article taking aim at the cable industry for bad customer service, the magazine gave examples of three (!) other industries it said also were known for treating customers badly.

*"The pay TV industry is awash in companies renowned for awful customer service, ranking on consumer satisfaction surveys right up there—or rather, down there—with airlines, health insurers, and the Postal Service."*

An attentive Bob Douglas, an Illinois retiree from Campaign-Urbana who carried mail for 37 years, quickly informed us. As a result, we were able to tell a *Money* editor that not only do multiple public surveys show that USPS is viewed highly favorably, and not only do letter carriers take their jobs and their other contributions—saving lives, running the just-completed food drive—seriously, the very survey *Money* cited didn't back up the article's contention. The editor removed the reference to the Postal Service, substituting local utility companies; another editor instructed staffers to be more careful.

When you alert us in real time to misleading reports, it makes a difference. Nipping errors in the bud limits the public damage while educating the media outlet, which helps with future coverage.

**The second task involves getting news outlets to do feature stories about letter carriers.**

From the media's perspective, there are two types of news—hard news and features. The first involves events—a traffic accident, jobs report or political speech—that must be reported as they occur and often are boring, but that readers or viewers need to know about. The second is more optional—an interview with a local author, a story on someone's good deeds in the community—and runs when space or time permit.

At a daily news meeting, an editor or producer, having gone through the log of mandatory reports (dubbed "broccoli" in that they're necessary but rarely enjoyable), will ask whether anyone has a "dessert" to offer up—an enjoyable feature.

We can help fill that need. Results from the 24th annual food drive are just in, providing a hook for a reporter to show how local food pantries are being replenished just when school food programs aren't available. And, maybe, mention how the drive shows the value of the universal network.

So this would be a great time to contact local newsrooms or write a letter to the editor thanking the public for its continued support of the food drive. Easy story to sell this time around: We set a record by collecting 80 million pounds this year and also have reached 1.5 billion pounds since the food drive began!

Here's a link that provides a letter template and information about the food drive results. [www.nalc.org/community-service/food-drive/food-drive-tool-kit](http://www.nalc.org/community-service/food-drive/food-drive-tool-kit)

**Third task: Let's keep generating letters to the editor and op-ed pieces, so the public and political candidates will understand the actual situation at the Postal Service and the best way forward.**

Among significant recent efforts were President Rolando's powerful commentary in New Hampshire's *Keene Sentinel*, the fifth-oldest U.S. paper (founded in 1799). The president's piece complemented a superb *Sentinel* editorial. And, the half-dozen letters in Indiana newspapers from the desk of Ronnie Roush, president of Branch 888 in Carmel.

I'd like to challenge each of you to take on at least one of these tasks in the next couple of months. You do that, and the impact will be truly extraordinary.

**EDITORIAL STAFF:**  
Managing Editor Philip Dine  
Designer/Web Editor Mike Shea  
Internet Communications Coordinator  
Joe Conway  
Writer/Editor Rick Hodges  
Editorial Assistant Jenessa Kildall Wagner

*The Postal Record* (ISSN 0032-5376) is published monthly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

Subscription included in membership dues. First-class subscription available for \$20 per year (contact Membership Department).

© 2016 by the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Circulation: 287,000. Union-printed using soy-based inks.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS? Contact the Membership Department.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube by going to NALC.org.

