

Carrier spreads good word about USPS while helping students learn to read

Long Island City, NY Branch 357 President David Van Aken learned recently that he is helping to spread the word about the good that letter carriers do in their communities and helping schoolchildren learn to read. Not bad for a day's work.

Van Aken is the subject of an article on Readworks.org, a website that provides free resources for teachers nationwide. A writer from Readworks, a not-for-profit group located in New York City, interviewed Van Aken a few years ago, but he forgot about it until a friend of his, a sixth-grade teacher, stumbled upon Van Aken's story on the website and contacted him about it.

"It's kind of cool," Van Aken said, "that someone just found it out of nowhere."

As with most articles on Readworks.org, the article comes with questions for students to answer as a quiz on their reading comprehension, along with a teacher's guide. The article is written for students reading at an eighth-grade or ninth-grade level.

The article packs into three pages information about Van Aken's background and experiences on his route, his relationship with his patrons, the failed effort by the Postal Service to cut Saturday delivery, elderly citizens' dependence on the mail for delivery of medication, automated sorting vs. sorting by hand, changes in uniforms, overtime, Van Aken's involvement in the NALC and the role of letter carriers in their communities.

"Van Aken knows the people on his route well," the article reads. "For example, he'll know if a normally active elderly resident stops picking up her mail for a few days.

"Sometimes the letter carriers are the ones looking out for these vulnerable residents when no one else is,"

it reads. "Van Aken considers his job to be not only the physical activity of delivering mail, but also the social responsibility that comes with the job."

Readworks.org has a catalogue of approximately 2,600 original articles for classroom use, with more to come soon. The group's writers focus each article on different reading levels and standards. About a million teachers use the articles as teaching tools, but after six years on the internet, the site expects still more teachers to discover the site and take advantage of its free services. Most of the site's promotion comes from recommendations from fellow educators.

According to Readworks, since the story featuring Van Aken was published in 2013, more than 3,800 teachers have downloaded it for printing and thousands more have viewed (and possibly copied) it on the web.

You can read the article in PDF format by going to nalc.org/readworks.

"This article is a great way for kids to learn about letter carriers and how they do so much more in the community beyond delivering the mail," Van Aken said, "all while they're learning to read." **PR**

