

Coal Valley Post Office



**Philip
Dine**

This is a story ultimately about letter carriers, not about a tiny West Virginia city, but we'll start with the place.

Montgomery, home to all of 1,577 residents, lies along the Kanawha River in southwestern West Virginia. It straddles two counties, Fayette and Kanawha. For a decade and a half, just before the 20th century, the city had the intriguing name of Coal Valley Post Office. It then changed names four times in the course of less than two years, finally settling on its current name.

About 100 years ago, Montgomery was the shipping center for 26 separate coal operations. Today, the city's population is half of what it was as recently as 1980. The

Montgomery Post Office boasts one city carrier (though it's looking to add another).

So Montgomery is, it's safe to say, a pretty quiet place these days.

And yet, when the small (but high-quality) weekly newspaper that serves the community carried a guest commentary in early July that attacked the U.S. Postal Service, the paper's online edition lit up with folks willing—and able—to take the record straight.

The piece, written by a Florida resident who directs the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism, misrepresented postal finances, including indicating that USPS is funded by taxpayers and contending that USPS charges too much. The writer also argued that UPS and FedEx are well situated to handle the mail, and that residents of areas the private carriers wouldn't deliver to could communicate via their telephones or home computers, or public library computers. Nostalgia for "the big blue corner mailboxes and the friendly neighborhood mail carrier" aside, he argued, USPS should be closed down.

The writer, and the *Montgomery Herald*, which ran his piece, surely had no idea what they were about to encounter. Almost immediately, readers began posting tough but fact-filled responses that pointed out the commentary's multiple errors, fallacies and gaps.

They mentioned the Constitution, pre-funding, the absence of taxpayer funding, the vital role of the Postal Service in our society, the jobs that depend on the Postal Service, the extent to which the private carriers rely on USPS for last-mile delivery, and more. And they advised the writer to do some fact-checking before his next article.

The response was so powerful that the newspaper's editor felt compelled to post several times herself, noting that the author was not employed by the paper, and further that he

was simply stating his own opinion. She liked the fact that readers were paying attention, she told me, but she acknowledged surprise at the volume, and force, of the reaction.

Here's the point: An avalanche of well-argued, targeted responses like this shows just how effective you've been in informing the public about the real situation at the Postal Service. Moreover, it demonstrates how much letter carriers have motivated people to not only recognize, but take action to rebut, the misleading conventional wisdom.

I've mentioned several times that your efforts to change the national conversation are unparalleled in the labor movement. Those aren't mere cheerleading words; they accurately reflect the situation—and in a future column we'll delve into how you're setting the standard for a union movement still grappling with the need to get its message out.

Speaking of which, along with recent grassroots efforts by letter carriers in Kentucky and Idaho and beyond, President Rolando has continued to inform the public, the politicians and the media about the current state of affairs at USPS and the way forward.

In particular, he's put the word out through city or regional newspapers in key areas, with commentary pieces in the *Columbus Dispatch*, the leading news source for Ohio's capital city (which recently surpassed Indianapolis as the Midwest's second-largest city, after Chicago); the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the most influential newspaper in the South; and the *Wisconsin State Journal*, the top news source for the state's capital, Madison.

He's had commentaries in smaller outlets as well, such as the *Mercury* in Pottstown, PA, while being quoted in news articles by the *Wall Street Journal*, Associated Press, Federal News Radio, Government Executive and more.

And most recently, our president had a powerful op-ed in *Townhall*, one of the country's most prominent conservative news sites, backing the legislative effort at postal reform.

So, from the tiny Mountain State city formerly known as Coal Valley Post Office to Washington, DC, and virtually everywhere in between, letter carriers are making your voices heard, getting the message out—and influencing people.

For those of you who want to join a winning effort, there's a spot on the roster.

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

© 2017 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, Instagram and YouTube by going to NALC.org.

