

# Engaging new letter carriers

## Innovative ways branches are reaching out to new hires

**B**eing a new city carrier is hard work: long hours, frequent scheduling, new technology and terminology thrown at them right and left. Many city carrier assistants (CCAs) struggle in silence, not asking questions or taking advantage of what their union can do for them. Some branches are finding new and innovative strategies for connecting with their CCAs, communicating with them and encouraging them.

If your branch is looking to engage newer members, perhaps you can find inspiration in this article. And if you're a CCA who is struggling, speak up to get the help and information you need.

### Special CCA-only meeting

"I try to focus the entire night on them," Carmel, IN Branch 888 President Ronnie Roush said of the special meeting he holds once a year.

Because he has about 35 CCAs in his branch, spread out over nine stations, he doesn't get much interaction with some of the CCAs unless they're having problems or unless they attend the regular branch meetings. When they're hired, the branch sends them a packet of information that includes the branch president's business card and how to contact him, but he says that doesn't always draw a response. So his branch started holding the special meeting every summer.

All of the CCAs are invited to attend, but no regular carriers and a limited number of officers are allowed. The branch provides food and drinks to make it easier for them to come right after work. Roush also offers incentives to help encourage the CCAs to attend, such as door prizes.



At the meeting, Roush will show NALC's Great Postal Strike documentary and a video on safety. Attendees typically respond well to the videos, he said. The rest of the night is for talking with the CCAs and letting them ask questions.

"They tell me what their issues are, what they'd like to see the branch do for them," he said. "They ask a lot of questions about scheduling, about their pay, about insurance, about how quickly they might convert to regular in their individual office. The hot topics."

Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126 President Bobbi Green also holds special meetings for CCAs every six months or whenever necessary, usually in conjunction with the branch's stewards meeting. Topics that have arisen include getting extra training or going over ways to do the job. Green and the other officers of the branch let the CCAs know that this is their time to ask questions.

"I just feel like we're being proactive to get to the CCAs to make sure they

know that we're looking out for them," Green said.

### The CCA e-mail network

"The first thing we did was establish an e-mail network for the CCAs exclusively," said San Antonio, TX Branch 421 President Tony Boyd. "Any CCA who is a union member, we put them in the network right off the bat."

The branch has between 250 and 300 CCAs at any given time, so getting information to all of them proved a challenge. But with the CCA e-mail network, they're all one click away.

Once the CCAs are in the network, the branch sends them a welcome message containing lots of resource material, including the steps that need to be taken for them to get their uniforms. The message also includes a listing of all of the stations and the stewards' e-mail addresses and telephone numbers. "So if they move

anywhere around the city, they know who to get into contact with, if push comes to shove,” Boyd said.

It also gives the CCAs the opportunity to communicate directly with the branch president or vice president, 24 hours a day.

“It works because, as we tell them, it’s better to hear it from us than to hear it through the grapevine,” Boyd said. “It allows us to put out a lot of rumors very fast.”

Boyd also has had success giving members his cell phone number so they can text him.

“A lot of them, they do the social media thing, so they may not be into going down to the branch office to see what is going on or waiting for you to come to their station,” he said. “I get texts from as far as 200 miles away, and they ask about such-and-such a thing, and they can get an instantaneous answer. And they appreciate that.”

In addition to the electronic communication, the branch has special CCA-only meetings/dinners, starting later in the evening to coincide with when the CCAs typically get off work.

“We get a lot of good feedback from this,” Boyd said.

### CCA-directed training

When York, PA Branch 509 President Stephen Hanna wanted to put together a training session for CCAs, he went to the source to find out what should be included in CCA training: a former CCA.

“I’ll do a training session, but you tell me what they want to hear,” he asked Kayla Berkebile, who recently converted to career status. She ex-

**Opposite page: A training session held by Honolulu Branch 860. At right is the agenda the branch uses for the training.**

plained that as she had gone through her time as a CCA, she had been surprised by the lack of working experience held by some of the other CCAs, and had been determined to help them.

“She felt she had a responsibility, which I thought was refreshing, to help the next group of people,” Hanna said.

The outline Berkebile suggested focused on basic rights and responsibilities. She pointed out that many CCAs hadn’t been in a union before, and most had never worked in a large organization like the Postal Service.

“Take us through today, how to get through the day,” she said. She also suggested going through the basics of the grievance procedure.

“She was the one who opened my eyes to (the fact) that some of these people don’t even have the basics of what their rights are, much less understanding the full extent of our contract,” Hanna said. “So that was really important for me.”

Hanna hopes to encourage Berkebile, who recently had a baby, to become more involved with the branch or become a steward when she has more free time.

In addition to the special training, the branch commits to devoting quarterly meetings to CCA issues. By holding the meeting at a restaurant with meals provided, the branch has gotten good turnout.

### Video conferencing

Honolulu Branch 860 also holds special trainings about every six months, with the branch’s stewards

going through the basics of opting, Weingarten rights, uniforms, scheduling, discipline, Handbook *M-41*, the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)* and the NALC Member App. But President Howard Komine knows that not everyone might be able to attend in person. So he made it possible for them to attend virtually.

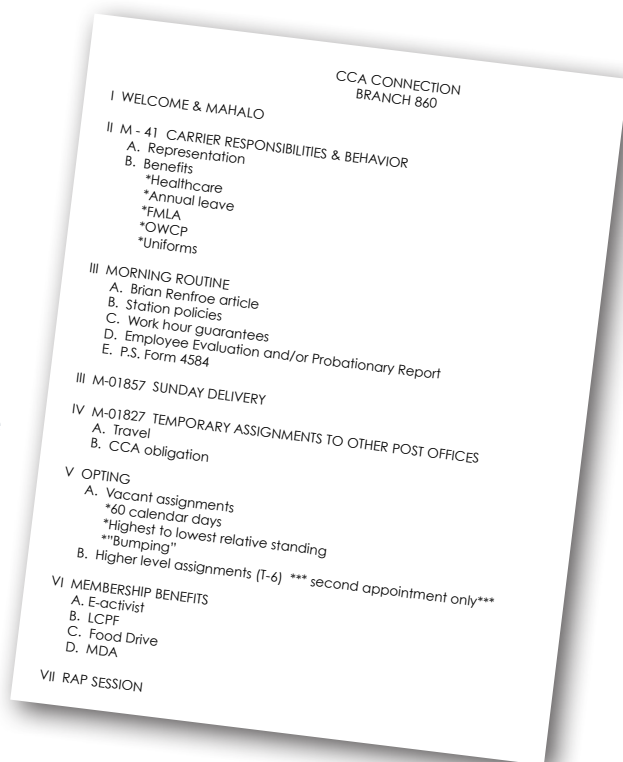
The training is streamed on video for CCAs all over the island of Oahu, Hawaii’s most populous island, to attend, and also for some CCAs who are farther away, including on Maui and Kauai.

“When we did the class, we had people from the outer islands watch the class and ask questions,” he said.

But the CCAs don’t have to be far away to take advantage. “One guy had twins, so I told him, ‘Link in, so you can see it from your house,’ ” Komine said.

To help the virtual attendees get the full experience, the cameras capture all of the participants. “They can see the people on the television screen mounted behind me on the wall, and the camera then goes out to the floor—so they can see exactly what goes on,” he said.

The video conferencing is just one of the ways Komine tries to make it easier for the CCAs to get the answers



to their questions. He tells them, “Come to the training; I’ll feed you. Are there better days to get you guys out?”

“I’ll move mountains to get them there,” he said. He knows that the branch is better served with educated CCAs. “I’m a young guy, only 54. But I tell them, in 10 years, it’s going to be one of you guys taking over.”

## CCA and recently converted carrier leaders

Several of the branch presidents interviewed for this story said that one of the best resources for engaging CCAs is having them or recently converted career carriers become stewards or serve in other branch leadership positions.

“I’m lucky that I have a few of them stepping up and doing their thing,” Komine said. “It just helps all of us, you know. Because sometimes we just forget. I notice that the ones who were CCAs come from a whole different place.”

San Antonio President Boyd agreed. “I have had and continue to have a couple of CCAs who are the chief stewards at their stations, and I’m talking big stations where you have 60 to 70 routes,” he said. “They’re stepping up.”

The key is to offer them training whenever they show an interest. “We told them, we’re going to give you opportunities if you jump in there,” Boyd explained. “We’ll give you the specialized training. So we spend a lot of time with the people who jump in. Because we realize that they’re doing this on their own time, we tell them, ‘We’ll work around your schedule. We’ll meet any time, wherever. If it’s at your house, before work, after

work, we’ll be there for you.’ And we’ve done that.”

Boyd’s branch has sent members to the first national CCA conference, held in St. Louis last year, to the Formal A and Beyond class held several times near Baltimore and to the new member training held last month (for more on the training, see sidebar at right).

The Royal Oak branch also makes the effort to train interested members, many of whom have gone on to be facilitators.

“Whatever they want to do, if it’s to assist in MDA, if it’s in Customer Connect, safety captain, we encourage that,” President Green said. “We find a place for all of them, even if it’s just doing the recreation games at our picnic. However many CCAs want to be involved, we find a place for them to be a part of.”

But even if they don’t have a clear-cut role in mind, the branch still likes to get them trained.

“We have an open-door policy,” Green said. “If they show any interest at all, we train them as alternates, even if we’re not going to use them, but we keep them in the know. We use them for passing out the flyers, etc. If they don’t want to get both feet wet, we make sure they’ve got their finger in the pool and try to nudge them along until they feel more comfortable to get involved.”

Celia Bowling, a steward in Honolulu Branch 860, believes that CCAs and career carriers who were CCAs have a different perspective. She should know: She was a CCA from November 2014 until September 2015. After about six months of being a career carrier, she became a steward and is now involved in the orientation for new CCAs.

“I want to make sure that when anyone new comes in, that they feel that they have somebody who can relate to them to go to and talk to them,” she said. “I found a lot of times when I was asking questions, I couldn’t get an answer because no one knew what a CCA was. Nobody really understood it. And it was really frustrating for me. I wanted to make sure nobody else felt like that when they first came in.”

One of the ways that Bowling has found to communicate with the new CCAs is through new technology. “It makes a really big difference being able to talk about social media and being able to use that,” she said. She tells them to download the NALC Member App for their smartphones. “They respond to that better when you can tell them, ‘Download this app; it has all this great information for you.’”

Texting is a major tool, as well. She tells them, “‘Here’s my phone number and you can text me if you need me,’ because people don’t use e-mail as much and no one likes to pick up the phone anymore, but I can get a text so easy and respond in my own time and it works for everybody.”

Mostly, she said, CCAs need the union’s understanding and help. “We’re responsible to make sure the CCAs have every opportunity to succeed. We need to make sure we’re giving them all of those resources and that the supervisors are giving them those resources, too. There’s a lot more going on than was ever going on before.”

## Go to them

Almost everyone interviewed agreed that the best way to engage





CCAs is to find ways to go to them.

"We have someone who gets in touch with them as soon as they are hired," Green said of the Royal Oak branch. "And then she stays in contact with them. She has a personal interaction with them all along, throughout their whole careers."

San Antonio President Boyd says that you have to find them at the stations, even though it can be difficult. "A lot of them don't start at the same time as the regular carriers do," he said, "so you have to make the extra effort and get with the station managers and supervisors and say, 'Hey, what time do your CCAs come in? Give me 10 to 15 minutes with them to talk to them beforehand.'"

Wendell Tomooka, another recently converted career carrier who became a steward for Honolulu Branch 860, believes that it's important to make sure CCAs know they have someone they can talk to in their station. "Whenever they come to our station, I try to welcome them," he said. So he tells them, "You can ask anyone a question, but if no one has the time, look for me and we'll figure something out."

And some of it is on the CCAs to ask the questions. "If you don't ask, we don't know what your struggles are and we can't help you," Tomooka said. "If you act like everything is good and fine, then nobody is going to step up and bother to see how you're doing."

Once he has established that rapport, he encourages them to learn more.

"You should always encourage them to come to the meetings because then they get to see the bigger picture," he said.

### Do something

This should not be considered a comprehensive list of what branches are doing to engage their CCAs; this is only a list of methods that some branches are finding help them be successful.

NALC President Fredric Rolando said, "It's imperative that we engage our newer members. The future of this union is in their hands. If we do a successful job of that, we can take pride in their successes helping the NALC and the Postal Service thrive in the years ahead." **PR**

## New Member Training

May 14-19, NALC Headquarters held a new member training at the Maritime Institute of Technology outside Baltimore. The training was designed to teach and give attendees the opportunity to practice a number of skills that will be beneficial to them in whatever role they fill in the future.

"Branches have already started to see the investments they've made—in their CCAs and other new members—pay off," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "It's heartening to see them continue to make these investments in our new member training session put on by National Headquarters."

Attendees (pictured above and below) got to ask questions of President Rolando as part of the class. For more on the training, see Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe's column on page 48.

