

25th Anniversary

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF LETTER CARRIERS

Stamp
Out
Hunger

FOOD DRIVE

Lake Jackson, TX Branch 4723

Positive early reports for 25th food drive

For the last quarter century, letter carriers have set aside the second Saturday in May as a special day to do what we can to fight hunger in America.

Saturday, May 13, was no exception.

For the 25th annual national Letter Carriers' "Stamp Out Hunger®" Food Drive, NALC members representing more than 1,400 branches worked alongside thousands of family members, friends and volunteers—not to mention their fellow employees in the other postal craft unions and in management—to pick up bags upon bags of non-perishable food left by postal customers' mailboxes.

"We're proud of the fact that this effort led by NALC is the largest single-day food drive in the nation," NALC President Fredric Rolando said, "but we remain saddened that widespread hunger is still a problem in this country."

The president said he draws some encouragement from the union's massive annual effort to fight this ongoing problem—how the drive raises awareness of it and makes a noticeable difference.

The national drive began in 1993, and since then, countless letter carriers and volunteers throughout the country have spent this special Saturday helping to restock food pantry shelves. (A history of the food drive can be found in the May *Postal Record*, available for download at nalc.org.)

The food drive is an especially timely event, since food donations typically peak during the winter holidays and food pantries usually are depleted by Memorial Day weekend. Complicating matters: free or reduced-cost meals for the children of families in need tend to only be available while school is in session, which means that many families often face greater hardship once summer vacation begins.

"Budgets that are already stretched thin have to stretch that much further," Second Harvest of South Georgia's Eliza McCall told WCTV-TV, "so we'll make sure these families use some of this food that we've gotten to bolster the nutrition in their homes."

A labor of love

For many NALC members, the annual Food Drive Day provides an opportunity for them to do something special for all of their customers.

"I don't just do this as a job," Aiea-Pearl City, HI Branch 4692's Adele Yoshikawa told *Hawaii News Now*. "I'm off today; I do it with a passion to help our community."

Milwaukee Branch 2 letter carrier Ashley Webb echoed that sentiment. "This is a great way for me to give back," she told WITI-TV. "I don't think people really understand that they actually made somebody's day better."

Augusta, GA volunteer Miguel Valdez told WDRW-TV that "just that one meal makes a huge difference in your life," and that for him, the food drive was personal. "I know what it is like to go through that struggle," he said. "I didn't quite reach homelessness, but I know how it is to need a plate and to receive that, and that's why we are here."

Volunteers are often the lifeblood of local food drive efforts, said Sioux City, IA Branch 69 Food Drive Coordinator Carrie Matney. "They just feel so passionate about the cause itself and how it helps the community. It is a ton of work,



South Macomb, MI Branch 4374

but I really love to see it all come together.”

Saturday, May 13, marked Youngstown, OH Branch 385 member Scott Downing’s 23rd food drive. “To see those donations going to the needy people we serve, and who we see every day—it’s really touching,” he told WYTV-TV.

“It’s good to give back, because as we’re walking through the neighborhoods we see the need in certain neighborhoods,” Great Falls, MT Branch 650 letter carrier Marcus Delgado told KRTV-TV. “We see the need out there for struggling families, veterans, the elderly—I mean, it’s everywhere there is a need for all these services.”

Customer generosity seemed to rule the day, at least as far as Kalamazoo, MI Branch 246 member Gary Hall was concerned. Hall told *Three Rivers News* that he visited about 20 houses at a time, and on average, one house per trip left 15 to 20 non-perishable food items for collection. “I felt great about it,” he told the newspaper. “The fact that the food stays right here, I think is a bonus.”

Blue skies, gray skies

A variety of factors can determine how much food gets collected from one year to the next, not least of which is the weather, something obviously no one can control. Although Mother Nature largely cooperated with food drive efforts across the country on May 13, a late-spring snowfall threatened to make things interesting for letter carriers in New Hampshire. Meanwhile, rain dampened efforts—but not spirits—in portions of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Georgia, among others.

“The community supports us in so many ways, so we know that they’ll recognize that maybe things didn’t go as well” as far as the weather is concerned, Second Harvest of Savannah, GA’s Mary

Jane Crouch told WTOG-TV.

Meanwhile, in California’s sunny Central Coast region, food drive volunteer Wendy Lewis told KSBY-TV that “it looks like it’s our best year ever. We heard from carriers and post offices around the county that their docks are filling up with food and it’s the most they’ve ever seen.”

Rural letter carrier Wayne Watts told Lawton, OK’s KSWO-TV that the food drive means a little extra work, but it’s worth every pound that gets picked up. “Sometimes we actually have to bring food back before we finish the day and go back and deliver our routes again because it just gets too crowded” in his postal vehicle, he said.

“It seems like every year the need is growing,” Minneapolis Branch 9 Food Drive Coordinator Samantha Hartwig told the *Star Tribune*. “This food drive really helps out a lot of families in the community.”

Elyria, OH Branch 196 President David Lozano estimated that 60 letter carriers from his branch took part in the all-volunteer event. “We had city carriers, rural route carriers and clerks helping out,” Lozano told *The Chronicle*. “It’s a team effort. These guys go above and beyond—they get the mail delivered and they’re picking up food at the same time.”

Josephine County, OR Food Bank Director Kevin Widdison credited the food drive’s “huge success” in his area to several elements all coming together: “The generosity of the community, the hard work of the letter carriers and the people who were willing to volunteer



Duluth, MN Branch 114



Top: Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100
Above: Mass. NE Mgd. Branch 25

New Castle, PA Branch 22



their Saturday afternoon at the Food Bank's warehouse," he told KDRV-TV. "Everyone who participated played an integral role in the success of this event."

Springfield, MO Branch 203 President Tom Carter told KOLR-TV that so much food was coming in to his post office, he was worried volunteers would run out of places to store it. "This amount exceeded our expectations and proves once again that our community cares about each other," he said.

Fort Myers, FL Branch 2072 Food Drive Coordinator George Sciascia estimated his branch had collected around 300,000 pounds of food. "Although the final tally is not in yet," he told the *Naples Herald*, "preliminary reports from some of the various post offices indicate an increase of at least 10 to 20 percent over last year's results."

The food drive has a special meaning for longtime Reading, PA Branch 258 Food Drive Coordinator Paul Purcell. "I know what it is like to grow up in a situation like that (without enough to eat)," Purcell told the *Reading Eagle*. "It is heartwarming to be a part of this food drive."

Teamwork triumphs

"While letter carriers lead this effort," President Rolando said, "there is simply no way that we could do it alone." He thanked this year's national sponsors for stepping up: The U.S. Postal Service, the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), United Way Worldwide, the AFL-CIO, AARP Foundation, Valpak and Valassis.

UFCW and Valpak were instrumental in the production of the millions of postcards that found their way into every mailbox in the country, while USPS

generously donated the use of its G-10 postage permit for the mailing of not just the postcards but also of specially marked food drive bags made available to many areas of the country thanks to strong local sponsor partnerships.

"In all the years we've partnered with the letter carriers, we've never seen this much food," Feeding America West Michigan's Ken Estelle told *The Rapidian*. "The fact that we had strong media coverage this year, along with the postcards and collection bags the carriers distributed for us really made the difference."

Online promotion also gave the food drive a "signal boost." Posts to the Stamp Out Hunger Facebook page were viewed by at least 1.4 million people in the weeks leading up to the drive, while posts on Twitter containing the #StampOutHunger hashtag were seen by 44.5 million users of that platform in that same timeframe. More than half a million social media users saw the Thunderclap message promoting the food drive on the Friday before, a message that received perhaps millions of additional Facebook shares and Twitter retweets. And the new, public-facing stampouthungerfooddrive.us website provided numerous visitors with timely food drive information, including the public service announcement featuring actor Edward James Olmos and a page containing answers to frequently asked questions.

Through 2016, the food drive has delivered to food pantries a total of more than 1.5 billion pounds of food—a figure that includes last year's record figure of 80 million pounds collected. Final totals from this year's silver-anniversary drive were due after this magazine went to press; a more detailed report will appear in a later edition of *The Postal Record*. **PR**