



Looking out for veterans at the branch level

The branch level is a great place to provide assistance to and honor the veterans among us. Some branches even appoint a veterans representative to help branch members with veteran-related issues and to highlight veterans' concerns and contributions. Here are some ways that letter carriers look out for veterans at their branches and continue to rely on their commitment to service.

Navigating benefits

The rules governing leave, medical and retirement benefits for the military and Postal Service are already complicated, but can be even more daunting for a veteran or reservist working for or retired from the Postal Service. It helps to have someone who has been through it.

As a sergeant major in the Army National Guard with three overseas tours of duty (two in Iraq and one in Bosnia) under his belt, **William Zeughardt** understands what letter carriers serving their country go through before, during and after their service.

Zeughardt helps fellow active service members and veterans in his branch, Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3, navigate the complex world of military and postal benefits and how they intersect. As the Postal Service hires more and more letter carriers, he said, he sees more reservists and veterans who need assistance.

After 26 years in the Army National Guard and 18 as a letter carrier, Zeughardt thinks his background and connections give him the tools to help. "Being that I've deployed so many places, I can share those experiences with the other members," he said.

Stress and mental health

Zeughardt also keeps an eye out for veterans who need help with the legacy of the stress of service. "A lot of veterans are coming back with post-traumatic stress disorder or memory

loss," he said. When a veteran confronts those kinds of challenges, Zeughardt knows exactly where to go for help.

Ronald Kania, president of Milwaukee, WI Branch 2, is a former Marine who looks out for veterans in his branch and has the contacts and resources to help those with medical or mental health needs. Kania—who served in the Marine Corps from 1983 to 1987 and then joined the Postal Service the following year—uses his military experience to aid them. "I can usually find a conduit to help them," such as a referral to the VA, he said. "I've got that network built up."

Honor and recognition

Veterans deserve to be honored for their service, and letter carriers appreciated the opportunity to honor and support them.

Retired Portland, OR Branch 82 letter carrier and Army veteran **Bruce Hall**, who served in Vietnam, keeps members informed about holidays and events for veterans. In branch newsletter articles and at branch meetings, Hall tells branch members—both veterans and those who wish to honor them—about local ceremonies to mark important dates such as Memorial Day, Flag Day and Veterans Day. He also publicizes lesser-known events, such as POW/MIA Recognition Day, an event that, while not an official holiday, remembers those missing in action and current or former prisoners of war each year on the third Friday of September.

At a special branch ceremony each November near Veterans Day, Zeughardt recognizes the branch's veterans, as well as a carrier who is a Gold Star mother who lost a son in Afghanistan. The branch has supported the member's Gold Star Mothers charity drive with donations of cash and toys destined for other military families.

Advocacy

Letter carriers regularly speak up for veterans in Congress or in their communities.

As Branch 82 veterans representative, Hall monitors developments affecting veterans in Washington, DC, and reports on them through the branch newsletter and branch meetings. "I try to keep the members in the union aware of what's happening in the legislature that affects veterans," he said, "and how they can communicate with their representatives."

Hall stresses the need for his fellow veterans to become more involved in the community and to tell their stories as well. "I try to write articles about veterans' issues, but I also want them to speak to people, to let them know what veterans have done," he said. "Unless you've been in people's shoes, you can't tell anything about them."

Union activism

Veterans bring their commitment to service with them to the Postal Service and NALC, and branches can rely on them to step up when the union, or fellow veterans, need their help, Kania said.

"It's not a coincidence that veterans are active in their union," he said. "They're always willing to volunteer." Fellow Branch 2 veterans not only do their part in union affairs, they pitch in to help with veteran projects such as honor flights that take vets, many advanced in age or disabled and requiring help to travel, to see monuments to their sacrifices in Washington, DC. (For more information about honor flights, see the November 2017 issue of *The Postal Record*.)

Asking a branch member to serve as veterans representative for your branch is a great way to keep all branch members, whether active-duty reservists, veterans or civilians, informed and connected on issues that affect veterans and how to support them.