

# Our architectural jewel on Capitol Hill



**Paul  
Barner**

**O**ne of my duties as assistant secretary-treasurer is overseeing the operations of the NALC Headquarters building. After taking over in my new role, following the installation of officers in December, I quickly realized the awesome responsibility that comes with maintaining and caring for the members' building. Our headquarters building is located at 100 Indiana Ave. NW in Washington, DC and is a landmark in its own right.

If you've never been to Washington, DC, or never studied a map of the area, you might not know that the NALC Headquarters building sits in a prominent location at the foot of Capitol Hill. The Office of the Presi-

dent has the most spectacular view of the Capitol building, which is just across the street from the front entrance of the NALC building. When NALC purchased the site, it was one of the last available for development adjacent to the U.S. Capitol grounds. The total cost: \$1.7 million.

## **NALC Headquarters was first dedicated on Aug. 31, 1952.**

According to historical records, in 1943, then-NALC President William C. Doherty had persuaded the members to accept a dues increase to create a special building fund. At the time, NALC did not have a home of its own and was actually renting two rooms at the American Federation of Labor (AFL) building.

Along the way, individual members, branches, district and state associations, and auxiliaries were making contributions as well. Donations were even sent by servicemen from the front lines during World War II. In fact, the first-floor meeting hall at Headquarters is named for Fred B. Hutchings of Syracuse, NY Branch 134, who left \$35,000 for the building when he died in 1949—the largest individual gift to the fund. Today, Hutchings Hall is used for meetings and receptions and is occasionally rented out for events.

The original building had eight floors and allowed NALC to move the Mutual Benefit Association headquarters from Nashville, TN, and the National Sick Benefit Association from Boston, MA, to Washington, DC. The new building meant that, for the first time in history, all of NALC could be under one roof.

**Then in 1962, an eight-story annex was added, primarily to accommodate growth of the Health Benefit Plan. Today, the Health Benefit Plan is located in Ashburn, VA, a**

suburb of Washington, DC. MBA, however, remains at Headquarters and occupies the entire fifth floor of the building.

Currently, NALC occupies six of the eight floors. Historically, NALC has leased floors of the building for extra income. Past tenants have included the Teamsters, the Meatcutters, and other groups such as railway mail clerks and flight attendants. Today, the fourth floor is occupied by a tenant, and the third floor is being advertised as available for lease.

**In recognition of the contributions of Vincent R. Sombrotto**, the 16th president of NALC, the delegates of the 65th Biennial Convention of the National Association of Letter Carriers adopted a resolution to name NALC's National Headquarters Building in his honor. On July 22, 2008, Headquarters was officially named The Vincent R. Sombrotto Building, and a bust of President Emeritus Sombrotto was prominently placed at the entrance, where it remains today.

**Your Headquarters building is in extremely good condition, inside and out, thanks to the many employees whose job it is to help maintain it.** NALC employs a full-time painter, two full-time engineers and two full-time guards. All are union employees and they take great pride in being stewards of your building.

Another unique feature of your Headquarters building is its outer shell, made of unpolished, high-quality Vermont marble. There are only a few other buildings in Washington, DC, with marble from the same quarry, including the U.S. Supreme Court building and the Jefferson Memorial, making the NALC building architecturally significant.

**I encourage you to visit Headquarters if you are ever in town.** Tours of the building for visiting members are given quite frequently. It's always enjoyable to meet a member on any given day, often with their family, getting a tour of the building. No appointment is necessary for a tour; you just need to come in and ask. It is, after all, your building.



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