

Birthplace of NALC gets makeover

Milwaukee letter carriers have always cherished their city's status as the birthplace of NALC. On Aug. 30, 1889, a group of city letter carriers gathered in a meeting hall above Schaefer's Saloon at the convergence of Plankinton Avenue, Wells Street and Second Street and created the new organization to represent their profession and to promote postal delivery service. NALC went on to hold its first convention in Boston, MA, the next year, and now is one of the oldest labor unions in the United States.

The saloon is long gone, but on the 100th birthday of NALC's founding, the city erected a statue to honor letter carriers in the square across the street. It depicts three carriers, two men and a woman, in uniforms of different periods.

"In honor of the men and women who have delivered for America in rain, sleet, and snow, and in tribute to their union, the National Association of Letter Carriers, founded across Plankinton Avenue from this site on August 30, 1889," the statue's plaque reads.

In the spirit of the public service and community connections that letter carriers facilitate on their routes each day, Milwaukee recently transformed the small triangle of land one block from the Milwaukee River where the statue stands into "Postman's Porch," a meeting space to host public events. It opened to the public on June 4.

"They really updated the park," Milwaukee Branch 2 President **Ronald Kania** said. "The statue is very promi-

nent now—it used to be just a statue and some grass."

Milwaukee Branch 2 members celebrate the memory of the saloon meeting each year by cleaning the statue. "We've been taking very good care of it for 30 years," Kania said. This year, the statue enjoyed a professional cleaning as part of the park renovation, so the branch will skip its annual tradition. The statue will be rededicated this month on its 30th anniversary.

By creating Postman's Porch, the city's leaders embraced Milwaukee's role in labor and postal history—and the statue that commemorates it.

"We met with businesses and the adjacent residents," Milwaukee Downtown Business Improvement District CEO Beth Weirick said, "and we created a plan that we knew would transform this underutilized traffic triangle into a cherished community cultural asset." Weirick called Postman's Porch a "third space," a place beyond the first two spaces, home and work, that unite people.

The plan involved a \$12,000 redevelopment of the space, including expanded seating and improved

landscaping, and plans for recurring special events such as free acoustic musical performances—"Postman's Porch Unplugged"—as well as food and drink celebrations. It was funded by private donations.

So how did Milwaukee become the birthplace of our union?

During the Civil War, the Post Office Department had established free city delivery, but in peacetime, letter carriers were stretched thin and forced to work up to 12 hours a day. Despite several attempts to organize a union, the expense of convening a national group of carriers made the task too difficult. Carriers worked together in 1888 to persuade Congress to enact an eight-hour workday for city carriers. This success led letter carriers to want to create a permanent association to further advance their interests. They chose Milwaukee as their meeting site because the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union war veterans, was convening in the city at the same time and many city carriers also were veterans. The plan worked—about 60 letter carriers from 18 states met at the saloon and founded our union. **PR**

