

Heroes deliver



**Philip
Dine**

As we've discussed in this space, along with delivering the mail letter carriers deliver NALC's message, in a variety of ways.

Some of you write letters to the editor or pen commentaries for your local or regional newspapers. Others communicate our points on radio or are interviewed on television. In addition, you increasingly make us aware of journalists or news outlets in need of some gentle guidance.

In so doing, you inform the public, influence lawmakers and educate the media. That is as important an endeavor for NALC as any, I would argue, because the fate of our employer—and therefore of our jobs—rests on getting the truth about the Postal

Service out to the public, the pols and the press.

Meanwhile, many of you help this effort in a quite different manner: by your actions on the route—saving someone in emergency situations or improving the lives of customers or an entire community. When you do that, your intent, of course, is more immediate—to put out a fire or stop a crime, find a missing child or assist someone who has fallen. But you also help NALC's critical work of getting out the message, in a couple of ways.

First, the valor, dedication and compassion you display offers personal and tangible evidence of the value of letter carriers providing six-day, door-to-door mail delivery. And it does something else as well—it makes people more receptive to the policy messages we deliver, via letter or commentary, interviews or congressional testimony, about maintaining the universal network and assuring a robust United States Postal Service. If people value the messenger, they'll pay more attention to the message.

Which brings us to the NALC Heroes of the Year event held in Washington a few weeks ago as I write this. The awards luncheon, along with the feats of the awardees, is covered in detail in this issue's cover story, so let me just note that it was celebratory, entertaining—and moving, from President Rolando's compelling address about what letter carriers do daily on their routes to serve their communities to the humble yet poignant remarks of the Heroes. Those in attendance—NALC national officers and employees, the other postal unions, USPS executives, Postal Regulatory Commission members, others from the postal community, even that skeptical lot known as journalists—paid rapt attention from start to finish.

And how could it be otherwise? Mitchell Rivas's Marysasa's Mission Foundation, which the former Marine set up

after his daughter died at 28 months, has assisted many Ohio families whose children face medical crises. Ivan Crisostomo helped rescue a teenage girl in California from abductors who had kidnapped and abused her. Austin Rentz saved an elderly woman in Iowa from a house fire. Theresa Jo Belkota's quick actions saved the life of a young boy run over and badly injured by a lawn mower in Western New York. Michael Musick helped save the lives of two fellow California letter carriers hit by a runaway car. Indiana's Mark Schuh saved an elderly man and his dog from an aggressive larger dog.

His deeds generated dozens of news stories prior to the luncheon, which in turn was covered by more media than we've had in the 10 Heroes events I've been privileged to attend. In concrete terms: I sat at a table where I was the only former journalist. To cite a few of the others: *The Washington Post*, which hadn't covered the event in years, sent both a reporter and a photographer. A writer for *Barron's*, perhaps the country's leading finance publication, took a train from New York City for the event, hopping back on to return right after. A reporter for *El Tiempo Latino*, named the country's top Hispanic weekly year after year, provided first-time coverage for his paper. Elsewhere in the room sat an associate editor of *Federal Times*, the first time I've seen that outlet cover the event, along with a reporter from a national TV chain.

Unsurprisingly, there was extensive coverage of the event, including by the *Los Angeles Times*, one of the largest U.S. newspapers.

This is, of course a dynamic process. The media's interest in the Heroes suggests that NALC's message is resonating—whether about needed legislative reforms or the value of letter carriers.

Consider, as a result, how many millions of Americans read or watched inspiring stories about letter carriers helping families and communities. Then think of how that affects the public's views of letter carriers—and also their receptivity to the policy and political messages carriers deliver.

This self-reinforcing process is worth its weight in gold to all of us.

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