Letter carriers have a long history of helping their union brothers and sisters. At the national level, there’s the NALC Disaster Relief Fund, designed to aid members after natural disasters; Nalcrest, our affordable, amenity-rich Florida retirement community; and the William C. Doherty and John T. Donelon Scholarships, to help children of NALC members pay for college.

The scholarships don’t end at the national level. Several branches and state associations offer academic gifts of their own. Each branch and state association that does so has its own way of doing this, and the criteria, and available funds, differ widely, but the common thread is there: A helping hand when it is needed.

The whos

While the main reason a scholarship is created is to help members’ children—and increasingly, grandchil-


Ault & EJ Wilson Scholarship was established in memory of two longtime branch activists; Boise, ID Branch 331’s scholarship is named in memory of former president Jim Schmidt, who died on a hunting trip in 1996.

But it’s not always about what activists have done for carriers. Portland, OR Branch 82’s Judith Hyde Scholarship honors a letter carrier who did her utmost to raise HIV awareness decades ago. Hyde adopted an HIV-positive child in the late 1980s and later took a year off from work to walk across the United States to draw attention to the then-still-taboo infection, “back in the Ryan White days,” Secretary-Treasurer Matt Pierce said. (Ryan White was a boy with hemophilia who became famous in the 1980s for contracting AIDS from a blood transfusion.) When she reached Ohio, she discovered that she had liver cancer and was unable to finish her walk.

In the spirit of its namesake, “the main thing we judge people on is a letter of recommendation on current community service,” Pierce said. Applicants also must write an essay on “what problems they see in the local community, and what they are [doing] or would like to do about it,” he continued.

The hoops

The criteria used for granting scholarships are different for every branch—and they might surprise you. The grade-point average (GPA) cutoff for Seattle, WA Branch 79’s scholarship is 2.0, and SAT scores need only reflect the national average. John Sweeney, a retired member of Branch 79 who has overseen the scholarship from its begin-


Scholarship winners from St. Louis Branch 343
being accepted into an institution of higher learning. “We tried to make it very easy,” President Joe Padén said. “I was one of the people who pressed upon [the scholarship committee]—don’t make it just for kids who have a 4.0,” he said, adding with a laugh, “I didn’t have a very good GPA and I went to college. I would’ve liked a scholarship if someone would’ve given me one.” As with Seattle, the applicants are chosen by random drawing. “It’s more a lottery than a contest,” Padén said.

Not all scholarships are just for traditional colleges. This year, St. Louis, MO Branch 343 opted to include a trade-school gift in its program. “We are a union and not every kid is destined for college,” explained branch editor Tom Schulte. “This year, for the first time, we offered three college-bound scholarships and one vocational school/trade school scholarship,” he said. It was awarded to a student who had taken 30 hours of welding classes and wanted to continue his work at Ranken Technical College. “Our only requirement was that the trade school be accredited,” Schulte said.

The funding

A common source for money is a branch’s general fund. Though the Seattle branch has about $100,000 in its scholarship fund, the branch’s general fund bolsters the amount. “The idea was to have it self-sustaining over the years, but with the low interest rates we haven’t been able to do that,” Sweeney said.

South Florida Branch 1071’s John Seymour Memorial Scholarship was created thanks to a generous endowment willed to the branch by its namesake.

Among other funding sources, the West Virginia State Association raffles off hunting rifles.

In Portland, OR, “we used to have to fund-raise,” said Secretary-Treasurer Pierce. That all changed when communications giant T-Mobile needed a spot for a substation—and the branch office parking lot was the only place available. T-Mobile pays a rental fee of $800 a month to the branch for 110 square feet on its lot. In 2018, the branch was able to increase its scholarship amounts from $500 to $2,000 because of this. “Manna from Heaven,” Pierce said.

In St. Louis, the money comes in large part from the general fund. However, this year, “we sent out a solicitation letter to the parents of our former winners as well as to the former winners themselves to ‘pay it forward’ to the next group,” Schulte said.

They were pleasantly surprised by the generous response and set that money aside in a scholarship interest-bearing account. “We are also in discussions with the branch trustees to perhaps have a 50/50 drawing” at regular branch meetings with the money earmarked for the scholarship fund, Schulte said.

It is not necessary to contact NALC Headquarters to set up a scholarship fund, but branches or state associations that are interested in doing so can contact national Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine for tips and pointers on how to go about it.

Changes over the years

A recent drop-off in scholarship applications has been noticed by several branches. St. Louis’s Tom Schulte said that, in the first 15 years of the branch’s 29-year-old scholarship, the number of applications never dipped below 24 and was sometimes as high as 36.

“And then there was a significant drop-off,” he said.

The Postal Record
Scholarships of the satchel

“We had several meetings to try and account for the drop-off and we concluded that the gap in the postal hiring freezes left a generational gap where the older employees' children were already out of school and the new hires didn't have high school-aged children,” he said.

It had gotten so low in Seattle that the branch began offering scholarships to the grandchildren of members as well as the children. Several other branches do the same.

In Portland, OR, the Hyde scholarship form was printed on one full page of a recent B-Mike newsletter, and on another page was a small announcement that only one application had been received.

Apparently, word got out just in time: The due date was April 1, and the branch received eight more applications by March 31. “Advertising made a big difference,” Pierce said.

There have been some other changes over the years.

In news that letter carriers may not be surprised to hear, the art and craft of writing has diminished in this digital age. “Dr. [Barbara] Anderson, who heads the evaluation team, has been telling me for years that the quality of the writing of the essays by the applicants has depreciated over the last 10 years, as if writing is no longer viewed as a necessity,” Schulte lamented.

On the other hand, Seattle’s Sweeney is very impressed by how much community service work has grown during his tenure overseeing the scholarship. “When my kids went to school, that’s pretty much all they did,” he said with a chuckle. Now, he’s noticed, students may have a high GPA but also are involved with church, community service or employment. “It’s just amazing how many students are involved,” he said.

Success stories

After its scholarship’s 20th year, the St. Louis branch sent out a letter to find out what past winners were up to. “Of the first 100 winners, we had two doctors, a number of accountants, research scientists and a lot of teachers,” Schulte said.

One student stood out for Portland, OR’s Matt Pierce. “We got a fantastic [application] from a young lady last year,” he said. She worked at a suicide hotline for 15 hours a week; her letter of recommendation was from the group she volunteered for. She is now studying at Stanford University to become a psychiatrist and specializes in working with people who have served in the military. She “went above and beyond,” Pierce said.

A sidebar on some of the scholarships offered by NALC branches and state associations, by no means comprehensive, is below. If you have a child or grandchild about to enter college or trade school, check with your local branch and state association to see what they offer. For more about NALC’s national-level scholarships, go to nalc.org/scholarships.

The following is a partial list, by no means exhaustive, of branches and state associations offering scholarships. If your local branch or state association is not on the list, check with them to see if they do.

Region 1:
Escondido, CA Branch 2525
Greater East Bay, CA Branch 1111
San Diego, CA Branch 70
San Jose, CA Branch 190
Santa Barbara, CA Branch 290
Sparks, NV Branch 2778
Watsonville, CA Branch 857

Region 2:
Anchorage, AK Branch 4319
Boise, ID Branch 331
Portland, OR Branch 82
Seattle, WA Branch 79

Region 3:
Illinois State Association

Region 4:
Arizona Merged Branch 1902
Oklahoma City, OK Branch 1358
Tulsa, OK Branch 1358

Region 5:
Iowa State Association
Kansas State Association
Missouri State Association
Nebraska State Association
Kansas City, MO Branch 30
St. Louis, MO Branch 343

Region 6:
Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56
Hammond, IN Branch 580
Indianapolis, IN Branch 39
Niles, MI Branch 775
Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126
South Bend, IN Branch 330
South Macomb MI Branch 4374

Region 7:
Minneapolis, MN Branch 9
St. Paul, MN Branch 28

Region 8:
Mississippi State Association

Region 9:
Florida State Association
South Florida Branch 1071

Region 10:
Texas State Association

Region 11:
Canton, OH Branch 238
Cincinnati, OH Branch 43
Columbus, OH Branch 78
Dayton, OH Branch 182

Watertown, NY Branch 302
Youngstown, OH Branch 385

Region 12:
Great Valley Merged, PA Br. 4317
Harrisburg, PA Branch 500
Philadelphia, PA Branch 157
Southeast PA Merged Branch 725
South Jersey Br. 908

Region 13:
Virginia State Association
West Virginia State Association

Region 14:
Boston, MA Branch 34
MA Northeast Merged Branch 25
New Haven, CT Branch 19

Region 15:
New Jersey State Association
New Jersey Merged Branch 38
New York, NY Branch 36