

Amazon rolls out new delivery fleet

You've probably seen them: vans with the Amazon Prime logo delivering parcels in neighborhoods in various parts of the country. Drivers wearing Amazon-logoed uniforms getting out and delivering the packages to customers' doorsteps. This is just the latest step by the retail giant to expand the last-mile delivery of its products.

News broke late last year that the dotcom had purchased a fleet of 20,000 delivery vehicles and that it would be hiring a workforce to drive them. *Business Insider* reported that the drivers were being hired nationwide, initially as seasonal employees

for the 2018 holiday rush, but noted that many of them would be offered permanent jobs. It was reported that the new, non-union drivers will work up to 12-hour shifts and supplement independent contractors under the Uber-like Amazon Flex delivery program, which is also expanding.

"With the explosion in package volume, these developments won't necessarily reduce the volume of work for the Postal Service," NALC President Fredric Rolando said during the Executive Council installation in December, "but we must nonetheless take notice and ask ourselves new questions."

Rolando said those questions include how to diversify USPS's customer base beyond its reliance on Amazon and whether it makes sense for NALC to consider helping those drivers organize into a union.

"In the past, we've shied away from this issue," Rolando said. "I've concluded that we can no longer do that. One of the top priorities of the new NALC Executive Council will be to grapple with this new development and to devise a response that upholds employment standards in the delivery industry and protects the jobs of America's city letter carriers."

One thing that is not clear from the news reports is whether Amazon is hiring drivers directly as contractors to the company, or whether it is leasing the vehicles to small entrepreneurs—essentially franchisees—who would then hire the drivers.

Either way, Amazon is making a major move into last-mile delivery. The company already has a massive fulfillment network complete with warehouses and a fleet of jets, so a move to take over end-to-end control of the delivery of its products has long been presumed.

Several analysts predict that the company eventually will offer the service to other businesses, in direct competition with USPS, UPS and FedEx.

"Amazon took that approach with its cloud computing business, where it leveraged its own cloud infrastructure and expertise to offer a product to other enterprises," Adam Levy wrote for *The Motley Fool* in November.

"That's now one of its most profitable businesses. It also did the same thing in its retail business as it built out its warehouse footprint and improved its technology to offer fulfillment services for other merchants."

Amazon tests land-based delivery robot

In January, Amazon released video footage of an autonomous delivery robot (nicknamed Scout) delivering packages in a Seattle neighborhood. The six-wheeled bot, which looks like rolling luggage, made its way to a customer's house and popped its lid open. The customer removed the package before Scout continued on to its next delivery.

This is just one of many autonomous delivery devices being developed throughout the world, which include flying drones (see the May 2017 issue of *The Postal Record*) and self-driving vehicles. Another example, in Great Britain—where the post office was privatized and mail delivery was deregulated—involves a startup company called Starship Enterprises that is looking into a mail delivery service with a subscription-based model. For a monthly fee, consumers could have their packages and letters delivered to a Starship warehouse and then schedule delivery by small wheel-based robots about the size of a cooler.

Responding to the development of drone delivery and related innovations, President Rolando said, "As this technology matures, the Postal Service will likely consider adopting it. So, NALC must develop the

expertise to understand and respond to how our work is organized by changing technology. Indeed, because of developments like this, I have been actively participating in the AFL-CIO's Commission on the Future of Work and Unions, serving as chairman of the commission's federal-sector subcommittee." PR





Letter carriers can expect more change to come to the delivery landscape in the years ahead. But that is nothing new for letter carriers.

“The impact of technological change on postal demand is an old story, one that has confronted generations of letter carriers,” Rolando said. “Over the decades, first the telegraph, then the telephone

and the fax machine and eventually the internet have all repeatedly challenged the Postal Service. Each new technology has transformed the way Americans have used mail and the

Post Office. So we’ve had to adapt to the evolving needs of America’s households and businesses over and over again—and we will have to continue doing that in the decades to come.” **PR**

Former Trustee Randall Keller dies

Former NALC Trustee Randall L. Keller died Feb. 6 following a long illness. He was 72.

Born and raised in Medford, MA, Keller entered the Marine Corps in 1964 after graduating from high school. He served in Vietnam as an infantry radioman and then at Camp Lejeune, NC, as an infantry instructor before his honorable discharge at the rank of sergeant in 1968.

Keller graduated from Boston State College in 1975 with a bachelor’s degree in philosophy with a minor in business administration. He began his career as a letter carrier in Reading, MA, in 1982, joining Massachusetts Northeast Merged Branch 25. He became an activist in the branch, he said, after “witnessing management’s disrespect and abuse of letter carriers.” Keller began as a steward, Mutual Benefit Association representative, Step 2 grievance designee and branch executive board member before being elected branch president in 1990—an office he held for 20 years.

Keller was first elected to the national board of trustees in 1998 at the 61st Biennial Convention in Las Vegas. He was re-elected four times and retired

from the position in 2018 shortly before the end of his fifth term.

Keller is survived by two daughters and a son-in-law, Jennifer L. and Scott Bradish and Joy A. Keller of Haverhill, a son and daughter-in-law, Grant C. and April Keller, his fiancé, Mary E. Tinglov, two brothers, Douglas Keller and Scott Keller, two sisters Laraine Cowan and Kristine Jannini and three grandchildren, Riley Bradish, Ashley Bradish and Audrey Keller.



“Randy was an unwavering advocate for his fellow letter carriers, as well as a decorated veteran and beloved family man,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “We extend our sympathies to his family and will remember the role he played in making his union even stronger.”

In lieu of flowers, donations in memory of Randall Keller may be made to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, P.O. Box 849168, Boston, MA 02284. **PR**