

Reaching out



**Philip
Dine**

I'm writing this nine years to the day since I began at NALC, and one reason I enjoy this job is the dedication shown by so many of you who have engaged in—let me amend that, who have led—the effort to change the national conversation about the Postal Service and to disabuse the public, politicians and press of the misleading conventional wisdom.

From the perspective of more than 30 years of involvement with the nexus between labor and communications, I can tell you that nothing like it is happening now—or has happened in recent memory—in the U.S. union movement.

You get the message out through letters and op-eds or through interviews with reporters. Increasingly, you alert us to misleading articles or editorials so we can respond in real time.

A prime example of the latter occurred a few days ago. A letter carrier from Delaware read something he didn't like in *Barron's*, the weekly financial magazine published since 1921 by Dow Jones & Co., publisher also of the *Wall Street Journal*. But this carrier didn't merely notify us; he first engaged with the article's writer.

The article in question discussed postal red ink as well as alleged problems with pension funding. Aubrey Fisher, who carried mail from 1968 to 2008 and who's a 51-year member of Newark (DE) Branch 1977, read it, didn't feel it gave the full story and sprang into action, telling the writer what he thought of the piece and providing additional information.

Then he proceeded to let us know about the article and about the back-and-forth, which had been candid on both sides. That helped us cut to the chase when we spoke with the reporter.

The article struck a chord with Fisher partly because he regularly delivered *Barron's*—one of the world's leading finance and investment magazines—during his years on the route.

"It was a nice neighborhood, and people would sometimes say, 'Mr. Fisher, where's my *Barron's*?' I knew it was a respected publication. So, I would assume that, as a well-respected financial entity, they would do their research."

Fisher said he'd reached out to reporters on five or six prior occasions ("I just want them to know that there's people out here reading their stuff") and that "he's the first one who ever responded to me."

As a result, we were able to have several constructive

conversations with the reporter, a senior writer at *Barron's*. To his credit, he expressed an interest in learning more about—and writing about—the impact of postal pre-funding on the financial situation. Just a couple of days later, he published an informative story about the USPS quarterly financial report that explained the roles of pre-funding and the stamp price decrease in the red ink, showed how postal pensions and future health benefits are well funded, cited the role of public policy, quoted President Rolando—and noted that "USPS is still the best-loved federal agency."

Wow. Article One to Article Two; night and day.

Fisher grew up in a household where his father was a union pipefitter. At 19, he was earning \$2.20 an hour at a unionized pulp and paper plant. He took the postal test and was offered a job for \$2.25 an hour. As he recalls thinking, "I'm not going there for a nickel. I'm working inside. Why should I be walking around outside?" But then: "My mom said take it; they have better benefits."

He started in the summer of '68, by fall received his draft notice and spent four years in the Navy; part of it "chasing Cuban gunboats." In June of '72 he returned to his route, always working out of the same Newark post office, and never looked back.

"I loved that route," he said. "I liked being out in the neighborhoods with the people. I saw kids grow up."

Along the way, Fisher served as branch president, "held every position in the branch other than sergeant-at-arms," and was vice president of the Delaware State Association.

What makes NALC's communications effort particularly powerful is that the grassroots drive is complemented by strong leadership at the top. Just a few days ago, President Rolando commented for a story on Sunday delivery in the *Wall Street Journal*, arguably the nation's most-influential newspaper, while Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe was quoted in an article by the Weather Channel that dealt with worker safety in extreme heat.

This has been from the start, and continues to be, a collective effort—which of course makes sense. After all, that's what unions are about, isn't it?

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