

The voices of the branches

How scribes are representing their communities

During this pandemic, it has become both more important and more difficult for branches and state associations to stay connected to their members. Fortunately, *The Postal Record* already has a platform for individual branches to report local news and address topics specific to their communities. Every month, this magazine receives dozens of submissions from branch, state and retiree scribes all over the country, who send in articles on subjects ranging from describing working conditions and voicing perspectives on new legislative proposals to congratulating retiring members and reporting on community services.

These scribes are a valuable resource for NALC, as they inform members using their own experience and local knowledge. We spoke to a sample of scribes to get their opinions and advice on their often overlooked but critical role in the union. For more information on how to become a scribe, see “How to become a scribe” on the next page and consult with your local officers.

Tony Rodriguez has been the branch scribe for Knoxville, TN Branch 419 for eight years, and has continued to fulfill the scribe role alongside his duties as branch secretary. Rodriguez says that his writing process can be quite time-consuming. “I learned from college to do a draft and then come back later and see how it reads,” he said. “I can do two to three drafts before I send it to the [branch] president to review.” However, he added, the actual time spent writing the article is much shorter: “Once I get into the flow of it, I can bang it out in 10 minutes.”

Rodriguez says that one of the most challenging aspects of being the scribe is finding ideas every month. To do so, he taps his best resources: his fellow officers and the branch members (particularly retirees). “Sometimes, I’ll use the branch meeting itself,” he said.

He likes to highlight retirees because of the wisdom and authority they can bring to a column. “They are really the core of a branch,” he explained. “They are speaking from experience.”

The scribe says that he is always pleased to hear from members about his column. “They’ll come up to me and they’ll say, ‘Good column,’ or they’ll give me ideas,” he said. Occasionally, Rodriguez even receives recognition from the wider NALC community. “I’ll run into people at the [national] convention, and they’ll say, ‘Are you the guy from Tennessee? Great article!’ ”

JoAnn Gilbaugh also has received plenty of feedback in her 10-year tenure as branch scribe for Minneapolis, MN Branch 9. “At first, I didn’t think anyone read them,” she admitted, so she was surprised when she attended a retirement celebration and one of the retirees shook her hand and quoted one of her recent columns. “Getting the feedback is amazing,” she said.

Unlike Rodriguez, Gilbaugh says that she doesn’t like to write drafts—“the majority of the time, [the column] is something I can do in one fell swoop,” she said. For her ideas, she waits for something to “strike a chord” with her. She added with a laugh, “A lot of the topics come from conversations I have with people, where they’ll say something and I’ll say, ‘I’m going to [use] that.’ ”

Gilbaugh says that the most difficult time to write is when there hasn’t been much happening at the branch, adding, “I’m not good at forcing something onto a piece of paper.” But her favorite part about writing? “I get to talk about things that are important to me,” she said. “Things that maybe aren’t being spotlighted elsewhere.”

“I really enjoy the ability to remind people that we are a union,” Gilbaugh continued, “and give examples of how we are stronger together.”

Leslie Hammett has written for two branches in her 33 years as a letter carrier—Fort Worth, TX Branch 226, and her current branch, Las Vegas, NV Branch 2502. In her time as a scribe, she says, she never has been “at a loss for subjects” to write about. “I just need to listen to the letter carriers around me,” she said. “They are a never-ending source of inspiration.”

Hammett adds that she is constantly thinking about her article throughout the month, “but when I actually sit down to write, it takes on a life of its own,” she said. “Scribe articles bind all of the union members together.”

The branch scribe for Southeast Pennsylvania Merged Branch 725, **Eric Jackson**, has been representing his branch in the pages of *The Postal Record* since 2009. “I try to be topical—and as direct as I am in real life,” he said. When he started writing the Branch Item, he also was writing daily posts on the branch’s website, so he learned quickly how to find writing inspiration. In fact, the most difficult part for Jackson is the 300-word limit. “My columns are usually 300 words on the dot,” he said with a laugh.

Jackson says that he views his column as small articles embedded in the magazine that give him the opportunity to communicate with many members, even those who cannot attend branch meetings. “I’ve gotten so much positive feedback,” he added. “[Members] will come up and tell me, ‘As soon as I get *The Postal Record*, I turn to your article.’ ” The feedback “lets [me] know that what [I’m] doing is important,” he said.

Scott Van Derven is the president and state scribe for the Wisconsin State Association; he has served in the position since his election to the presidency in 2010. As state scribe, his goals are slightly different than those of the branch scribes. “I am generally writing

