

Our NALC home in Washington, DC



**Paul
Barner**

As assistant secretary-treasurer, I have the awesome responsibility of overseeing the operations of the NALC Headquarters building. In this role, I am tasked with the overall maintenance and care of the members' house. Our headquarters building is located at 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC, and is a landmark in its own right. Despite working at the building for a few years now, it never gets old seeing our remarkable headquarters nestled within the surrounding historical landscape of our nation's capitol.

If you've never been to Washington, DC, or never studied a map of the area, you might not know that

the NALC Headquarters building sits in a prominent location at the foot of Capitol Hill. The office of the NALC president has the most spectacular view of the Capitol building, which is just across the street from the front entrance of the NALC building. When NALC purchased the site, it was one of the last available for development adjacent to the U.S. Capitol grounds. The total cost: \$1.7 million.

NALC Headquarters was first dedicated on Aug. 31, 1952. According to historical records, in 1943, then-NALC President William C. Doherty persuaded the members to accept a dues increase and create a special building fund. At the time, NALC did not have a home of its own and was actually renting two rooms at the AFL building.

Along the way, individual members, branches, district and state associations, and auxiliaries were making contributions as well. Donations even were sent from servicemen during World War II from the front lines. In fact, the first floor meeting hall at Headquarters is named for Fred B. Hutchings of Syracuse, NY Branch 134, who left \$35,000 for the building when he died in 1949—the largest individual gift to the fund. Today, Hutchings Hall is used for meetings and receptions and is occasionally rented out for events.

The original building had eight floors and allowed NALC to bring the Mutual Benefits Association (MBA) headquarters from Nashville and the National Sick Benefit Association from Boston to Washington, DC. The new building meant that NALC, for the first time in history, could all be under one roof.

Then in 1962, an eight-story annex was added, primarily to accommodate growth of the Health Benefit Plan. Today, the Health Benefit Plan is located in Ashburn, VA, a suburb of Washington. The MBA, however, remains at Headquarters and occupies the entire fifth floor of the building.

Currently, NALC occupies six of the eight floors. Historically, NALC has leased floors of the building for extra income. Past tenants have included Teamsters, Meatcutters, Railway Mail Clerks, Flight Attendants and other government groups. Today, NALC has the third floor available for leasing. The fourth floor is currently occupied by a tenant.

In recognition of the contributions of President Vincent R. Sombrotto, the 16th president of NALC, the delegates of NALC's 65th biennial convention adopted a resolution to name the NALC's National Headquarters building in his honor. On July 22, 2008, the NALC Headquarters building was officially named the Vincent R. Sombrotto Building, and a bust of President Emeritus Sombrotto was prominently placed at the entrance to the building, where it remains today.

Another unique feature of your Headquarters building is its outer shell, made of unpolished, high-quality Vermont marble. There are only a few other buildings in Washington, DC, with marble from the same quarry—including the U.S. Supreme Court building and the Jefferson Memorial—making the NALC building architecturally significant.

Your Headquarters building is in extremely good condition, inside and out, thanks to the many employees whose job it is to help maintain it. NALC employs a full-time painter, two full-time engineers and two full-time guards. All are union employees and they take great pride in being stewards of your building. And along with maintaining the building comes the ongoing task of renovation to keep the interior areas of the building functional, safe and up-to-date. As of the writing of this article, the Hutchings Hall auditorium is undergoing a makeover to refresh the dated interior design and add state-of-the-art audio/visual capability.

I encourage you to visit Headquarters if you are ever in Washington. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tours of the building for visiting members were given quite frequently by members of the NALC staff—something we hope to get back to doing in the near future. It's always enjoyable to meet a member, and often his or her family, on any given day as they were touring the building. No appointment is necessary for a tour; you just need to come in and ask. It is, after all, *your* building.