

Postal vignettes



Philip Dine

The *New York Times Magazine* approached with an ambitious photo/essay national project chronicling postal employees' election work, given vote-by-mail's historic role. They wanted 15 letter carriers. We planned, internal NYT delays ensued, the project narrowed to Florida, time was short. An efficient Lynne Pendleton, Region 9 national business agent, stepped up with Sunshine State prospects. The first draft of history was published, under the headline "America has never needed its postal workers more," with the subhead "Couriers of Democracy."

Detroit Tigers fans were treated to a (virtual) first pitch by 27-year letter carrier and longtime Branch 1 steward Benjamin Dixon at a First Pitch Friday game recognizing front-line workers. Tiger executives reached out to regional USPS folks, who selected Ben. At a postal facility, they videotaped his pitch and provided talking points. Ben requested a pen and paper; easier to memorize his own words, he said. They chose not to argue with a Marine veteran. Ben mentioned his postal job, encouraged social distancing and face masks, and closed with: "On behalf of the United States Postal Service, GO TIGERS!!!"

The call was from a New Jersey letter carrier's widow. John F. Twilight, 96, carried mail from February 1950 to January 1981. Ann Twilight hoped her husband, a Jersey City Branch 42 member, would be listed in *The Postal Record*. She wanted to do this for him, she said, adding that he was a World War II Army veteran (and ardent Brooklyn Dodgers fan who had a farm team offer but returned home with a damaged leg). Informed that the next issue, our veterans cover, would include John, Ann was beyond grateful. "It's important to honor our veterans," she said. It is, Ann, and thanks for helping make that happen.

Region 4 NBA Dan Versluis was describing how it played out when folks uncomfortable with other races joined the Marine Corps: "You go through boot camp, then start doing combat exercises, and you realize very quickly, your life may depend on your brother next to you." Whatever their initial attitudes, Black and white Marines "would take a bullet for each other." Well into a fascinating conversation, I posed my question—and realized I'd called the wrong guy. I'd meant to ask Region 2 NBA Nick Vafiades about a media/postal matter. My mistake, but fortuitous. And, perhaps, understandable? Not only do they oversee adjacent regions, have names starting with "V" that require study to spell or pronounce, both are plainspoken, eight-year Marine veterans, shaping their views of leadership,

cohesion and duty—and providing NALC with an embarrassment of riches in that section of the country.

Uniting some topics above: racial justice, military service, Florida and letter carriers who began long ago. Lloyd N. Pearson Jr. signed on in October 1942 as a special delivery messenger, riding the train daily from his native Jacksonville to St. Petersburg and back. The job involved carrying a weapon, and though Lloyd prudently stayed onboard during stops, "In some small towns, people would stand outside and look at you through the window, see a black [postal] clerk, see the badge on your belt, the pistol on your belt, and they would stare a little harder," he said. Lloyd switched to the carrier craft in 1947, encountering racially separate post office restrooms/water fountains. Soon, he joined the Navy Reserve, guarding the East Coast as a ship gunner two weeks a year. The civil rights movement beckoned; he delivered mail and championed racial equality, serving Northeast Florida Branch 53 as treasurer and scribe alongside NAACP leadership roles—delegate to 20 NALC national conventions and 25 NAACP ones. Lloyd hung up his satchel in January 1977; this month marks 44 years of retirement. The first dozen, Lloyd took a folding card table outside stores and schools, registering 35,000 voters in Duval County: "I got trained just after I retired. I was on a good pension, so I gave my time for free." I called him after receiving a branch photo of his 99th birthday celebration in November from Bob Henning. When Bob was elected Branch 53 president in 2010, Lloyd, 89, "faithfully" attended retiree meetings and helped in various ways, as now. Bob's summary: "This guy is unbelievable."

Amid a contentious election, a Wisconsin respite arrived in the form of a letter to the editor about letter carriers collecting letters to Santa on their routes. "No postage is required...Santa has a busy crew standing by to answer and reply to all your letters," Chris Paige of Racine Branch 436 wrote. The Dec. 7 deadline "is flexible...merry band of elves will always take stragglers up until Christmas!" Thanks to this 30-year letter carrier, assistant vice president and branch scribe for some joyous reading. And for adding to the Paige postal presence in America's newspapers. (If the allusion escapes anyone, feel free to ask.)

EDITORIAL STAFF:
Director of Communications and Media Relations Philip Dine
Designer/Web Editor Mike Shea
Writer/Editor Rick Hodges
Writer/Editor Jenessa Wagner
Editorial Assistant Clare Foley

The Postal Record (ISSN 0032-5376) is published monthly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

Subscription included in membership dues. First-class subscription available for \$20 per year (contact Membership Department).

© 2021 by the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Circulation: 287,000. Union-printed using soy-based inks.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS? Contact the Membership Department.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube by going to NALC.org.

