

Joint NALC-USPS pilot program for COVID-19 testing held in New York City

In May, NALC and USPS began jointly testing a program to help contain the spread of COVID-19 in postal facilities by taking temperatures of postal employees as they enter a facility, as well as by providing rapid-result COVID tests. The test continued for a 30-day period.

At the Morgan General Mail Facility in New York City, employees stop at the door to have their temperatures checked with a non-contact, hand-held thermometer. While most of the employees there are postal clerks, about 100 letter carriers represented by New York Branch 36 also work in the building.

Under the pilot program, which follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, if an

employee has a temperature of 100.3 degrees or above, he or she is directed to an isolated area for a follow-up temperature check to confirm the first reading. If the employee still shows an elevated temperature, the employee may opt to take a quick-result COVID-19 test on site, administered by a nurse in an isolated room in the facility, or to go home and use a COVID-19 test mailed to his or her home by USPS. The employee will not be charged for either test. COVID-19 testing is also made available to employees who have not shown an elevated temperature.

An employee who goes home after showing a high temperature and who does not have a positive COVID-19 test result may return to the facility on his

or her next scheduled workday and, if the temperature registers below 100.3 degrees, return to work.

An employee who is sent home with an elevated temperature and has an elevated temperature when returning to work must follow the current USPS return-to-work protocol for COVID-19 infection before returning to work again. An employee who was sent home and tested positive for COVID-19, or who is advised to stay home by a medical professional, also must follow the protocol.

The month-long pilot program seemed to be working smoothly, according to Branch 36 President **Charlie Heege**. “I haven’t heard any complaints from any carriers so far,” he said. **PR**

CCA retention pilot program started

NALC and the Postal Service have launched a joint pilot program designed to improve the experience of newly hired letter carriers and to prompt more new carriers to stick with the job.

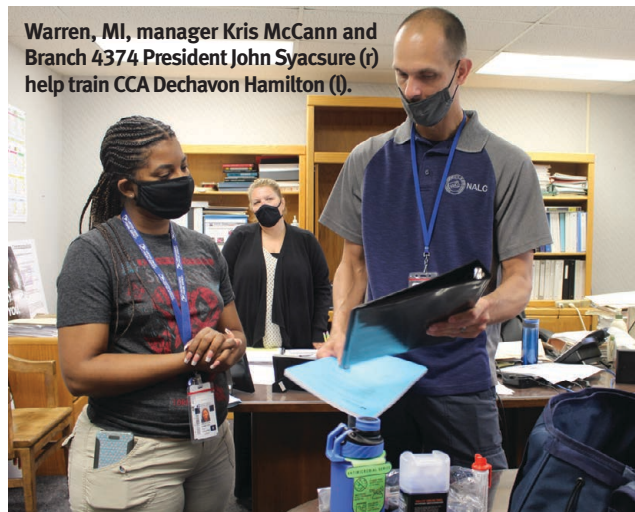
Many city carrier assistants (CCAs) and part-time flexibles (PTFs) find the job tough at first—the long hours, physical work and steep learning curve take their toll. Unfortunately, too many new hires quit within a few months. The experience is not only an unpleasant way to start the job as a carrier; it’s a waste of time and resources when new hires leave.

The pilot program began in May in the main post office in Warren, MI, and in the West Milwaukee station in Milwaukee. The program involves various new and modified practices for all CCAs and PTFs in these offices. It is scheduled to run for about a year.

The pilot program focuses on improving the experience of new carriers from Day One. Designed together by NALC and USPS, it includes a variety of improvements, such as a structured welcome, better training, limits on work hours during the carrier’s first six weeks on the job, more consistent route assignment and availability of necessary supplies and information needed to do the job.

“This joint program has the potential to assure that new letter carriers start their jobs on the right foot and stay long enough to enjoy the rewards of carrying the mail,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “It’s a win-win.”

Under the program, new carriers receive the attention and materials they need for success, with a welcome



Warren, MI, manager Kris McCann and Branch 4374 President John Syacsure (r) help train CCA Dechavon Hamilton (l).

checklist for supervisors to use to assure that all bases are covered. On their first day, carriers are handed a welcome package—a satchel with items inside such as a USPS cap, vest, water bottle and dog spray.

Before their Carrier Academy training concludes, new carriers will receive information such as the address of their employing office where they are scheduled to report, and the proper shoes and clothing to wear for their first days on the route. The pilot includes a Day One office tour introducing the new employee to the station, to other employees, and to union representatives. The new carriers will receive essential information such as how to contact supervisors or stewards as well as the location of safety and other employee bulletin boards and emergency exits.

“The goal of the pilot program is to give new carriers what they need to succeed and to feel welcome,” Rolando said.

The program includes additional help for CCAs as they ease into the job. After completion of Carrier Academy and On-the Job Instruction, the pilot program encourages stability in route assignments with gradual increases in workload to help promote confidence in the new employee. The program ensures that once the new carrier is out delivering a route alone, both a steward and a supervisor will check on the CCA on a regular basis. The pilot program also restricts new carriers to working only in their employing office for the first four weeks following completion of Carrier Academy.

A new carrier’s weekly hours will be capped at eight hours a day and 40 hours a week for the first two weeks, and 10 hours a day and 56 hours a week for the next two weeks, followed by a limit of 11.5 hours a day and 60 hours a week.

The pilot program also assures that CCAs receive frequent check-ins to

track their success and provide help when they need it, including ensuring that they receive the required evaluations at 30, 60 and 80 days into the job. During these progress reviews, management will identify opportunities for improvement, offer constructive feedback, and consider whether additional training could benefit the new carrier.

Throughout the pilot program, CCAs will be asked for feedback, including through surveys, to evaluate the program’s effectiveness.

High turnover among CCAs has been an ongoing concern since the CCA position was created in 2013. As part of negotiations for the 2019-2023 National Agreement, NALC and USPS agreed to form a joint City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force, with a renewed commitment to improving the experience and retention of newly hired CCAs as part of its agenda.

A subcommittee of the task force composed of NALC and USPS representatives studied the issue. It relied heavily on input from CCAs about their initial experience joining USPS, gathered through several focus groups.

Using this information, the subcommittee developed the pilot program and agreed in a memorandum of un-

derstanding (MOU Re: New Employee Experience and Retention Program) to test it. For a detailed explanation of everything the pilot program entails, see M-01949 in NALC’s Materials Reference System in the “Resources” section of the NALC website or at nalc.org/mrs.

“In the long run, the pilot program is part of an effort to improve the overall culture at USPS,” Rolando said.

“Letter carriers, especially new CCAs, need to know that the Postal Service gives them room for work-life balance and respects them,” he added. “This collaborative effort is a great first step in transforming USPS for the benefit of both the Service and its employees.”

Several provisions in the new National Agreement improve the status of all CCAs, Rolando noted, including removal of the lowest pay step to boost their starting pay, an increase in the employer contribution for health care benefits and a guarantee of conversion to career status within 24 months of their hire date.

“We can all do our part to help our new carriers—who are the future or our union, after all—by supporting them as they join our ranks,” Rolando said. “Let’s welcome newly hired carriers and give them a helping hand.” **PR**



Letter carrier Lakeyia Terry (l) provides on-the-job training to newly hired CCA Robert Hessel in Warren, MI.