

# Mail, carriers, multimedia



**Philip  
Dine**

**T**wo Cleveland girls spent six months researching/producing a film about free mail delivery's origins and value for the annual National History Day competition. Amid 600,000 contestants in 50 states, 12-year-old twins Aanya and Siya Lakireddy soared.

The judges liked the narration, praised their source material—and reveled in the topic. The sisters captured third place in Cleveland's regional contest, then third again in Ohio's April 26 state competition. They also won the American History Film Project Prize, so their 10-minute documentary will remain available online.

This year's theme: Communications in History.

"The mail has always been delivered to us by letter carriers," Aanya says.

"I wanted to find out how that happened. We should be grateful, because mail is really what started communication among people."

Siya adds, "I learned a lot about free mail delivery and the first mail carrier. Joseph Briggs invented something that would actually change the world today."

After their mother, Manjula, read in a local history newsletter that Cleveland's Briggs had pioneered free delivery in 1863, they approached NALC in March. We sent them a *Postal Record* article as a primary source. The documentary's credits lead with NALC and include the Postal Service, Library of Congress and National Postal Museum.

"Whenever I see a mail carrier now, I make sure I wave to them," Manjula says, "because I have so much respect for them."

Social studies teacher Connie Miller, who oversees the history contest at their school, was fascinated to learn how free mail delivery began: "The fact that it wasn't always there really surprised me. We take so much for granted."

Now this award-winning teacher plans to add it to a curriculum list of "outstanding" local history topics.

View the film at [americanhistoryfilmproject.org/improving-communication-through-mail](http://americanhistoryfilmproject.org/improving-communication-through-mail).

**NALC's retirement community for letter carriers has received** widespread media attention, but is about to get rarified coverage in a scholarly journal—because an accomplished academic finds the place "really cool."

Nalcrest will grace the pages of *Arris: Journal of the Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians*, thanks to Anna Andrzejewski, a University of Wisconsin professor specializing in the social history of architecture. Her research included NALC archives at Wayne State University, old *Postal Record* articles, and a visit to Nalcrest.

Dual factors intrigued her: Nalcrest's unique nature, and its success.

"It looks like the postwar suburbs of the 1950s and 1960s in a lot of ways, single-family row houses and more," Anna says. "But people don't go to work, and there are no playgrounds. That's why Nalcrest is so cool. It looks like a suburb, it acts like a suburb, but it's not a suburb."

The developer tried to build other retirement communities, "but they all failed," she observes. "Nalcrest succeeded because of the strength of the union. I came away from my visit with the sense that the commitment is still there. I think that's a testament to the union."

**Boston Branch 34's Anthony Denucche's preferred medium** for his music with a twist is television. The 24-year letter carrier plays molar music—tapping his teeth with his fingers. He started in third grade, while trying to think of test answers. Others enjoyed it, so he kept with it.

"I didn't really pursue it," Anthony says. "I have a career. But people keep asking me to do it, so I just go with the flow, and as you can see, it's taken me places."

To David Letterman's show. "The Gong Show." Professional baseball stadiums. Now, to "America's Got Talent," summertime's biggest TV show. After two home video auditions in February, he was among 200 (of 200,000 aspirants) invited to perform in California before judges Howie, Simon, Heidi and Sofia.

"I was surrounded by talent from all over the world," Anthony says. "I'm thinking, 'I'm just a mailman.'"

Before ushering Anthony on stage, actor/host Terry Crews encouraged him: "Do it for your letter carriers!"

"I told the audience I was a mailman," Anthony recounts, "and that during the pandemic we've seen many of our customers losing their job, having to quarantine, and the best we can do is try to deliver a smile for them every day."

"I got a standing ovation. I didn't expect it. Twenty-five seconds is a long time to stand there, as people just clapped. I kept saying 'Thank you'; they just kept going. I sort of teared up."

The 200 filmed tryouts will air Tuesdays, June to September, with the judges choosing 44 contestants for live TV in September, when Americans vote for the ultimate winner. Anthony thinks letter carriers already have succeeded.

"It's good for us. I think speaking for the Post Office, that was the drawing point. They appreciated my story, our story."

Anthony can be found on Instagram at [@anthony\\_molarman](https://www.instagram.com/anthony_molarman) or on YouTube by searching "Anthony the Molar Man."

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