

Solidarity is a secret to our success



**Fredric V.
Rolando**

As I approach the end of my time as president of the NALC, I've been reflecting on what an extraordinary privilege it has been to serve our union and its amazing membership. It is easy to take the unity and solidarity of the NALC for granted—as if an open shop union (where membership is voluntary) with 93 percent affiliation is no big deal. In fact, it's a very big deal that has been built step by step by more than a million fellow letter carriers from every corner of the country over more than a century. It's truly an honor to be part of this spectacular union.

Our success as a union was built by becoming a strong voice in Congress for our members' interests and by battling for our members at the bargaining table—our central and most important functions. That's true. But there is a larger force at work as well—our service to the common good also contributes to our strength as a union. The most obvious way we do this is to defend the Postal Service and affordable universal service for the American people. But we also do it in a variety of other ways, for our members and for the general public.

For example, over the past few weeks, as I've watched our Disaster Relief Foundation spring into action to lend aid and assistance to dozens and dozens of members adversely affected by hurricanes Fiona and Ian in Puerto Rico, and in Florida and the Carolinas, respectively, I've been reminded once again of what makes me so proud to be an NALC member. Thanks to all of you who have made donations to the foundation, we have been able to step up for members who have lost everything due to the hurricanes. Emergency grants of financial assistance have been issued, supplies and replacement uniforms are being distributed, and a team of NALC officers and staff visited southwest Florida to provide help to members who are perhaps facing the most difficult days of their lives. That we can do that for each other is a beautiful thing that highlights the value of brotherhood and sisterhood made possible by a deeply rooted sense of solidarity in the NALC.

That same spirit infuses a broad array of NALC activities aimed at serving the broader public in the cities and towns where letter carriers live and work. At our convention

in Chicago, I marveled at how quickly the NALC Veterans Group, now 18,273 strong, has in just a few short years turned into a force for good. The Ruck March on the third day of the convention raised more than \$25,000 for homeless veterans in Chicago—an amount that was matched by the national union via a convention resolution.

We also got reports on the post-pandemic return of the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive and the renewal of our decades-long efforts to raise money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. As we have for decades, we are once again collecting millions of pounds of food for our local food banks, and we are once again raising millions of dollars for the MDA.

In Chicago, we also celebrated our non-partisan role in pushing states to make it easier to vote through our work with the National Vote at Home Institute, which we helped found in 2017 to combat growing voter suppression. That proved especially vital as a public health matter during the pandemic, as the percentage of Americans who voted by mail nearly doubled between 2016 and 2020 (from 25 percent to 46 percent).

The pride our members take in serving the public extends far beyond delivering the mail to more broadly serving our fellow citizens. I believe our culture of solidarity and service is a superpower of our union. It is what makes it possible for a wildly diverse group of workers to come together to not just confront shared workplace challenges, but also to commit the time and resources to fight hunger, disease and hardship faced by our fellow citizens, and to secure their voting rights.

Social solidarity is a role of the labor movement in general. When Hurricane Fiona devastated Puerto Rico, the AFL-CIO helped coordinate relief efforts within hours. NALC contributed to the relief fund that the federation established, and several unions (the Seafarers, Machinists and Teamsters) organized the logistics of shipping supplies donated by unions from four ports on the U.S. mainland directly to our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico. At the same time, our Disaster Relief Foundation worked closely with our branches in Puerto Rico to lend a hand. Nobody has to ask us, we just do it.

All this leaves me feeling hopeful about the future, despite America's deep political divisions and the economic challenges we face in the wake of the pandemic. Public approval of labor unions is at a near all-time high (65 percent, according to Gallup) and union organizing efforts are surging all over the country. That's happening because the public sees unions like ours fighting for our members but also fighting for their fellow citizens. I am proud that the NALC is doing its part to revive the labor movement, and to heal and strengthen our country with solidarity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fredric Rolando'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.