

## Ongoing efforts to appropriately staff our craft



**Brian  
Renfroe**

**I**n recent months, I've written in multiple *Postal Record* articles about the staffing challenges that have surfaced in post offices around the country. The reasons for these challenges are both external and internal within the Postal Service.

Externally, the world around us has an impact. A highly competitive job market with very low unemployment and rising wages makes it more difficult to hire in many locations. In some locations, the Postal Service is unable to get enough applicants for jobs.

Internally, high attrition rates in our craft have been an increasing problem. Unnecessary delays in the Postal Service's hiring practices

also negatively impact its ability to staff in some areas.

Anyone can see that high attrition combined with difficulty hiring is a recipe for disaster. Unfortunately, we have seen disaster in a number of installations around the country. Inadequate staffing harms our ability to service our customers and negatively affects letter carriers in several ways.

It is easy to point out problems—and there is no doubt that this is a problem. It is important to understand the causes of a problem to be in the best position to address it. Developing solutions and strategies to address problems is where the real work takes place.

In January of this year, I wrote in *The Postal Record* about these issues and called on my counterparts at USPS Headquarters to join with the NALC to improve those matters because our customers and NALC members need relief. We have made some progress over the last year or so, but thankfully that progress has accelerated over the last couple of months.

**Let's look at the problem of hiring. This issue can be** divided into a couple of categories. First, there is the issue of seemingly having sufficient applicants, but difficulty onboarding enough employees.

One of the subcommittees of the City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force is devoted to addressing complement-related issues in our craft. This joint group of NALC and USPS representatives has developed a comprehensive process for reviewing complement, which includes examining hiring practices. We sometimes see issues with delays in the required pre-employment processes that result in those in the hiring process taking

another job before they are cleared for training as a city letter carrier.

Pre-employment processes are being expedited as much as possible. The Postal Service is exploring potential changes to allow for more rapid onboarding. We will continue engaging on this issue and hope to see further improvements going forward.

**The second part of hiring difficulty is where we simply** don't get enough applicants to appropriately staff. In the August edition of *The Postal Record*, I wrote about a new agreement (M-01986 in the Materials Reference System) that moves 22 installations to an all-career model. In these 22 installations, all city carrier assistants (CCAs) have been converted to career status. As of this writing, these 22 installations are hiring part-time flexible (PTF) career letter carriers to reach the number of PTFs indicated in M-01986 for each of the 22 installations.

Since that time, we have worked with our USPS counterparts to take the information that NALC branches all over the country have provided, as well as a district-by-district review process, to identify additional installations to move to the all-career model. In early August, we agreed (M-01988) to add 43 additional installations to the all-career model in M-01986. We are constantly working with our USPS counterparts to complete reviews all over the country as quickly as possible to identify installations where we can reach agreement to move to this all-career model to improve hiring.

**In the spring of 2021, we reached agreement with** USPS on a pilot program, the New Employee Experience and Retention Program (M-01949). Later, in the summer of 2021, we reached agreement on another pilot program, the New Employee Mentoring Program (M-01961). Both programs build a joint structure around creating the best possible experience for newly hired letter carriers. Between the two pilots, they include structuring work hours early in careers, utilizing joint communication to help new letter carriers learn, and having a mentoring process where seasoned letter carriers serve as mentors.

These programs have been overwhelmingly successful. Retention rates in some locations have jumped from as low as 50 percent to 95 percent and higher. There is one exception to this level of success—locations with staffing issues.

**Customers and letter carriers need adequate staffing** levels. Most of the service issues and contractual compliance issues can be traced back to staffing problems. Letter carriers are overworked in offices with poor staffing levels. We will continue to work on these staffing issues until every installation in the Postal Service is addressed.