

Supporting each other is solidarity



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There are several foundational elements of unions. Solidarity is probably the most common of these. In its definition is a key phrase that speaks to strengthening solidarity—“mutual support within a group.” Our union’s history of supporting one another is strong. Over the years, we have expanded the many forms of this support.

Representation always has been, is, and always will be the primary focus of NALC at all levels. This representation comes in several forms.

First, there is enforcement of our collective-bargaining agreement. The majority of our time,

energy and resources at the branch, regional and national levels is dedicated to representing our members in the grievance-arbitration procedure. Any leader in NALC will tell you that while representation often relies on individuals to process grievances and to advocate for the union, success happens when there is support from the group of members being represented.

Over the last decade-plus, our union has increased what we do to represent injured letter carriers. Our legislative and political representation has improved tremendously by becoming more sophisticated and influential on Capitol Hill.

Additionally, the establishment of the NALC Disaster Relief Foundation (DRF) has grown into an irreplaceable source of relief and assistance for our members affected by natural disasters. In many cases, the DRF is the first to provide assistance to these members dealing with severe difficulties.

These sources of support for our members might start as an idea by an individual or a few, but the growth and success of each is directly attributable to the mutual support within the membership. This support comes in many forms, but it leads to the ultimate goal of everything we do—to represent, assist and support the members of our union, particularly those in need.

Most recently, we have seen our new NALC Emergency Response Team (ERT) quickly provide an entirely different level of support for our members affected by critical incidents in or related to our fellow members or in the workplace.

The ERT began as an idea I had about exploring what we could do to help our members facing difficult circumstances. The initial thought was rooted in what I know about the

members of our union: If given the opportunity and information necessary to help fellow members, they will not only do so, but will go above and beyond.

In March, we held a training for 30 activists selected to learn how they could support our members in these situations. Director of Safety and Health Manny Peralta, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Mack Julion, a number of NALC Headquarters staff members, and outside professionals produced an excellent week of learning for those who attended. I am very appreciative of their efforts in the initial training as well as in the implementation and deployment of this program.

Immediately after the training, NALC members began to be deployed to visit our members who faced difficulties due to circumstances such as the loss of a co-worker or a significant accident or incident. The fantastic group we trained communicates and provides support for our members who unfortunately are exposed to the troubles that come naturally following loss or other traumatic incidents.

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I want to express my appreciation to the NALC ERT members. Walking into these situations isn’t easy. But as has always been the case, our members surpass expectations any time they are given the chance to help letter carriers.

Going forward, we are planning to provide further training to the ERT on topics such as suicide awareness and prevention. We intend to expand the services the ERT can offer on a peer-to-peer basis in the future, as well as train more ERT members.

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