

How regional offices work for you

The *Postal Record* often brings you articles about the work done at the NALC Headquarters-level, but much is done to serve letter carriers across the country in the NALC's 15 regional offices.

NALC's national administration is grouped into 15 regions, each directed by an elected national business agent (NBA). Every region also employs at least two regional administrative assistants (RAAs) to assist the NBAs, and there are also regional grievance assistants (RGAs) who specialize in grievance handling and dispute resolution. Many regions also rely on letter carriers working part time or as volunteers to pitch in. Each region employs either a regional office assistant (ROA) or a full-time secretary who helps members with issues or directs them to someone who can help. They keep the office running smoothly.

Acting under the national president's direction, NBAs have extensive authority over union affairs in their regions and are members of the NALC Executive Council. Each NBA's primary responsibility as outlined in Article 9, Section 8 of the *NALC Constitution* is contract administration—handling grievances, presenting at arbitrations, and dealing with regional postal management. They also provide skilled services to the field by assisting in organization campaigns, gathering evidence for legal proceedings, assisting in the mediation and conciliation of labor disputes, advising members and local officers on practice and procedure, assisting in all activities relating to legislation, conducting training and educational seminars, and all other functions relevant to their duties.

With large territories to cover, NBAs, RAAs and RGAs spend a good chunk

of their time on the road. The travel and hours are required because of the broad responsibilities of the regional offices and the need to help carriers one at a time.

Regional offices do countless individual tasks for members, which fall mostly into two categories: helping local officers and stewards with information, coaching and training, and communicating directly with carriers to help them with their problems.

The regional office handles and administers many responsibilities while responding to branch officers' requests for advice and assistance and representing the membership at the USPS district and area levels.

Regional offices take many calls from carriers and are happy to help with problems, but sometimes they must refer a carrier to a steward or branch officer to start the process properly. For instance, a grievance starts with a local steward. The NALC's structure starts locally with shop stewards and branch officers and a president. The regional office interacts with USPS at the district and area levels as well as the local and branch levels of NALC.

The NBAs and regional staff are a critical part of the dispute resolution and grievance arbitration process. If there is a grievance that cannot be resolved at the lower steps of the grievance process—Informal Step A, Formal A or Step B—it then goes to the regional office for processing. Once Step B reaches an impasse, the NBA for the region may appeal the grievance to arbitration. Each NALC region has a panel of neutral arbitrators selected jointly by the NBA and the Postal Service. In arbitration, a neutral arbitrator considers the arguments presented by

both sides and makes a decision. Both NALC and USPS management present evidence and testimony. The arbitrator then issues a final and binding written decision on the grievance. It is the responsibility of the regional office to make sure each case is properly appealed for arbitration, and an NALC advocate is assigned to present the case in front of the arbitrator.

On many days, the regional offices assist branches in dealing with unusual or more complex issues. For instance, a small branch may call to request help on filing a grievance for a unique situation or a contractual provision that the branch has never dealt with before. In this circumstance, the RGA may be just the person for the job. The NBA can assign an RGA to file grievances, deal with management on specific issues, or to educate the branch on how to best handle certain situations.

Likewise, a carrier injured on the job might seek immediate advice from the regional office, since many branches have less experience helping a carrier with a compensation claim. If an injured worker needs specialized assistance with a complicated workers' compensation claim, the regional office may refer them to the regional workers' compensation assistant (RWCA). RWCA's are letter carriers who have extensive knowledge and experience with on-the-job injury situations and claims filing. RWCA's also assist the regions with providing training to stewards on Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP)-related contractual violations and grievances. When an injured letter carrier needs help navigating through the injury compensation process, the regions and RWCA's are there to help. Branch

officers should contact their NBA office to request RWCA assistance.

In many places, the Postal Service struggles to retain employees, which leads to constant hiring. The influx of new carriers, many with little or no knowledge of their rights, brings new challenges to regional offices. For instance, this winter led to numerous calls from city carrier assistants (CCAs) about how to handle a situation where they can't make it to work or have trouble delivering the mail due to weather—and what to do if their pay is docked or they are disciplined for it.

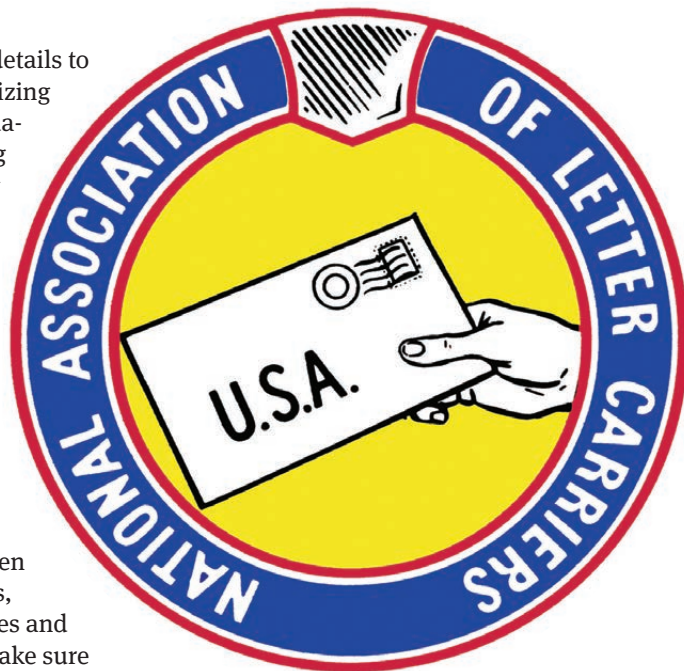
NALC's regions support local branches with charitable activities and events, too. Many branches will host MDA fundraisers such as picnics, golf outings or bowling nights. The regions also help organize and coordinate distribution of supplies for NALC's annual Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive. Some branches will hold retiree luncheons, holiday gatherings or special meetings to recognize their members. Oftentimes, the NBAs and regional staff will be asked to attend and assist with these events.

Every NALC region has at least one regional rap session or training every year, with some regions offering more. These rap sessions and trainings typically offer lots of information on collective bargaining, Postal Service conditions, the grievance arbitration procedure, and other union activities and events. They may also include workshops with specialized presentations on topics like retirement, building a case file and the grievance procedure, OWCP, stewards' rights and responsibilities, and community services. As you can imagine, there is a lot of work that goes into planning these rap sessions. Prior to the training,

there are many details to work out. Organizing hotel accommodation and meeting rooms, planning registration and scheduling, and workshop development all must happen long before the session even starts. At the rap session, the NBAs and regional staff often teach workshops, facilitate activities and speakers, and make sure every member in attendance gets the most out of the experience.

Recently, in many regions, the staff members are also busy with route inspection training. The Postal Service often conducts mail count and inspections during spring and fall. In anticipation of this, the regions will often offer route inspection training to ensure letter carriers are as educated as possible in the inspection process so that they get a fair and accurate route adjustment.

The average day or week in a regional office is extremely busy and hectic with a large number of daily phone calls and emails. Despite all the effort the regional offices put into serving carriers, they can't fix every problem in the Postal Service on their own. USPS staffing shortages and forced overtime are among the common complaints and, unfortunately, issues without an easy or immediate fix. Even though it may not be easy and there are some things that the regional staff cannot fix



contractually, every member will get a 100 percent effort from the team to assist them with their needs. Ultimately, NBAs, RAAs and RGAs do what other union representatives do, just on a larger scale.

Every city carrier should know that the regional office is available to them at any time. Members can speak directly to their NBA or a member of their staff to discuss their specific issues. You can find the contact information for your region by visiting the NALC website at nalc.org/union-administration/nalc-regions or seeing page 2 of this magazine. You should always let your steward or branch president know about a problem, but regional office staff are ready and willing to listen and help set you on the right path. It is all the professional work of the NBAs, RAAs, RGAs, RWCAs, ROAs, secretaries and volunteers who make NALC's efforts at the regional level possible. **PR**