

Our ‘backbone’



**Mack I.
Julion**

You have probably heard it said many times or have more than likely repeated it yourself if you are a representative in our union. We refer to our retirees as “the backbone of our union” or say that “we stand on the shoulders of those who preceded us.” Those are more than just phrases. They are truths borne out of the experience of our union and the federal agency for which we are employed. In the U.S. labor movement, the Great Postal Strike of 1970 is legendary. It was an illegal wild-cat strike that transformed the United States Post Office Department,

which was a presidential Cabinet-level federal agency, into the independent United States Postal Service for which it is known today. That is a huge difference.

We are a *quasi*-government agency. That simply means we are a hybrid federal agency that provides a public service but is independent of direct government control. Let that sink in for a moment. That aspect of the strike generally is an afterthought to the fact that it changed the standard of living for postal workers across the country. We were the “Walmart” of that time: the largest civilian employer with wages that qualified for public assistance. So, it’s understandable that we focus on us winning the right to collectively bargain for wages and benefits that were indeed livable. It’s for that reason alone that a strike would not succeed today. Most of our brothers and sisters simply would not go! Also, we live in a digital age, and we do not have the same leverage as we did when letter mail was king.

This brings me back to our retirees. I recently had the good fortune to attend several annual retiree events as the assigned national officer. It was a two-day marathon weekend, taking me from South Macomb, MI Branch 4374 to Branch 11 in Chicago. (They also tried to include Aurora, IL Branch 219, but time did not permit. That’s too bad, because they treated me so well the last time!) I spoke with them specifically about that aspect of the strike and emphasized that today it means more than the pay. The Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 may be the sole reason that we still have a public post office today. If we were not an independent

government agency, this corrupt and rogue administration would have privatized us by now or placed us under another federal agency, like the Department of Homeland Security, and taken away our rights to collectively bargain!

As of this writing, we are voting in our union election. The results are not known, but I am hopeful that we can once again turn full attention to representing our members in solidarity. We have a *real* election in front of us, and if you read this before Election Day, I beseech you to vote! We must elect and support people who support us. This current administration has no guardrails, and we need to change the makeup of Congress to protect us and pass legislation favorable to letter carriers. Elections have consequences, and if we get two more years of this current administration with unfettered control, then the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 may not be enough! *Vote* as if your job depended on it, because this time it really does!

Below are three pictures from my weekend highlighting three of our heroes from that Great Postal Strike. All the retirees recognized at the events are worthy of recognition and I congratulate them all!

At top left is Ken Johnson, an EastPointe Retiree who has 59 years. On the bottom is James E. Worsham, former Branch 11 president and national trustee, who is pictured with Branch 11 President Elise Foster and me. On the top right is my mentor Tim L. Willis, who has 55 years. Congrats to all!

