



# A look at the year ahead

# All on the line

**T**his year could become the most important in the history of the NALC since 1970.

Some letter carriers remember the events of 42 years ago, when the “Great Postal Strike” forced the federal government to grant collective-bargaining rights to postal employees and improve their wages and working conditions. The result was a career for the typical letter carrier that allowed for a middle-class lifestyle and a comfortable retirement and helped create the modern Postal Service.

The challenges are very different this time, but their importance to the future of the letter carrier craft is the same. A serious financial and economic crisis followed by enduring unemployment, declining mail volume, and openly hostile politicians all threaten to undo the gains of the last four decades.

Through all the difficulties, letter carriers are persevering. While politicians—some friends, some enemies, and some simply clueless about the complex issues the Postal Service faces—debate our future in Washington, we keep the mail moving, six days a week, in every part of the country. When the work day is done, we work hard to educate members of Congress about our issues.

In 2011, thousands of letter carriers gathered signatures for petitions, sent letters to members of Congress and visited them at their offices or at public meetings, went to rallies and parades nationwide, wrote letters or columns for newspapers or went on radio shows, educated our patrons, donated to COLCPE and recruited new COLCPE donors. We discussed how to best ensure our future through a new national agreement, and then waited patiently as our trusted

leaders negotiated. And even in the middle of fighting for our survival, we found time to help the less fortunate.

We’ll do all those things, and more, in 2012. We must. Just as we have little room for leisure when we do our jobs each day, the challenge of bringing the truth to Congress and the public about the value of the Postal Service, and convincing both to support a strong, stable future for the USPS, is a challenge that must be met.

The next few pages contain an overview of activities and events that will involve the union and letter carriers in the coming year.

## Contract negotiations

At this writing, negotiations between the Postal Service and NALC were continuing. NALC President Fredric Rolando has coordinated the work of all the negotiating committees and has taken the lead on discussing the key economic provisions of the contract, including pay, health benefits and other matters such as the structure of the city carrier workforce. Before this issue went to press, the negotiations were extended to Dec. 16 to allow more time for negotiations (*see story, page 4*).

Extensions are a normal part of the negotiation process, and further extensions could continue into 2012 until an agreement is reached and mailed to all active NALC members for ratification. If no agreement can be reached, the contract will go to arbitration. Either way, 2012 will determine what the future holds for our contract with the Postal Service for the next several years.

## Legislative action

This year, NALC members will have to continue their hard work educating

# in 2012

Congress on the best way to help the USPS thrive, instead of adopting short-sighted measures that will only hurt the Service. Unfortunately, Congress will likely take up several proposals early in 2012 that could do more harm than good if they become law.

In the House, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), chairman of the subcommittee that oversees the Postal Service, is supporting H.R. 2309, his bill that would gut our collective-bargaining rights and significantly downsize the Postal Service. Issa pushed his bill through the House Oversight and Reform Committee, ignoring the much more sensible approach proposed by Rep. Stephen Lynch (D-MA). Lynch's bill (H.R. 1351), which is strongly supported by NALC, had 227 co-sponsors at this writing—a bipartisan majority of the House. Despite this broad support for Lynch's bill, Issa's bill is now headed to the House floor for a vote this year because his party controls the House and decides what legislation will be considered.

A bipartisan group of senators has proposed a postal reform bill (S. 1789) that is better, but still falls far short. That bill is headed to the Senate floor as of this writing. NALC will continue to work with the Senate to improve that bill.

To pass through Congress, a bill must be approved by both the House and Senate. Typically, a bill goes to a joint House-Senate conference committee responsible for hammering out a compromise between the House and Senate versions, which would then go to both chambers for a second vote. The bill would be sent to the president for a signature or veto. A

postal reform package also could be attached to another bill, though the same process would still apply.

As Congress debates, the Postal Service faces deadlines that will require it to make tough choices.

As of this writing, lawmakers had extended the deadline Dec. 16 for the Postal Service to make its 2011 payment of \$5.5 billion toward pre-funding retiree health care—a payment required of no other government agency or private company. The deadline could be extended again. Even if the deadline is pushed back further, the Postal Service has said it will not have the cash to make the payment and will likely default on some or all of it.

Defaulting on the payment would have no impact on Postal Service operations, but it would cause a public relations firestorm.

"If and when the Postal Service defaults on the pre-funding payment, nothing will happen in an operational sense," Rolando said. "The mail will still be delivered; the employees will still get paid. But the media still don't understand that, and you will see some bad headlines and more hysteria about 'bankruptcy.' "



**NALC activists will need to take to the field in 2012 to help spread the union's message.**

# All on the line in 2012



A more serious deadline looms, though. Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe announced last November that without action from Congress, the USPS likely would run out of cash by October, since it will reach its statutory debt limit.

In an effort to save money, the USPS announced that it wants to slow mail delivery by closing half of its processing centers, a measure it said would save \$2.1 billion annually.

In this environment, now more than ever, letter carriers need to educate their elected representatives. Thousands of carriers have been busy collecting signatures for petitions, contacting and meeting with their representatives, and communicating with the public through the media and in personal conversations. For NALC to succeed in 2012, we will need to redouble our grassroots efforts and we will need the participation of every letter carrier, active or retired.

"I can't say it more clearly—your job is on the line," President Rolando said in a warning to letter carriers. "If ever there was a time to be involved in your union and help our efforts to save America's Postal Service, it's now."

## 2012 elections

While NALC today faces a crucial legislative struggle over the very future of the USPS, in just 10 months Americans will vote in state and congressional elections and choose a president. With narrow margins for the majority in both chambers of Congress, a struggling president overseeing a difficult economy, and the fight over the future of labor expanding to the states, the entire balance of political power is on the line. NALC will have its hands full with state and federal political activities. Though under federal law, the union cannot use dues money for political purposes, we do have COLCPE.

The Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education (COLCPE), the union's

political action committee, supports candidates for federal office who back letter carriers and workers' rights, regardless of whether these candidates are Democrats or Republicans, incumbents or challengers. With the help of COLCPE, dozens of letter carriers have been released to work on campaigns, including helping to get voters out to the polls. Last year, COLCPE played a role in helping to convince Ohio voters to overturn a law pushed through by Gov. John Kasich (R) that stripped collective-bargaining rights from many state workers, and in recalling two Wisconsin state senators who had voted to support Gov. Scott Walker's assault on workers' rights. If state workers lose their rights, our rights are threatened as well.

In 2012, the demands on COLCPE's resources will be more intense than ever.

"If every carrier gave just a small donation, our ability to fight back against all this anti-union political activity would grow tremendously," President Rolando said. "Our power comes from our unity. I urge letter carriers to give to COLCPE so we can protect our jobs. You will miss your entire paycheck more than the few dollars you can give now to save it."

NALC also will need an army of volunteers to help turn the tide in these elections. Members of the Carrier Corps are the union's grassroots leaders (*see story on page 16*). Hundreds of Carrier Corps members will use their organizing skills, knowledge of neighborhoods and work ethic to help elect pro-letter carrier candidates. Backing the Carrier Corps will be tens of thousands of e-Activist Network members ready to act at a moment's notice to support NALC's legislative and political agenda.

## National convention

Thousands of delegates representing almost every NALC branch will gather at the union's 68th biennial convention in Minneapolis July 23-27. The conven-

tion will consider amendments to the NALC's constitution and resolutions.

The biennial convention is a chance for letter carriers to discuss the most pressing issues they face and to set policy for the future, including participation in the upcoming elections. Delegates will have the opportunity to engage their national leaders, vote on union policies, and make plans to achieve their goals.

The delegates also will attend a variety of classes offered by letter carriers and NALC staff updating them on developments in labor and workplace issues, from city delivery and route adjustment issues to steward training to legislative and political topics. They also will get the latest information about contract negotiations or the new National Agreement, if one is in place by then.

## Public service

Despite the challenges we face, we get the job done. That also describes the way we serve our communities.

NALC will continue to support the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA), the union's official charity, in 2012. Thanks to the efforts of carriers across the country, NALC handed over a check for \$1.5 million to MDA at the annual Labor Day Telethon last year. We will work to better that figure in 2012 by boosting our fundraising efforts. NALC will assist branches with building on MDA events introduced in recent years, such as the national Bowlathon and Fill the Satchel campaigns, and to help branches pursue their own ideas.

This year, letter carriers will once again conduct the largest one-day food drive in the country. Over the years, letter carriers have filled food pantries with more than 1 billion pounds of food. In our 20th annual "Stamp Out Hunger" drive, we will work hard to bring even more food to hungry people and exceed last year's collection total of 70.6 million pounds of non-perishable food.

"Our food drive makes an enormous impact on the lives of the most vulnerable families in America," said President Rolando. "Letter carriers will be there for the hungry again in 2012."

*The Postal Record* will continue to recognize the heroes who selflessly keep the public safe while out on their routes, with the Heroes of the Year recognized again this fall in a ceremony in Washington, DC.

## Leadership Academy

Since it began in 2005, the Leadership Academy has brought more than 300 letter carriers to the National Labor College campus in Silver Spring, MD, to develop their leadership skills and join the next generation of union leaders.

Twice a year, the Leadership Academy trains letter carriers—two from each of NALC's 15 regions—in leadership and management skills and the inner workings of the National Agreement and union administration in three one-week training sessions at the Silver Spring campus. Back home, the students work with a mentor—a branch or state association officer—on take-home assignments. To complete their training, they spend a week "shadowing" their NBA to learn more about the day-to-day business of the union. Students are selected by President Rolando.

This year will see the 13th and 14th Leadership Academy classes. (*The students for Class 13 are listed on page 14.*) They will meet in January, March and May. The students for Class 14 will be announced in a future edition of *The Postal Record*.

Given the overall situation and the challenges we face, NALC members must be ready for anything this year. The challenges—whether from Congress, the voting booth or the workplace—will be like nothing we have faced in a generation. We will succeed only if we stay united to support our union. ☒



From top: Supporting the Muscular Dystrophy Association, attending the biennial convention in Minneapolis, and learning for two more Leadership Academy classes are all on the agenda for 2012.