

Going the extra mile



**Philip
Dine**

We know about letter carriers and “the last mile,” but today I’d like to discuss “the extra mile” many of you are traveling to get our message out and thereby preserve the U.S. Postal Service.

Increasingly, letter carriers and branch officers, state presidents and NBAs/RAAs are finding creative ways to bolster our communications efforts.

Let’s be clear: Writing letters to the editor and penning commentary pieces, or appearing on radio and TV news shows, remain the meat and potatoes of our campaign to win over the public and their elected representatives. But when an additional spark is called for, the required initiative seems to be in full supply.

Consider what occurred in Kearney, NE. On a recent Saturday, viewers of a statewide Nebraska ABC affiliate watched an excellent TV report from the site of the letter carriers state convention.

They heard from letter carriers about the future of the Postal Service and the importance of Saturday delivery. They saw an impressive showing of military vets among the carrier ranks. They heard from NALC Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine about the actual financial problems, including the role of pre-funding. They were told that preserving the USPS should be a bi-partisan effort. They witnessed remarks from a Republican congressman.

They almost saw none of this. Here’s the back story.

TV reporter Nick Starling had planned to arrive at 8 a.m. to prepare for the 8:30 a.m. convention start. But he texted Kearney, NE Branch 312 President Ken Nickerson at 8:11 that morning to say he wouldn’t be able to cover the event, because his car wouldn’t start.

Anxious to assure coverage—and aware that the reporter had done a good job at the previous year’s convention—Nickerson took action. Having previously exchanged contact information with the reporter (which, of course, is how Starling was able to alert him in the first place that morning), Nickerson called and called the reporter, who was likely working on his car, finally reached him, asked him where he lived (clear on the other side of town), and told the reporter to await a ride to the convention. Having promised a ride, Nickerson then tried to arrange for one. He located fellow Branch 312 member Josh Bruntz, who was selling tickets at the convention for the Muscular Dystrophy Association raffle (312 was the host branch). “I said, ‘No, I’ll sell the tickets. Take my phone, find out where he lives and get him.’”

The reporter arrived at 8:40 a.m., just as GOP Rep. Adrian Smith was addressing delegates, who then stood up by military branch (including Navy veteran Nickerson) and told Smith why the Postal Service remains important today. This display of the military presence among letter carriers was the terrific idea of Nebraska State President Kevin Hevelone, and it made for compelling television.

Once the convention was over, Nickerson made sure the reporter was driven back to broadcast his report. Aside from the thousands of Nebraskans who watched an informative news story, do you think this ‘extra mile’ built up some goodwill for the future with this particular reporter? (I can tell you from experience that the answer is likely a resounding ‘Yes’—with reporters, much like letter carriers, constantly on the move, under time constraints, and facing pressure from supervisors.)

Going the extra mile also can spark the type of ‘ripple effect’ I’ve mentioned in this space. A good example involves a similar branch president-state president pairing, this one in New Haven, CT, where the presence of Branch 19 President Vincent Mase and State President Chuck Page starting at 6 a.m. for the local March 24 rally helped generate early news coverage, which boosted rally attendance, leading to impressive post-rally coverage. The momentum thereby created has in recent weeks produced a flurry of constructive letters and commentary pieces by postal patrons in the influential *New Haven Register*.

Such efforts complemented the NALC’s cascading work in terms of media outreach. Just two examples: Never satisfied with preaching to the converted, President Rolando pulled a twofer in hostile territory—getting our message across on the editorial pages of the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Examiner*—while also being quoted widely in wire service reports. And in New York, Walter Barton, president of Long Island Merged Branch 6000, talked effectively about pre-funding and Saturday delivery in a news report on WABC-TV.

Nobody said that saving the USPS from its own poor management or from some hostile or indifferent lawmakers would be easy. But if you keep getting the truth out—and going the extra mile—we will do just that.

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The Postal Record (ISSN 0032-5376) is published monthly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

Subscription included in membership dues. First-class subscription available for \$20 per year (contact Membership Department).

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Circulation: 287,000. Union-printed using soy-based inks.

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