

Getting involved in the union starts at your branch meeting



Whether you're a new NALC member or a longtime veteran, there are always plenty of opportunities for you to get involved. For some members, all they see of the union is what the shop steward does on the workroom floor. But that's just scratching the surface of what the union is all about. There are many ways to get involved with the union beyond workroom-floor issues.

- If you enjoy giving back in your community, branches often engage in blood drives, collections for the Muscular Dystrophy Association and other volunteer opportunities. But the biggest volunteering event every year is the Letter Carriers' Food Drive. The local food drive coordinator is responsible for everything involved with the food drive, from promoting the event to organizing delivery of the collected food. If your branch has a food drive coordinator, he or she would appreciate any assistance you'd like to give, and if your branch doesn't have one, you could take on that role and give back to your community.
- If you like to write, branches often are looking for writers and editors to help on the branch newsletter, or even to start one. If you're technologically savvy, many branches have or want to start a website, Google group or Facebook account, and you could put your skills to good use.
- If politics is your cup of tea, there are many opportunities to come face to face with your legislators and tell them about

the importance of letter carrier and worker issues.

- If you're tired of the way you and other carriers are treated on the workroom floor, maybe you're ready to start gaining the knowledge and skills to serve as a shop steward. There's no better way to know what is going on in the union and play a role in how the union operates than by becoming a steward.

These are just a few of the many ways you and your family can get involved. All you need to do is ask.

And it all starts in one simple way: Attend your branch meeting.

As an NALC member, you are automatically a member of your local branch—one of 2,100 NALC branches of varying size throughout the country. Your branch consists of, and is run by, letter carriers like yourself. Members elect their own branch officers in free and fair elections, and any regular member in good standing may run for office.

Branch business is conducted at regular membership meetings, which any member may attend. Most branches hold meetings monthly, though some hold them less frequently. You can find out when your branch meets by reading a posting on a bulletin board at your station, in the branch newsletter or on the branch website; by asking carriers in your station; or by contacting your shop steward, branch leaders or your national business agent's office.

Most meetings are held on the same night each month and some have food and refreshments. While it's best to arrive on time, the meeting isn't closed if you arrive after the start time.

The meeting will be called to order by the branch president and then,

most likely, it will follow the normal order of business spelled out in the *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches*:

1. Roll Call.
2. Reading of Minutes of Previous Meeting.
3. Reading of Communications, Notices, Bills, etc.
4. Application for Membership.
5. Balloting for Candidates.
6. Initiation of Elected Candidates.
7. Reports of Standing and Special Committees.
8. MBA.
9. Health Benefit Plan.
10. Unfinished Business.
11. New Business.
12. Good of the Association.
13. For the Improvement of the Service.
14. Financial Secretary's Report of Receipts.
15. Treasurer's Report of Expenditures.
16. Adjournment.

Many of these items can go fast or be skipped if unnecessary, so you are unlikely to feel overwhelmed. If you're a first-time attendee, the branch might have a special welcome or introduction for you.

If you have something you'd like to bring up, the best time to do it is during "new business" or "good of the association." If you want to make a motion—to get the entire branch to take action—do so during "new business." If you just have a question or concern, bring it up during "good of the association." As you talk it through, you might realize you need to make a motion, but that will have to wait until the next branch meeting.

Raising issues in this way will assist you in getting the answers you're looking for, help you realize that other carriers are facing the same issues you are, and

spur you on to take action to better your work situation. You just might discover that you can be your own solution.

Branch meetings also are great sources of information. You'll find out what is happening with other carriers and at other stations in the branch, which may operate differently from yours. You'll find out when there are trainings and conventions, as many branches offer classes to help new carriers "work smarter" on the job and conduct special classes for shop

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stewards and other union activists. You'll find out about offerings from the branch and national union on vision and dental benefits, additional retirement benefits, accidental death benefits and scholarships, to name a few. You'll also hear about legislation that could affect your job or benefits.

Branch meetings aren't the only organized activities. Many branches also promote fellowship and solidarity among branch members and their families by offering a variety of social activities, including bowling nights, picnics, dances, ball games and special dinners for retirees, stewards and other groups.

"For tens of thousands of letter carriers, participating in the NALC is simply a great way to help strengthen the one organization dedicated solely to protecting carriers' interests in the workplace and in the halls of Congress," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Find out how you can get involved." **PR**