

NALC stepping up as battles heat up



**Philip
Dine**

As thousands of letter carrier delegates from across the country streamed into Philadelphia on the Sunday before our 69th Biennial Convention began, they were greeted by an article in the state's leading news source, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, depicting the finances and prospects of the United States Postal Service.

The story said that USPS has navigated the recession, is figuring out how to deal with the Internet, and that the biggest remaining hurdle is "a highly unusual law passed by Congress" requiring the Postal Service to pre-fund future retiree health benefits.

The reporter quoted Region 12 NBA Bill Lucini as saying about the pre-funding mandate, in his typical no-nonsense manner: "That's the thing that has held us back the most."

The piece, which fills two-thirds of the Business Section's front page, includes photos and charts—the latter showing letter revenue stabilizing and package revenue skyrocketing—and jumps to an inside page.

It contains this paragraph from the reporter, who spent a week preparing the story: "These days, with the Postal Service adjusting to the Internet and the economy improving, what remains, management officials and union leaders agree, is an unusual burden imposed on the agency by Congress."

She noted that in the first six months of fiscal 2014, absent pre-funding USPS "would have turned a billion-dollar profit." In response, Postal Service CFO Joseph Corbett whines, rather ineffectually: "It's not truly a profit."

Why this treatment in one of the nation's great newspapers, winner of 20 Pulitzer Prizes, with a Sunday circulation of about a half-million in Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Delaware?

It's because convention host Bill Lucini took the time to talk to the reporter. Because Chuck Goushian, president of Camden, NJ Merged Branch 540, provided some color about the life of a letter carrier. Because NALC Chief of Staff Jim Sauber detailed the economic and political challenges facing USPS. Because Research Director Jim Holland produced charts showing the trends in letter and package revenue, using the USPS' own data to make our case.

More broadly, why did the reporter know that our convention and our issues justified so much work on her part? In large measure, because of President Rolando's yeoman's work getting our message out on the national stage, whether in newspapers or online sites, on radio or on TV. He's shown journalists that the conventional wisdom is less compelling than the actual

situation, and that the topic merits exploration.

The coverage in the *Inquirer* set the stage for more attention. Tuesday, a local CBS radio reporter showed up—in a rush—to interview someone about postal matters.

Kevin Card, assistant to the president for workers' compensation, quickly agreed to do the interview (even though he was on his way to teach a workshop). He spoke about the convention, the issues and letter carriers and their customers.

The KYW radio reporter was shortly on his way, happy with such a quick turn-around. That afternoon a CBS radio report aired that mentioned the food drive, convention issues, USPS finances, "the huge upswing in package deliveries from on-line shopping," pre-funding and Benjamin Franklin—Philadelphia's favorite son and the first postmaster general.

It's worth noting that the *Inquirer* and the radio station assigned two of their best reporters to the NALC convention.

The next morning Larry Brown, chairman of the NALC's National Trustees, was on a talk show on WURD radio in Philadelphia.

The host said the interview could be done by phone, but Larry made the effort to go the station, which makes for a livelier exchange. And so, the conversation about postal issues, the life of a letter carrier, and what USPS represents in urban communities expanded from the scheduled 15- to 20-minute segment to a half-hour.

There was additional news coverage, but here's the point: The media attention was positive, it was accurate, and it was multi-dimensional. In print and on the air, our delegates conveyed the flavor of the convention, the financial picture of the USPS, and the life—and contributions to the community—of a letter carrier.

We had good coverage at the Anaheim and Minneapolis conventions, but Philadelphia surpassed those—another example of how letter carriers and NALC leaders are stepping up as the battles heat up.

But our effort continues, and we need you to keep the momentum up and carry the message into every community—so that when USPS or our political opponents try to counter our facts with their spin, they will be every bit as ineffective as the CFO was in the pages of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

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