

*The Official Newsletter of  
NJ Merged Branch 38, NALC*



# THE SENTINEL

May 2020

## **COPING WITH COVID-19**



### **President's Report**

**by Mike O'Neill**

Who saw this coming? Over the past several months our world has been turned upside down by COVID-19. It has taken thousands of lives, here in America and around the world. Families have lost loved ones with no warning. Imagine having a family member or friend pass away, alone in a hospital bed, while you are unable to visit, console, or say good-bye. Too many have had to endure that unimaginable scenario.

**That's the worst of it, but there's more. At this writing, there** have been more than thirty-six million new applications for unemployment benefits. That's only the tip of the iceberg. So many more have had to accept fewer hours and a fraction of their normal income. Families are faced with the daily choice between paying rent or buying food or medicine. These are hard working families who deserve much better.

**The Postal Service has not escaped the ramifications of** COVID-19. We've had friends and family members suffer the scourge of the virus. Brother and sister letter carriers have been infected, and we have lost some forever. Our hearts and prayers go out to everyone attempting to heal from the ravages of this terrible and silent disease.

**Our jobs as letter carriers have changed as well. Agreements** between NALC and USPS have been made with the intention of protecting the safety of our employees, providing the critical and essential service to the American public, and reducing the financial hardship for those of us forced to stay at home. I'd like to discuss some of the changes and the reasons behind them. What is important for all of us to remember is that they are working. At this writing, the number of cases in both New Jersey Districts are reducing considerably. We must, however, remain vigilant in our practices of social distancing, personal hygiene, and respect for each other's right to a safe work place.

### **WORK RULES**

**On March 30, 2020, NALC and USPS signed a Memorandum** of Understanding in which they issued directives to the field designed to facilitate and encourage social distancing, as recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Proper social distancing is recognized as the most effective way of keeping the spread of COVID-19 under control, and hopefully eliminated. The virus is mostly spread from one person to another. (cont.p 3)

# NEW JERSEY MERGED BRANCH 38

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## Branch Officers

Michael J.O'Neill	President
Dan Szucs	Executive Vice President
Joseph S. Rutkoski III	Treasurer
Mark McGrady	Director of City Delivery
Christine A. Strasser	Financial Secretary
Pete Bednarz	Full-Time Area Rep
Roy Jancio	Sergeant-At-Arms
Ron Villegas	Director of Retirees

### BRANCH 38 TRUSTEES

Keith Hemmings	Richard O'Connell Jr.
Joseph Otero	Armando Pedreira
	Dominic Walton

### PART TIME AREA REPRESENTATIVES

Clint Colie	Michael Hedglin
Roy Jancio	Joe Otero
Armando Pedreira	Dominic Walton
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### NATIONAL BUSINESS AGENT

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Donald Millman, Esq. 973-669-9776

### MUTUAL BENEFIT REPRESENTATIVE

Tamara Humphrey 973-444-5128

## DATES TO REMEMBER

### BRANCH MEETINGS

June 3, 2020 via Zoom  
September 2, 2020  
October 7, 2020  
November 4, 2020  
December 2, 2020

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Scholarship Night  
June 3, 2020 via Zoom

MDA Day at the Races  
July 26, 2020

Charlie Connell Golf Outing  
October 12, 2020

Beefsteak Dinner for MDA  
November 7, 2020

**NJ Merged Branch 38  
Web Site**

<http://www.branch38nalc.com/>

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## ***President's Report (cont.)***

**One aspect of the MOU dealt with the movement of CCA's** from their assigned office to other offices. The MOU provides that "to the extent possible all city letter carriers will work in their employing facility." The MOU expands upon that language for offices of less than 100 hundred workyears of employment as follows: "work in facilities other than the letter carrier's employing facility should be limited to where they routinely worked prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic." This is intended to minimize the possibility of spreading the coronavirus from one facility to multiple other facilities.

**The Postal Service has agreed to additional guidelines when** the reassignment of CCA's is unavoidable. They are:

1. The supervisor and steward in the losing office will jointly determine which carrier will go to the gaining office
2. If the carrier does not have a need to enter the facility at the gaining office, the mail will be placed on the dock or somewhere outside where it can be loaded without entering the building
3. If a carrier does not take a vehicle from the losing office, the gaining office will have appropriate cleaning supplies for the carrier to sanitize the vehicle he/she will be using.

**If any of the above listed guidelines are not being adhered to,** contact your shop steward, area representative, or the Branch office. We will investigate the situation, have it resolved, or file a grievance if necessary.

**The MOU encouraged local management to review and alter** the workroom floor to accommodate social distancing. In many of our offices, this is simply not feasible. The same MOU provided guidance regarding the institution of staggered start times designed to have as few employees in the building at the same time. Conversations with both New Jersey Districts resulted in the following guidelines:

1. Shifts of 10 or less carriers will begin tour at least one hour apart.
2. Carriers in the earlier shifts will utilize a "grab and go" concept, in which they will take whatever mail is available and leave for street duties before the next shift arrives.

**These guidelines are exactly that. No one rule can apply to all** Post Offices, given the great disparity of the number of employees, the type of delivery, and many other factors. We also understand that the staggered start times may present an inconvenience for many letter carriers. Such an inconvenience is, without question, a lesser evil than the continued unabated spread of the coronavirus amongst our fellow employees. If any individual has difficulty with the start time assigned to them, due to child care obligations or any other personal situation, please speak with your shop steward, area representative, and Postmaster. Every effort will be made to accommodate your situation.

**On April 6, 2020. USPS issued a mandatory stand-up talk** in which the wearing of face coverings or masks was recommended, in accordance with the recommendations of the CDC. On April 21, 2020, the Postal Service issued another mandatory stand-up talk, which provides:

**"As a result, we will modify our policy with face coverings** to require all employees to wear face coverings in the following situations, until the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer an issue:

- When there is a local or state face covering order or directive in place; or
- When an employee who does not deal directly with the public cannot achieve or maintain social distancing in the workplace."

**After discussions with both New Jersey Districts, it was agreed** that the Governor of NJ has indeed issued an Executive Order mandating the use of face coverings, and that it is virtually impossible to maintain social distancing on the workroom floor of most every Post Office in New Jersey. The wearing of face coverings, therefore, is now a requirement for all Postal Service employees, both craft and management.

**Anyone may be infected by COVID-19 and not know it. You** may not have shown any symptoms, and may feel fine, but may be carrying the coronavirus and be able to transmit it to others. That is why the face coverings are so important in protecting those around us, including everyone's family and friends. They may be uncomfortable, and even make it harder to do your job, but the alternative is to continue the spread of the virus to our fellow carriers and their families. NALC is working with USPS to purchase and distribute face coverings that will be more comfortable as the weather gets warmer. Please honor your fellow workers and wear a mask.

**All of this information is available in more detail on the NALC** web site (nalc.org). Please take a few minutes every day to review whatever changes have already been made, and any additional updates. Thank you, and stay safe.

***Check Out The New*  
*Branch 38*  
*Facebook Page***

***"NJ Merged Branch 38"***

# **COVID-19, CONGRESS AND USPS**

## ***Bipartisan Poll Demonstrates Overwhelming Support of Direct Funding to USPS***

**North Star Opinion Research and Hart Research Associates**, two leading Republican and Democratic public opinion firms, released the findings of a national poll regarding the importance of the continued operation and funding of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) during this pandemic. Unsurprisingly, the results of the poll show overwhelming bipartisan support for USPS with 94 percent of all registered voters polled saying mail and package service is important during this time. In addition, 95 percent registered voters polled said official government recommendations, supplies, medications, and test kits related to COVID-19 are important to them.

**While those results are no surprise given the Postal Service's** popularity, when respondents were asked whether they would favor or oppose appropriating funds for the Postal Service to maintain operations through the coronavirus crisis in the next round of financial relief legislation, 92 percent of voters said they would favor this move. Only 30 percent of voters favored increasing the Postal Service's additional borrowing authority instead of direct funding, leading to increased debt for the agency and more problems for Congress to consider.

**"As letter carriers know, the conversation about Postal Service** finances is nothing new," said NALC President Fredric Rolando. "Unfortunately, this pandemic continues to cripple the economy resulting in sharp declines in revenue for the Postal Service, which is expected to run out of money in September if Congress and the White House fail to intervene. Thankfully, voters not only understand the peril, but also believe we must fund the agency. NALC stands ready to work with Congress and the White House to stabilize the agency in the next stimulus package so the Postal Service can continue to serve the needs of 160 million households every day."

**To support our continued efforts, letter carriers should continue** contacting their members of Congress to urge support for funding in the next stimulus package. Let Congress know that the Postal Service doesn't need more debt and that we now have overwhelming voter support for funding.

The two articles located above on this page were taken, in large part, directly from NALC web site. At this writing, the House of Representatives has passed a three trillion stimulus bill, in which USPS is provided with much needed financial assistance. The details of the Cares Two Act can be found on the NALC web site. Please take the time to contact your Congressional Representatives in support of this bill and any subsequent bills that support the recovery and future financial stability of the Postal Service. Go to [nalc.org](http://nalc.org) for directions.

## ***Support USPS in Next Emergency Stimulus***

**As letter carriers on the front lines of serving 160 million** Americans and businesses every day, you know that the COVID-19 pandemic is something we have never experienced before. While our letter carriers show their resilience, strength, and continued service to the public every day, the Postal Service looms closer to shuttering due to the staggering loss in mail volume and revenue during this crisis. It's a desperate situation that only Congress and the Administration can help solve.

**We cannot allow the USPS to fail. Unfortunately, instead of** providing much needed immediate financial assistance urged by NALC and stakeholders, the last stimulus gave the Postal Service a slap in the face by giving it access to a conditional line of credit. Those conditions aren't new to letter carriers - as they seek to destroy the network and attack letter carriers at the behest of private shippers. This is not a solution. It is a way to weaken the Postal Service by riddling it with more debt to the point where opponents of the constitutionally mandated service will destroy it.

**While it's been 40 years since we have needed taxpayer fund-**ing, we need financial relief to continue to serve this country through this crisis - and we need it now. Thankfully, the American public is on our side. A recent bipartisan poll showed that 92 percent of voters support direct funding for the Postal Service in the next pandemic response bill.

**Please take a minute to send a letter or email to your members** of Congress going to [nalc.org](http://nalc.org), and tell them that we need: an immediate and significant injection of money - and secure, regular appropriations for the Postal Service until this crisis is over.



# *June 3 Branch Meeting* *On Zoom*

In the best interest of the safety and health of our members and their families, and given the government regulations regarding gatherings during the current COVID-19 pandemic, the monthly Branch 38 meeting scheduled for June 3, 2020 will be conducted via Zoom. Please find information regarding how to attend the meeting on your computer or phone below. Votes relative to By-Law changes and a proposed merger with NALC Branch 1089, Lakewood, originally scheduled for the April Branch Meeting will be held remotely during this meeting.

Although we are aware that some members may have difficulty accessing the meeting through Zoom, we believe that it is important to stay in touch with the membership, to share ever changing information, and continue with the business of the Branch. It is our sincere hope that we will be back to our normal meeting arrangements in September. If anyone needs assistance logging on to the meeting, please contact your area representative for any future Zoom meetings.

We intend to utilize the Zoom platform for smaller meeting with individual stations and our shop stewards. Again, we wish to utilize any means necessary to maintain communication with our members. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation.

## *June Branch Meeting via Zoom* *Login Information*

MICHAEL O'NEILL is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: NJ Merged Branch 38 - June Membership Meeting  
Time: Jun 3, 2020 07:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6988072647>

Meeting ID: 698 807 2647  
One tap mobile  
+13017158592,,6988072647# US (Germantown)  
+13126266799,,6988072647# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location  
+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 698 807 2647

## *Officer & Area Representative* *Contact Information*

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# *Vote! Vote! Vote!*

**The Postal Service and the financial future of letter carriers** are at a legislative crossroad. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the already tenuous financial status of the Postal Service. As has been emphasized earlier in this publication, now is the time to contact your Congressional representatives and thank them for their support, and ask for their continued support. Implied in that request is that you will provide your support when they seek re-election. That's how politics works. So, let's talk politics.

**We've heard it time and again, politics is about votes and money.** The concept may leave a bad taste in your mouth, but there's no getting around it. Politicians need our votes and money to get re-elected. There's also no escaping the fact that the future of the Postal Service and our jobs rests in the hands of the politicians. So how can we influence them and convince them to do the right thing?

**Let's assume that you care enough about your jobs and your families future to vote, and to vote for the people who will support your interests.** The first step is to make sure you are registered to vote. You may have never registered to vote, or you may have moved or not voted in a couple of years. You are probably not registered. It could not be easier to register to vote. Turn on your computer and go to <https://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/voter-registration.shtml>. You can check to see if you're already registered. If you're not registered, print out the registration form for the county in which you live and mail it in, more than 21 days prior to election day. Now you're in the game.

**Let's make it easier for you. Let's sign up to vote by mail. Go to <https://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/vote-by-mail.shtml>.** Again, go to the county in which you live, follow the instructions, and you will have a ballot mailed to your home. You'll be making your life easier, especially with COVID-19 hanging over our heads, and helping out USPS as well.

**Now, let's talk about the money part of the equation. Politicians need money, lots of money, to get re-elected.** This is most certainly the least appetizing component of the political process, but it is a very important part. Politicians listen to and support the people and organizations that provide financial support to their campaigns. If we ignore that fact, the people and organizations that are intent on the failure and privatization of the Postal Service will have the politicians' ear and support.

**NALC has a very successful political action fund, the Letter Carrier Political Fund, LCPF.** Branch 38 has been a big part of that success. Our union has, with the help of LCPF, been very effective in staving off attacks against the Postal Service and letter carrier jobs and benefits. Without the funds in the LCPF, there is no question that such success would have not been possible. We need the support of Congress now more than ever, and we'll need more money in the LCPF than ever before.

**During the past several years, Branch 38 has tripled the number of our members who contribute to the LCPF.** We did that by meeting with our members at station meetings, Branch meetings, and training seminars to explain why their support is so important. The Hatch Act prohibits us from talking about politics on the workroom floor, and the restrictions caused by the pandemic make it impossible to meet with our members outside of work. With that in mind, I ask you to take the initiative to get involved by contacting your Area Representative and allow us to help you sign up to make automatic contributions to LCPF directly from your pay check.

**As we always say, we don't need a lot of money from any one member, just a few dollars from everyone.** It will be an important investment in your future, and a form of insurance against those who would take your jobs and benefits. If you already contribute, thank you. If you haven't signed up yet, please give us a call. If ever there was a time to act, this is it.

## **Sign Up for the Letter Carrier Political Fund Now!!!**

**Go to: <http://nalc.org/>**

By making a contribution to the Letter Carrier Political Fund, you are doing so voluntarily with the understanding that your contribution is not a condition of membership in the National Association of Letter Carriers or of employment by the Postal Service, nor is it part of union dues. You have a right to refuse to contribute without any reprisal. The Letter Carrier Political Fund will use the money it receives to contribute to candidates for federal office and undertake other political spending as permitted by law. Your selection shall remain in full force and effect until cancelled. Contributions to the Letter Carrier Political Fund are not deductible for federal income tax purposes. Federal law prohibits the Letter Carrier Political Fund from soliciting contributions from individuals who are not NALC members, executive and administrative staff or their families. Any contribution received from such an individual will be refunded to that contributor. Federal law requires us to use our best efforts to collect and report the name, mailing address, occupation and name of employer of individuals whose contributions exceed \$200 in a calendar year.

# Leave During COVID-19

Many of you will be forced to be out of work for extended period of time or intermittently as a result of the impact of COVID-19. You may become infected, you may have to be quarantined due to close contact with someone who has been infected, or you may have to stay home to care for your children or someone in your family who needs assistance. NALC and USPS have made agreements designed to address those situations under these most difficult of circumstances. You have stepped up and continue to serve the American public. You deserve to be paid if you are unable to come to work during the pandemic.

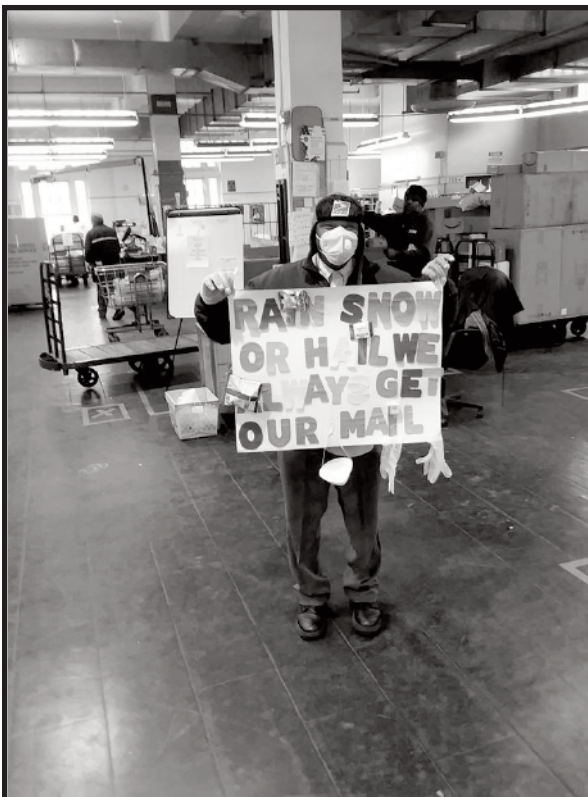
**The Postal Service, in addition to expanded leave availability** during the pandemic, has adopted a “liberal leave policy.” Requests for documentation for three days or less should be immediately brought to the attention of your shop steward or area representative. Any denial of requests for leave should also be brought to their attention. Denied requests for changes of schedule due to child care needs caused by the pandemic should also be reported. Any disciplinary actions relative to attendance should also be shared with the union immediately.

**Provisions for additional types of leave during the pandemic** have also been agreed to. Employees may use their 80 hours of sick leave for dependent care in order to address child care needs caused by the pandemic. For documentation, you need only supply the name of the school or child care provider that is no longer available, and the fact that you have no other child care options available.

CCA’s have been granted an additional 80 hours of leave to be used as the result of the impact of COVID-19. Details regarding the use of this additional leave can be found in M-01911 located under the MOU section of the NALC web site (nalc.org), or you can contact your area representative.

**Effective April 1 through December 31, the Family First Coronavirus Response Act**, passed by Congress, provides, in addition to your normal leave balance, an additional 80 hours of paid emergency sick leave. The FFCRA also provides 12 weeks of FMLA, 10 weeks of which are paid, for employees forced to stay home to care for their dependents during the pandemic. The details of the amount of pay and the circumstances under which the leave can be used can be found at nalc.org, or you can contact your area representative.

**NALC and USPS encourages all employees to stay home if you** are sick. We need everyone who is available to come to work, but we do not want anyone to endanger the health and safety of your fellow employees or their families. We also want you to receive a pay check if you are forced to be out of work. Please contact your area representative for information when you have to be out of work. Every situation is different, and we are here to help you through the confusion. Our priorities are threefold: the safety of our members and their families, the continued service to our customers now and into the future, and that every member not be forced to decide between the safety of themselves and their family and a pay check.



## What's On and What's Not

The COVID-19 has impacted the schedule of Branch 38, as it has the rest of the world. Although our area representatives continue to visit offices and work to protect the rights and benefits of our members, our ability to hold our meetings and events has been eliminated by regulations from State government and the CDC.

We were forced to cancel our April and May Branch Meetings. We will conduct our June meeting via the internet’s Zoom platform. We hope to return to Woodbridge in September, but that will be determined at a later date.

All retiree functions have been postponed until further notice. We hope to be able to schedule them in the Fall. We continue to request gold cards and commemorative pins for our retirees, and will get them delivered as soon as possible.

The Food Drive has been postponed. We are hoping that it will be rescheduled in the Fall, and we know that NALC is working on an alternate way for us to support our neighborhood food banks.

The Day at the races has tentatively been rescheduled for July 26, pending the extension of State regulations regarding gatherings.

**THE SENTINEL**  
NJ Merged Branch 38, NALC  
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Springfield, NJ 07081

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## **Branch Meeting Information & Directions**

Meetings are held at 7:30 PM on the first Wednesday of each month, except July & August.

The Branch Meetings are held at:

**ELKS BPO LODGE #2116**  
**665 RAHWAY AVENUE**  
**WOODBIDGE, NJ 07095**  
**732-634-2116**

**Directions:**

**SOUTH** on Garden State Parkway. Take Exit #129 to Route 9 North to Woodbridge Exit (Just after the Forge Restaurant on your right). At the end of the Exit Ramp, turn right onto Main Street (Route 514) and proceed until you reach a monument at City Hall. Bear left onto Rahway Avenue. The Elks is @1/2 mile down the road on your left.

**NORTH** on Garden State Parkway. Take Exit #127 to Route 9 North and follow directions above.

**NJ Turnpike.** Take Exit 12 (Carteret). Bear right after toll booth and turn left at light after overpass. Proceed through industrial park to Rahway Avenue and turn left. The Elks is 1 mile ahead on your right.