

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



# THE SENTINEL

September 2018

## *Special CCA Edition*



**President**

*by Mike O'Neill*

**CCA's continue to be hired at an incredible rate. This is not** only the result of career city carriers retiring or leaving for other personal reasons. CCA's continue to leave or be removed at a level not seen before in the Postal Service. This is a problem that needs to be addressed by the Postal Service and the NALC.

**We believe that many of the CCA's leaving the Service may** be more inclined to stay if they are better informed regarding their rights and benefits. With that in mind, Branch 38 has periodically published an issue of the Sentinel mailed to, and aimed directly at, CCA's.

**In this issue you will find articles about relative standing,** hold down assignments, health benefits, savings for retirement, and the Letter Carrier Political Fund. This information is intended to help you to understand your rights and the different benefits available to our CCA's. You should know that this issue only scratches the surface of what you need to know, and all of the information available to CCA's through the NALC.

**The NALC web site (nalc.org) dedicates an entire section to** help CCA's navigate the mine field that is life in the Postal Service for our newest employees. Here you will find information regarding the structure of the NALC, how the grievance procedure works, the National Agreement, NALC City Carrier Assistant Rights and Benefits booklet, NALC City Carrier Assistant Resource Guide, and National Agreement Q and A's for CCA's.

**There is information regarding the CCA uniform allowance,** conversion to career status, your rights if you are injured at work, and so much more. Please make a point to take advantage of this important source of information. The daily grind of being a CCA is a difficult one, and you will need all of the help you can get.

**The NALC has recently reached a settlement on a national** level grievance which will result in the conversion of approximately 3,500 CCA's nation wide. Those conversions are being implemented now. Information regarding these conversions can be found in the most recent edition of the Postal Record, recent editions of the NALC Bulletin posted in your office, and on the NALC web site.

**You should also know that your officers and representatives at** Branch 38 are always available to assist our CCA's. You should know who your shop steward is and who your Branch 38 Area Representative is. You can also contact the Branch office at 973-564-7244 with any questions or concerns you may have.

**The US Postal Service may not be for you, but since you are** already here I suggest you give it a fair shot. It can be a great place to work and support your family, but you will best be able to take advantage of what is offered if you make yourself familiar with what you are entitled to. Your Union is here to help you do that.

# NEW JERSEY MERGED BRANCH 38

**National Association of Letter Carriers**

**374 Morris Avenue  
Springfield, NJ 07081**

**Phone  
973-564-7244**

**e-mail  
NALC38@VERIZON.NET**

**FAX  
973-564-7673**

## Branch Officers

Michael O'Neill	President
Dan Szucs	Executive Vice President
Joseph Rutkoski	Treasurer
Mark McGrady	Director of City Delivery
John Sheridan	Financial Secretary
Pete Bednarz	Sergeant-At-Arms
Ron Villegas	Director of Retirees

### BRANCH 38 TRUSTEES

Keith Hemmings	Roy Jancio
Richard O'Connell Jr.	Christine Strasser
	Dominic Walton

### PART TIME AREA REPRESENTATIVES

Pete Bednarz	Clint Colie
Jeff Fezza	Roy Jancio
Joe Otero	Armando Pedreira
Christine Strasser	Dominic Walton

### NATIONAL BUSINESS AGENT

Larry Cirelli 212-868-0284

### BRANCH 38 ATTORNEY

Donald Millman, Esq. 973-669-9776

### MUTUAL BENEFIT REPRESENTATIVE

Christine Strasser 973-564-7244 (Ext.20)

## DATES TO REMEMBER

### BRANCH MEETINGS

September 5, 2018  
October 3, 2018  
November 7, 2018  
December 5, 2018

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Tough Mudder Challenge for MDA  
October 7, 2018

Charlie Connell Golf Outing  
October 8, 2018

Retiree Breakfast - North  
October 21, 2018

Retirement Training  
October 28, 2018

Election Day  
November 5, 2018

Beefsteak Dinner for MDA  
November 10, 2018

Holiday Party  
December 15, 2018

**NJ Merged Branch 38  
Web Site**

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

# Relative Standing



## Executive Vice President

by Dan Szucs

**Seniority is the length of time you work within an installation** compared to the other employees in the same craft employed at that installation. Seniority is used when applying various rights and benefits such as bidding assignments and leave. CCAs are credited with something similar to seniority called relative standing. This is how and why relative standing is calculated. It is determined by the original CCA hire date in an installation. For those CCAs who were transitional employees (TEs) before being hired as CCAs, all time served as a TE after September 29, 2007 is added to their relative standing.

**It is important to remember when calculating relative standing** that it doesn't matter where an individual served as a transitional employee. All time on the rolls as a transitional employee after September 29, 2007 counts toward relative standing, regardless of the installation(s) in which the transitional employee was employed. When CCA's are converted into career positions, the CCA with the highest relative standing should be converted. Questions have been raised by some that believe they were skipped over. The Postal Service sends a document to your mailing address. On the bottom of the page it has a form number - PS FORM 50. This document contains information including your name and your date of hire. To help your shop steward address your concerns keep this form and make a copy for your steward.

**Time credited toward relative standing for time worked as a transitional employee** after September 29, 2007 cannot be lost when a CCA transfers from one installation to another. Relative standing earned as a CCA in one installation does not move with a CCA who is separated and is later employed in another installation. If two or more CCAs are listed on the relative standing roster for an installation having the same total time credit, their placement on the relative standing roster is determined by their placement on the hiring list (appointment register).

**Relative standing also comes into play if the Postal Service** needs to separate a CCA due to lack of work. CCA employees may be separated at any time during their term of appointment for lack of work. Separations for lack of work shall be by inverse relative standing in the installation. CCAs separated for lack of work

will be given preference for reappointment ahead of other CCAs with less relative standing in the installation if the need for hiring arises within 18 months of their separation.

**Relative standing is also important if a CCA wishes to "hold-down" or "opt"** for a temporarily vacant full-time craft duty assignment with an anticipated duration of five (5) days or more. Another situation where relative standing is important is if the Postal Service decides to not reappoint a CCA for operational reasons. In a situation in which a CCA employee is separated for 5 days between appointments, and operational circumstances indicate that reappointment for a CCA is not needed, a CCA with lower relative standing in the office will be separated, and the CCA who was on break will be reappointed.

**Relative standing is extremely important for when CCAs are** converted to fulltime career status within an installation. The CCA with the most relative standing in that installation is the first one converted to full-time career status. When it comes to filling a vacancy in the office, Article 12-Transfer Memo, the Postal Service will afford full consideration to all reassignment requests from career employees in other geographical areas. If there are sufficient qualified employees for reassignment at least 1 out of 4 or 1 out of 6 vacancies (depending on the size of your office) will be filled by granting the requests for reassignment.

**If you have any further questions or concerns regarding your** relative standing or being converted to career employee, talk to your shop steward or call the Branch 38 office.

## Charlie Connell Memorial Columbus Day Golf Outing

Monday, October 8, 2018

8:30 AM Shotgun Start

BUNKER HILL GOLF COURSE

GRIGGSTOWN, NJ

FEE - \$110 per Golfer

Price Includes: Golf, Cart, Dinner, Beer, Soda, Hot  
Dogs & Prizes

Contact Mike O'Neill at 973-564-7244 (Ext. 18)

# Hold Down Assignments



## Director of City Delivery

by *Mark McGrady*

A temporarily vacant full time assignment of 5 days or more is available for opting, also known as a hold down. A City Carrier Assistant (CCA), with at least 60 calendar days of service, may submit, in writing, a request to hold down a temporarily vacant assignment of 5 days or more. Every CCA should take advantage of this option.

Article 41.2.B.3, 41.2.B.4 and 41.2.B.5 of our National Agreement provide a special procedure for exercising seniority in filling temporary vacancies of full time duty assignments. This procedure allows carriers to hold down vacant duty assignments of regular carriers who are on leave or otherwise unavailable to work for 5 days or more. CCA's may opt for these hold down assignments. The NALC/USPS Joint CCA Questions & Answers provides:

**68.** Will CCAs be allowed to opt on (hold-down) vacant duty assignments?

Yes, after April 10, 2013.

**69.** Is there a waiting period for a new CCA (no former experience as a career city letter carrier or city carrier transitional employee) before the employee can opt on a hold down?

Yes, 60 calendar days from the date of appointment as a CCA. Once the CCA has met this requirement there is no additional waiting period for applying for/being awarded a hold-down when the employee is converted to career.

**70.** Is there a difference in the application of opting (hold-down) rules between part-time flexible city carriers and CCAs?

No.

**CCA's will be awarded hold downs based on relative standing (seniority) in the installation.** This means that the CCA with the most time within the installation will have first choice for a hold down. If a CCA chooses to submit a hold down on a tempo-

rarily vacant assignment, that CCA is entitled to work the regularly scheduled days and the daily hours of the assignment. This is not a guarantee to work 8 hours a day or 40 hours in a work week. A regular carrier is guaranteed 8 hours of work a day and 40 hours in a week but a CCA is not. If it only takes a CCA 7 hours to finish their work assignment on one particular day, you are only entitled to the 7 hours of work on that particular day. Management has the option to make a CCA work other duties after your assignment is finished.

**Once a CCA opts on a temporary vacancy, that CCA is required to stay on the hold down for the duration of the vacancy; until the regular carrier returns.** If a CCA has a break in service or takes a vacation for five days, the CCA remains on the hold down upon his/her return to work. A break in service is not a reason to be taken off the hold down.

**There are exceptions to the rule against removing CCA's from their hold downs.** CCA's may be bumped from their hold down to provide sufficient work for full time employees. Again, full time employees are guaranteed 40 hours of work per service week. Therefore, they may be assigned work on routes held down by CCA's, if there is not sufficient work available for them on a particular day. This does not mean the CCA's hold down has been terminated. It just means the CCA can be bumped on a day-to-day basis, if there is not sufficient work for the regular carriers in the office.

**CCA's are not eligible to hold down a vacant Carrier Technician (T-6) assignment,** because they are higher-level assignments. Management may, however, assign a CCA to a Carrier Technician assignment.

**Opting or holding down a vacant assignment is not just an option,** it is an important right. It gives CCA's the opportunity to work a more consistent schedule, and allows CCA's some choice over what work they will do.

## Register to Vote

Every election is important. The Congressional election in 2018 is critical to the Postal Service and our jobs. Please register to vote now. Voter registration forms are available at our web site, [www.branch38nalc.com](http://www.branch38nalc.com). If you have moved, or if you have not voted in the past couple of years, you may not be registered. We need all of our members to have their voices heard.



# Health Benefits



## **Treasurer**

*by Joseph Rutkoski*

**The 2016-2019 National Agreement included a major increase** in the amount that the USPS will now pay CCA's for their health insurance. These changes will save CCA's hundreds of dollars in health benefit premiums each year. Under the 2016-2019 National Agreement, CCA's who choose "Self Plus One" or "Self and Family" coverage in the USPS Non-Career Health Benefit Plan will receive a contribution equal to 65 percent of the total premium during their first year of employment as a CCA, and 75 percent of the total premium after their first year of employment as a CCA.

**CCA's who decide to elect "Self Only" coverage in the USPS Non-Career Health Benefit Plan** will continue to receive biweekly USPS contributions of \$125 toward their premiums. National Agreement Appendix B states: The Postal Service will make a bi-weekly contribution to the total premium for any CCA employee who wishes to participate in the USPS Non-career Health Care Plan (USPS Plan) self-only option equal to the greater of (a) \$125, or (b) the minimum required by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and applicable regulations

**If you are a CCA, and wish to sign up for the Non-Career Health Care plan**, you must do so within 60 days of the date that your appointment started. This option is available to all CCA's. You must either elect coverage within 60 days of the date you were hired, or during any open season period. Each year, open season runs from the Monday of the second full work week in November through the Monday of the second full work week in December.

**It is important to know and understand that if a CCA does not sign up for healthcare insurance within the first 60 days**, they will not be eligible to do so again until the next open season. The only exception is if a certain qualifying life event occurs. Examples of a qualifying event would be getting married, getting divorced, or the birth of a child. Contact your Human Resources Shared Service Center (HRSSC) to find out if you qualify for a qualifying life event. Call 1-877-477-3271, and go to the Human Resources Shared Service Center (HRSSC) option, or call the Branch 38 office.

**To sign up for the Non-Career Health Care plan the employee** will need their Employee Identification Number (EIN) and their Personal Identification Number (PIN). The employee has the following options available to them when enrolling into a health care plan.

- Enroll using Postal Ease by calling 1-877-477-3271 and choosing the Postal Ease option
- Enroll using your computer, simply go to [www.lightblue.usps.gov](http://www.lightblue.usps.gov)
- Enroll using an employee self serving KIOSK system found in some of the larger offices.

## **CCA'S CHECK YOUR PAY STUBS**

**If you're a city carrier assistant (CCA) who recently returned from your five-day break between appointments**, check your pay stub to be sure you are being paid correctly. There have been instances reported where the CCA hourly rate was incorrectly reduced.

**Pursuant to the Jan. 10, 2013 Das arbitration award, CCAs who were on the rolls as temporary employees on that date shall be paid at Step AA of Table 2**, which is the higher hourly rate of the two steps for CCAs. [Click here to review the most recent paychart.](#)

**Also, check the new re-appointment letter you receive in the mail from Shared Services (PS Form 50, "Notice of Personnel Action," item number 62, "Base Salary")** to be sure your hourly rate is correct. If you are being paid incorrectly, contact USPS Shared Services at 877-477-3273, Option 5, to advise them that you are being paid incorrectly. Also, discuss it with your NALC shop steward or local branch officer and local management.

# CCA Retirement Savings



**Trustee  
& MBA Rep**

**by Christine Strasser**

As a CCA, you're in a daily struggle to balance the craziness at work while trying to maintain a harmonious home life. Although the last thing on your mind is retirement, now is the best time to consider some options available to make your retirement a reality years from now.

As a city carrier assistant, you are unable to participate in the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) until you are converted to a fulltime regular career employee. In your office, conversion to a fulltime regular could be a few months or a few years away. Fortunately, the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) has a fraternal organization known as the Mutual Benefit Association (MBA). The Mutual Benefit Association was established in 1891, and is designed to offer union members life insurance products, annuities, and hospital confinement policies.

The MBA offers city carrier assistants a retirement plan, which is available prior to your career appointment with the Postal Service. The NALC CCA Retirement Saving Plan, or commonly referred to as the RSP, is a retirement plan offered to supplement your pension. Just like other retirement plans, the RSP allows you to make small payments at a younger age, so when you retire you can receive monthly payments. The RSP is a tax-deferred plan,

meaning you do not pay taxes on the plan until you begin withdrawing payments from the plan.

**The amount you can contribute will be at your option, but must be a minimum of fifteen dollars.** You can contribute a lump sum deposit into your account at any time. Payment into the plan can be deducted automatically from your paycheck or billed to you monthly or annually.

**The RSP can be formulated through either a Traditional IRA or a Roth IRA.** The differences between the two are:

#### **Traditional IRA**

- Tax deferred
- \$5,500 annual contribution; over age 50 \$6,500 income limit
- Withdrawal privileges after age 59 1/2
- Mandatory distribution at age 70 1/2
- Fund can be transferred into a Thrift Savings Plan Traditional IRA

#### **Roth IRA**

- Contributions are not tax deductible
- \$5,500 annual contribution; age 50+ annual contribution \$6,500
- Tax free withdrawal at 59 1/2 and policy must be opened for at least five years

**As you begin your career, you will be receiving a vast amount of information.** Please do not be afraid to reach out and ask any New Jersey Merged Branch 38 representative for advice. Please contact me at [38strasser@verizon.net](mailto:38strasser@verizon.net) for a brochure or for additional information about the MBA plans.

**I am here to assist you with this excellent and important opportunity to invest in your future.** The first positive step was securing a career in the Postal Service. Although retirement is probably the last thing on your mind, now is the time to start preparing for a financially secure retirement. The NALC offers the means to help you to make that a reality.

## **TEMPORARY REASSIGNMENT OF CCA'S**

**CCAs will normally work in their employing post office, but may be assigned to another post office in the local travel area (Handbook F-15 Section 7-1.1.1.1) within the same district on an occasional basis (the assignment may be for a partial day or several consecutive days depending on local circumstances). Sunday CCA assignments are not subject to the occasional basis limitations.**

**CCA s are entitled to travel reimbursement for any distance they travel beyond the normal mileage distance between their home and their employing office.** A CCA needs to contact the supervisor who assigned them to the other office, and log on to E-travel for reimbursement of expenses. The supervisor needs to confirm that they authorized your temporary assignment and travel. You will also need to document the additional mileage you traveled to the other office, parking, and toll receipts that you paid. The best way to get the mileage is to go on map quest, and enter in the travel route and subtract it from your normal commuting distance between your home and employing office.

# Protect Your Future



**Sergeant  
at Arms**

**by Pete Bednarz**

As CCA's you work for the USPS, however your employer is really the Federal Government. There are many politicians in Congress that have been consistently trying to enact postal legislative bills that would harm all of our hard earned benefits and salaries. There are those who would like to see the Postal Service sold off, and have you replaced with minimum wage employees with no benefits.

Just recently, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) unveiled a plan for privatization of the Postal Service. This decision would likely result in price increases, provide service to only profitable areas, and would dramatically reduce the number of postal employees.

President Trump has also appointed a White House Postal Task Force which was due to give a report on August 10, 2018. This report in all likelihood will paint a grim picture of the postal financial situation. Without any sensible postal reform legislation, we should be prepared to hear the call for privatization and elimination of our collective bargaining rights.

We also have to worry about the White House 2019 Budget Proposal. The administration has targeted federal and postal employees' pensions and health care. The budget would mandate that we pay more into our pension fund and pay higher premiums for our health coverage. This is just another form of a pay cut. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has gone on record to agree with the budget proposal. The budget also calls for reducing frequency of delivery (eliminating 1-2 days) and scaling back door to door delivery. Imagine all the jobs lost?? As you can see, the future of the Postal service and your careers are on the line.

The most important way to invest in your future career is to contribute \$5.00 per pay period by automatic payroll deduction to the Letter Carrier Political Fund (LCPF). If you can't afford five dollars, donate whatever you can afford. This fund is used to mobilize our legislative efforts, and to support candidates that sup-

port us. We support both Republicans and Democrats.

**We are not permitted to use dues money for these purposes, so we rely upon the LCPF to achieve our legislative and political goals. Without this fund, your career with the Postal Service is very much in jeopardy.**

Since 2012, there have been more than a dozen bills in Congress to end six-day delivery. The LCPF, and our political allies, have been able to fight off every one of these bills. Think about how going to 5 day delivery would affect you. All the T-6/ floaters in your office would lose their assignment. They would all be unassigned regulars, still guaranteed 8 hours of work. The USPS would have no choice but to terminate a majority of the CCA's.

Another Postal Bill constantly being proposed is to eliminate door to door delivery. In other words, put cluster boxes on every street corner. This would eliminate routes and letter carrier jobs. The NALC needs the Letter Carrier Political Fund to protect our pay, benefits, and pensions. There will always be forces out there that will want to privatize the Post Office, eliminate collective bargaining and put many carriers out of work.

You are the future of the NALC and the USPS. We need to make sure that the CCAs continue to have a path to become career employees, with good wages and benefits. I urge all CCAs to invest in your future by signing up with the Letter Carrier Political Fund. This will be the best investment you can make to protect your future position as a career postal employee. Please see your Union representative, or call the Branch 38 office to sign up!

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

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

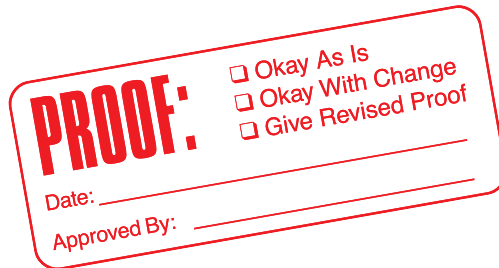
By making a contribution to the Letter Carrier Political fund, you are doing so voluntarily with the understanding that your contribution is not a condition of membership in the National Association of Letter Carriers or of employment by the Postal Service, nor is it part of union dues. You have a right 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.

# THE SENTINEL

NJ Merged Branch 38, NALC  
374 Morris Avenue  
Springfield, NJ 07081

NON-PROFIT  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PERMIT #398  
TRENTON, NJ

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



## 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.