

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



THE SENTINEL

September 2018

Convention Report



President

by Mike O'Neill

Branch 38 was very well represented at NALC's 71st Biennial Convention in Detroit this summer. I want to thank all of the delegates who took time out of their schedule to attend the Convention. It is always exciting to be able to participate first hand in formulating the future of our great union. Specialized training classes were offered every day before and after the Convention, and our delegates took full advantage.

It was very satisfying to have our Branch recognized for our hard work in so many areas. We received two awards for our efforts with the Letter Carrier Political Fund. In the category of Branches with over 2,000 members we took third place honors with a percentage of 10.91% and first place honors for the Branch with the highest increase of members contributing to the LCPF. It is my sincere hope that this is an indication that the message is getting across to our members that the Postal Service and its workers are under attack, and that we all must do our fair share to combat these attacks. I thank everyone who contributes to the Letter Carrier Political Fund, and I ask everyone else to consider joining us in this battle for our financial future.

Branch 38's efforts in informing our members about the very important benefits available to our members through the Mutual Benefit Association and the NALC Health Benefit Plan was also recognized. Christine Strasser and Pete Bednarz were named to chair the committees at the National Convention for the MBA and NALC HBP respectively. We feel strongly that it is part of our responsibility to share with our members the benefits of being a member of the NALC. It is gratifying to have our efforts in this area recognized. Thanks go out to Chris, Pete and our entire staff for their continued efforts in these important areas.

We have two very important events scheduled in the near future that involve retirement. On Sunday October 21, 2018 at 9:00 AM we will be hosting our annual Retiree Breakfast at the Chandelier Restaurant in Belleville, NJ. All retirees are invited to attend and bring a guest. Please contact Ron Villegas at 973-564-7244 (Ext.21) to reserve a spot. It is always a pleasure to get together with our retirees, and we encourage all of you to attend this very enjoyable event.

The second event is for those planning to retire in the near future. We will be having our third retirement seminar on Sunday, October 28, 2018 at 10:00 AM at the Elks Hall in Woodbridge, NJ. We received a positive response from the earlier seminars, and have decided to have one in the spring and the fall of each year. If you are considering retirement, this is a great opportunity to get the information you need and have your questions answered.

Finally, it was my pleasure recently to acknowledge the significant milestone of fifty years of membership in NALC achieved by three of our retirees. John Szewczyk of the East Brunswick office, Donald Kuenseler of the Edison office, and Peter Greco of the Livingston office were all presented with their Fifty Year Gold Cards. Congratulations and thanks to each of them.

NEW JERSEY MERGED BRANCH 38

National Association of Letter Carriers

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Springfield, NJ 07081**

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973-564-7244**

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

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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

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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

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 6, 2018

Beefsteak Dinner for MDA
November 10, 2018

Holiday Party
December 15, 2018

**NJ Merged Branch 38
Web Site**

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

It's Your Route - Protect It



Executive Vice President

by Dan Szucs

Every day letter carriers are being harassed about their time spent in the office and their time spent on the street. According to the Handbook M-41 - City Delivery Carriers Duties and Responsibilities, which is required to be at every route case, explains how we do our jobs as letter carriers. There is a standard time given for your office functions, which is listed in the M-41 section 121. Your street time is based on your own demonstrated ability and not someone else's. The M-41 provides, "...there is no set pace at which a carrier must walk and no street standard for walking." This is how your route is put together and you own that time. So how do you protect what you have established?

In 1978, the Postal Service and the Union agreed to incorporate provisions in their National Agreement providing that carriers receive two ten minute breaks each day. National Arbitrator Britton ruled that the Postal Service must ensure that all employees stop working during an office break. Contractual breaks must be observed and cannot be waived by employees. M-41 Section 242.341 states: Street Time Allied Work Rules -The carriers at the delivery unit will receive two 10 minute break periods. If two 10 minute breaks are taken on the street, they will be separate from each other. Breaks must also be separate from the lunch period. Break times for a part-time flexible letter carrier or CCA who works only a portion of a day performing carrier duties will be implemented on a pro-rated basis. The pro-rated basis will involve four equal segments of 2 hours each in the 8 hour day. Accordingly, a part-time flexible carrier or cca who works 2 hours performing carrier duties is entitled to a 5 minute break; 4 hours carrier work would provide a 10 minute break; 6 hours carrier work would provide one 10 minute break and one 5 minute break; and 8 hours carrier work entitles the carrier to two 10 minute breaks. Besides your paid two 10 minute breaks you are entitled to a non-paid 30 minute lunch. In 1985 MOU-00093 was agreed upon which reads, "Except in emergency situations or where service conditions preclude compliance, no employee may be required to work more than six consecutive hours without a meal or rest period of at least thirty minutes". Take your lunch. You DON'T GET PAID for your lunch period. Why does anyone want to work for free? That time does not get credited to your route.

Another way to protect your route is don't work off the clock. The JCAM is very clear when it comes to working off the clock. Section 41.3.K reads. "Supervisors shall not require, nor permit, employees to work off the clock". The M-41 section 112.26 provides, "Do not report at cases or racks before tour of duty is scheduled to begin or linger about cases or racks after tour has ended. Not only do you not get paid for that time, you don't get the credit that you deserve for the route. If you are working off the clock and get injured your claim will be controverted and cannot be approved by the Department of Labor. You will be left with the responsibility to pay for all your medical expenses and lost time.

One responsibility you always have to yourself is to work safe. The M-41 section 112.4 Safety provides, "Conduct your work in a safe manner so as not to endanger yourself or others." Section 133, Safety Practice reads, "Always exercise care to avoid personal injury and report all hazardous conditions to the unit manager (see part 812 for vehicle safety)." Section 133.2 reads, "Do not finger mail when driving, or when walking up or down steps or curbs, when crossing streets, or at any time it would create a safety hazard to the carriers or to the public." Section 133.3 provides, "Use crosswalks when crossing busy streets, and following traffic signals or the direction of traffic control personnel." No one comes to work planning to get injured, make it your priority to go home the same way you came in.

We all must do our part to protect our routes and our jobs. If you are unsure of anything, just ask a senior carrier or contact your shop steward or Area Representative. We will provide you with the information you need to succeed.

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)

Your Hard Work - Your Money



Director of City Delivery

by *Mark McGrady*

Nationwide there has been an increase in the number of offices with supervisors falsifying employees' work hours, stealing earned wages from our members. Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe is monitoring this issue closely and asking every Branch to report the violations directly to him. The NALC recently published a guide to help identify intentional false editing of clock rings. They have also published a work hour tracker, to keep track of your work hours for the year.

Just recently Branch 38 identified this problem in one of our larger offices. A class action grievance was initiated. The grievance was sustained and awarded the following remedy. The Postal Service was ordered to cease and desist from further violations, the carriers were made whole for all lost wages and benefits, and the supervisor who falsified the time records had their access to carrier work records, TACS, revoked.

As union leaders, we need to get this message out and advise our members to record their work hours on a daily basis and report any irregularities immediately to their shop stewards. As stewards, we need to monitor the work records on a regular basis. If you think this problem may exist in your office, request a copy of the TACs Everything Report and look for clock ring deletions (disallowed time). If you are investigating an overtime grievance check for deletions that look suspicious; deleted and or changed end tour (ET) or begin tour (BT). See if management is entering an out to lunch (OL) and in from lunch (IL). Carriers, as we know, do not have lunch rings. This is 30 minutes of time automatically subtracted from the carriers' work hours. Bear in mind some deletion of clock rings occur regularly and are not necessarily falsification of work records. Carriers from time to time swipe on the wrong operational code and or forget to swipe out at the end of the day. It should, however, be reported on PS Form 1017-A, noting why the deletion of time was necessary.

If you see any deletions that are suspicious, request in writing TACS Everything reports, PS Form 1017-A, Time disallowance Record, PS Form 1260, Non EBR Card along with the names and identification number of all employees who have TACS access. If you find that your manager is engaged in these illegal clock ring falsifications, file the grievance and cite the following provisions of our National Agreement, Article 5, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), Article 34 Section A, Article 41 Section 3.K, along with ELM Sections 432.712, 665.16 and 665.44 and Section 146.25 and 146.26 of the Time and Attendance Handbook F-21, via Article 19.

It is your responsibility to accurately track your work hours. You work hard for your money. Let's do everything we can to make sure you get every penny coming to you. If you suspect that management is stealing your money, contact the Branch office.

**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.

Respect is a Right



by Joseph Rutkoski

Treasurer

A number of provisions from our National Agreement, Postal Service Manual M-39, the Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM) and the Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace (JSOV) address the manner in which letter carriers are to be treated by management in the workplace. I mention these provisions because in too many offices today managers are quick to accuse letter carriers of taking too long to case their mail or taking too long on the street to deliver their route. It is all too common to hear on the workroom floor front-line supervisors arguing with a carrier over a request for overtime that a letter carrier feels honestly represents his or her needs for the day. This makes a carrier often feel like management is attacking their integrity, and in fact, they are. Far too many managers/supervisors express open disdain for letter carriers and comfortably attacks them whenever they can, all in the name of meeting their goals.

Article 34.A. of the National Agreement states: The principle of a fair day's work for a fair day's pay is recognized by all parties to this Agreement. This means that as long as carriers are doing their job to the best of their ability and by the book, then there is nothing management can do to you, EXCEPT TO TRY BULLING YOU INTO GOING FASTER.

This in turn creates a huge concern for the wellbeing and safety of letter carriers. When carriers are intimidated and threatened into taking shortcuts by management we often make decisions that we should not make. It pressures us to work unsafely. As a result, we end up doing things like leaving the engine running and in gear without setting the handbrake when leaving our vehicles. We don't put our seatbelt on and shut the door each and every time we are supposed to. We're in such a rush that we forget to take our satchel or dog spray when we rush out of the vehicle to make a delivery. We need to put a stop to the abusive behavior of those managers who violate your right to a safe work environment, free of the abusive behavior by management.

The Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace states in relevant part:

We openly acknowledge that in some places or units there is an unacceptable level of stress in the workplace...there is no excuse for and will be no tolerance of harassment, intimidation, threats or bullying by anyone...every employee at every level of the Postal Service should be treated at all times with dignity, respect and fairness. The need for the USPS to serve the public efficiently and productively... does not justify actions that are abusive or intolerant. 'Making the numbers' is not an excuse for the abuse of anyone. Those who do not treat others with dignity and respect will not be rewarded or promoted. Those whose unacceptable behavior continues will be removed from their positions....

The provision listed above gives the union the tools it needs to deal with abusive managers through the grievance/arbitration procedure. But the Shop Steward and/or the Area Representative cannot do it by themselves. They need the help of the other carriers in the office who may have witnessed or who have also been themselves harassed, intimidated, threatened or bullied. We need to watch out for each other. If you see a violation of the Joint Statement, step forward, be part of the solution, report it to your union representative and provide a statement confirming what you saw and/or what you heard. Help the union to help you.

Stewards will often reach out to carriers to investigate allegations of abuse raised by other carriers and discover that even though a carrier witnessed everything that took place in an alleged abuse case they will sometimes choose to ignore what happened or refuse to write a statement for the union. Some carriers unfortunately think that as long as they are not abusing me, then I'm not going to get involved or maybe they're just afraid to speak up. In my over twenty years of representing letter carriers in one form or another I have found again and again that those who do not speak up often are among the first to later demand assistance from those who suffered before. They demand that we, the union, seek statements of others in the office yet they refused to do the same for someone else when they were asked to. If you are a witness to, or have been yourself a target of abusive behavior by management, help by being a part of the solution by writing a statement and giving it to the union so we can file a successful grievance and put a end to it. If we cannot watch out for each other, who will?

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. If you have moved, or if you have not voted in the past couple of years, you may not be registered. Make sure your voices are heard.

We Must Be Heard



**Trustee
& MBA Rep**

by Christine Strasser

The National Association of Letter Carriers support both Democrats and Republicans. With over 280,000 active and retired letter carriers throughout the country, the NALC has the ability to maintain relationships with members on both sides of the aisle in Congress and across the entire political spectrum. In New Jersey, the NALC has been fortunate to have gained the continuous support of nearly all of our Representatives, both Democrats and Republicans.

Members of Congress, and candidates for open seats, have one common and obvious goal; to win election. In order to achieve that goal, the candidates need votes and money. As a large and diverse organization, the NALC represents a very significant number of votes. As political activists, we control a significant amount of money through our Letter Carrier Political Fund. As such, we have the ability to have an impact on who gets elected, and what issues they support.

Encouraging members to vote is especially important as the midterm elections approach. Midterm elections will be held this year on November 6, 2018. An unfortunate fact of midterm elections is that voter turnout is historically lower, since it is not a presidential election. As a registered voter in New Jersey, you can enroll in vote by mail, thereby removing any excuse not to fulfill your obligation to vote. The State of New Jersey Department of State website is an excellent way to register to vote and enroll in vote by mail. The voter registration link is www.nj.gov/state/elections/voting-information.html#vrf. The vote by mail link is www.nj.gov/state/elections/voting-information-vote-by-mail.html.

Currently, our government is controlled by a one-party majority. The Republican party controls the White House, Senate, and House of Representatives. Midterm elections are held for several seats in the Senate, the entire House of Representatives, and many State offices. Normally, the party of the incumbent president tends to lose seats in both the Senate, the House, and many State offices during the midterm elections.

Our interest as letter carriers in the midterm election process is focused on the Senate and House elections. The Senate consists of one hundred seats. The party that holds the majority has control of the Senate. That means that they chair all of the committees and decide what pieces of legislation are brought to the floor for a vote. The Republicans have held the majority since 2016. This year there are thirty three seats up for election, one of the seats is in New Jersey. Senator Bob Menendez (D) is running for re-election. Senator Menendez has held office since 2006, has the support of the Democratic Party, and has been a consistent friend of letter carriers, the Postal Service, and labor.

On the other side of Congress, the entire House of Representatives, consisting of four hundred and thirty five seats, are up for re-election this year. The Republicans have held the majority in the House since 2006. In New Jersey, there are twelve Congressional Districts; seven held by Democrats and five held by Republicans. Currently, the most closely contested races are in the 2nd, 3rd, 7th, and 11th Districts. Democrats are hoping to capture these four Republican seats in New Jersey in order to help regain majority control of the House.

It is important, as these midterm elections approach, to educate the membership about our legislative issues, especially the issues attacking active and retired letter carriers. But more importantly we must encourage them to vote. As letter carriers our goal is to ensure a balance between Democrats and Republicans in both Houses of Congress. The November 6th election date will arrive quickly. Who we send to Washington, and which party controls both Houses of Congress, will decide the future of the Postal Service, our jobs, and our benefits. These midterm elections are critical, and we cannot afford to stand by and let others determine our future. We have to be in the game, like it or not. Let's all do our part.

Retiree Breakfast

On Sunday, October 21, 2018, at 9:00 AM, NJ Branch 38 will be holding our annual Retiree Breakfast. The Breakfast will be held at the Chandelier Restaurant located at 340 Franklin Ave, Belleville, NJ 07109. To reserve a spot, and to get directions, call Director of Retirees, Ron Villegas at 973-564-7244 (Ext. 21). All Branch 38 retirees are welcome to attend. There is no charge to retired members and a guest.

Invited guest speakers include NALC President Fred Rolando, NBA Larry Cirelli, RAA Bruce Didriksen, and NJSALC President Rich O'Connell. All NJ Merged Branch 38 officers and staff will be in attendance as well. This is an excellent opportunity for retirees to come together to exchange old stories, renew old friendships, and hear the latest news from Washington affecting letter carriers and retirees.

Health Benefits Open Season



Sergeant at Arms

by Pete Bednarz

You may face no greater decision this year than to choose the right medical coverage for you and your family. As of this writing, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has not announced the premiums of any of the health plans that participate in FEHB. It is, however, almost guaranteed that most, if not all, of the health plans will have an increase in their premiums. All Branch 38 members, including retirees and newly converted regulars, are strongly urged to compare the NALC Health Benefit Plan with all the other plans available. When you see the quality service, excellent coverage and the affordable pricing of the NALC Plan, you will be convinced that this plan best serves the needs of you and your family.

This past year there were over 175 Branch 38 members that switched from our competitors to join the NALC Health Benefit Plan. Many of them were able to save over \$100.00 per pay check, that's \$2,600.00 per year, just in premiums alone. Think about what you can do with that kind of savings.

Last year's rates and enrollment codes for the high option plan were:

Self- \$72.42 (Code 321)
Self Plus One-\$173.42 (Code 323)
Family- \$157.36 (Code 322)

I don't have enough room in this article to explain why Self Plus One is more expensive than the Family option, but I recommend any enrollee with only two people to choose the Family Option. The enrollment codes will remain the same this open season.

The best way to make an educated decision is to compare your current plan to the NALC Plan. The OPM comparison tool will show the difference in the price of the premiums, co-payments, deductibles and catastrophic limits. Go to:
<http://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/plan-information/compare-plans>

You will be surprised how much overall savings you can have by switching to the NALC Health Benefit Plan.

The NALC partners with CIGNA in order to use their vast network to provide our members with access to over 2.6 million preferred physicians, and thousands of preferred hospitals and facilities all over the country. You can easily check to see if your current doctors are in the health plan by visiting the website (www.nalchbp.org) or by calling 877-220-6252.

The NALC Health Plan is union operated, union owned and not-for-profit. It was started over 60 years ago as a benefit for all NALC union members. It covers more than 126,000 members, has paid over 971 million dollars in benefits, and has processed over 4.5 million claims last year.

Current active letter carriers have 4 ways to enroll in the NALC Health Plan:

1. Use computer or smart phone and go to <https://liteblue.usps.gov>
2. The Blue Page (Internet) at work.
3. Employee Self-Service Kiosks located at some USPS facilities.
4. PostalEase by phone. Call (877-477-3273) and enter Option 1.

Annuitants and Retirees have 3 ways to enroll in the NALC Health Plan:

1. Call Employee Express at 800-332-9798
2. Visit OPM's Open Season website at retireefehb.opm.gov
3. Submit a Standard 2809 to your Retirement office.

If you are a retiree and have Medicare as the primary payer and the NALC Health Plan High Option, charges for services and supplies are covered 100% between Medicare and the Plan. With that in mind, why would you stay with another health plan that charges you hundreds of dollars more each month?

This Open Season, take the time to compare, educate yourself, and choose the health insurance plan that is best for you and your family. It may be the smartest and most important economic decision you make in 2018.

Retirement Seminar

Sunday, October 28, 2018 - 10:00 AM

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

Contact your Area Rep to Reserve a Spot

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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.