

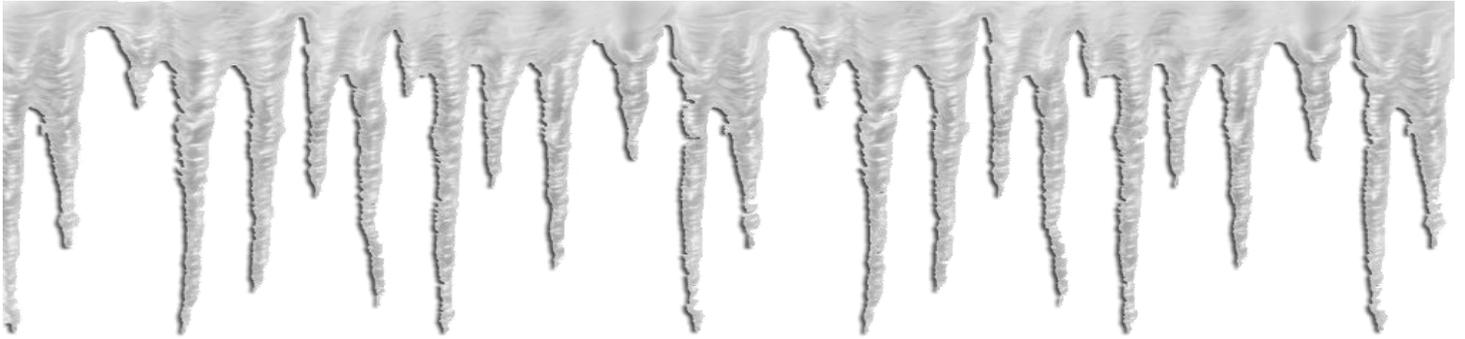
NALCASTER

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LETTER CARRIERS

Pagoda Branch 258

READING, PA.

February 10, 2020



**N.A.L.C. PAGODA BRANCH 258
READING PA OFFICERS 2020**

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Treasurer	Jason Taylor	570-617-1124
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19555	Robert Oswald	610-451-5114
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 View our website at www.nalc258.com
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Letter from the Editor

Warm holiday greetings to all! I know, that is the same greeting I gave in the previous issue of the Nalcaster, but the more I looked at the calendar, the more appropriate it seemed to give once again. During the time frame of this issue, most of us will celebrate President's Day, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, and Easter – as many, if not more holidays than we celebrated during the previous two months.

As I look ahead in 2021, this year holds the potential for a great deal of hope – that we can become better protected from this virus which continues to have such a profound impact on our lives; that we can gradually but permanently return to a better sense of normalcy in our daily lives; that we can see a positive impact on our professional lives due to efforts at completing both local and national contracts; and that we can all take the opportunities presented to us this year to improve, celebrate and enjoy our lives.



In this issue, there will, of course, be an obvious emphasis on the new contract and the ratification process. However, I have made sure to include information on other topics, as well. My goal, over the course of the coming months, is to keep this publication timely and inclusive to the things that our membership needs to, and wants to know. To this end, and as always, suggestions and submissions from any of our members are welcomed. I may be the editor, but this is your publication.

Andy Gelsinger, Nalcaster Editor



Meetings TBA

The continuing restrictions and precautions necessitated by the COVID pandemic has once again caused difficulty in conducting our usual Branch meetings. At this point, meetings are on the calendar for February 10 and March 10. The board and President of Branch 258 continue to monitor the latest information and hope to conduct either regular meetings, or meetings in an alternate form, as soon as possible. Please check our facebook page website, bulletin boards, or “word of mouth” for the latest news on our upcoming meetings.

President's Message

Hello Everyone,

I hope everyone has made it through the holidays safely and in good health. It was a big change for us this year. Jan and I spent the holidays at home alone. We are fortunate enough that we were able to do a Zoom holiday with our sons and their families. It was great to see and hear our grandchildren's excitement on Christmas morning. I hope next year we can all be together in person to celebrate. These times are especially hard on parents and grandparents. Loneliness can be devastating to anyone. Make sure you check in on any of your elderly or homebound friends and family. It will brighten their day.

All active NALC members should have received a ballot concerning the new collective/bargaining agreement. VP Richie McDonough attended a virtual rap session explaining the new contract provisions. As a NALC member you need to vote to approve or disapprove the pending agreement. After reviewing the tentative terms we urge all of you to vote YES to ratify this agreement. Good wage increases, retained cola's, discontinuation of the MSP street scans and pathways for CCA's to become career employees are some of the highlights. Information on this agreement can be found on the nalc.org website along with December issue of the Postal Record. If you have any questions please contact your steward or any board member.

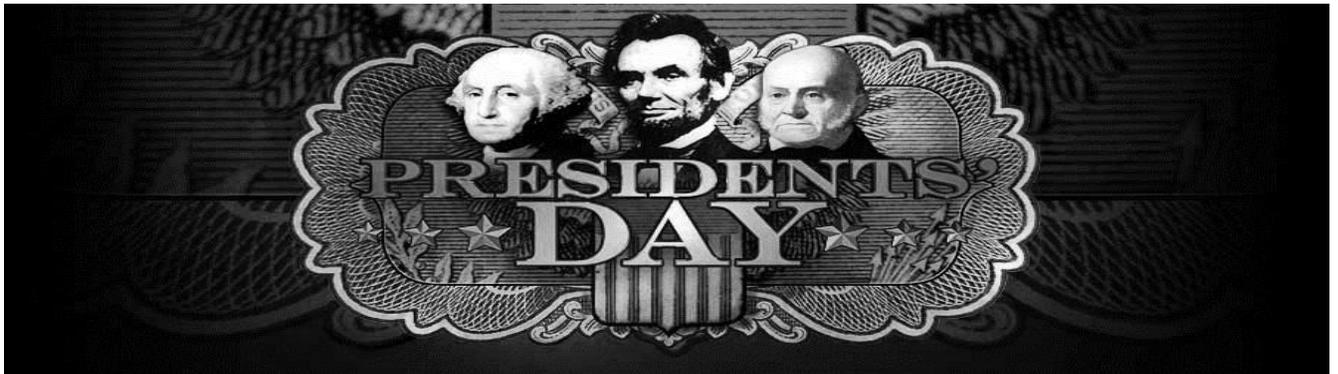
The pandemic continues to ravage our country. Local cases have increased. So have the number of positive postal employees. USPS employees are part of the second phase to get the shots. Please consider getting one. It is heartbreaking to me that the virus has taken 400,000 American lives. More Americans died from coronavirus than were lost in WWII. Some people didn't take this pandemic seriously until it effected someone they knew. I cannot urge you enough to take this seriously. Don't depend on anyone else to keep you safe. Be responsible - wear a mask, social distance and stay home unless it is necessary. Clean your work areas and vehicles constantly. Wash your hands. If not for yourself, do it for your coworkers and family. The postal service will begin looking for alternative assignments for employees who cannot or will not wear masks or face shields. With state and now federal mandates concerning wearing face coverings on federal property it has become a requirement for our job. Talks will be given on this subject.

This pandemic has hit the USPS hard. Delayed mail and forced work hours seem to be the norm these past few months. As employees we sometimes do not understand why things happen the way they do. The virus has put a lot of people out of work without an income. We are lucky we are not facing that nightmare. The postal service is now facing an increase in parcel volume along with many employees being off due to Covid 19 issues. There are just not enough workers to get the work done. On top of that, the service has had very little success hiring more employees. The whole situation is very troubling. Let's hope this doesn't become the new normal. I can only hope that a solution will be realized soon. All we can do as letter carriers is to do our best in serving

our customers daily. Our country is counting on us to help America make it through this crisis. Letter carriers are essential workers in every neighborhood across the land. We are always the #1 trusted government agency! So many people depend on us to deliver medicine, paychecks, package's and mail every day. I know letter carriers collectively will make that happen and we will prevail. Better days are ahead. Thank You for all you do. Please stay safe! Prayers for all of you for a happy and healthy New Year.

Sincerely,

Fred A. Ranalli Jr.



USPS Employee COVID Vaccination Update

Mandatory Stand-Up Talk Jan. 20, 2021 - When will it be my turn to get vaccinated? Like you, we are eager to learn when Postal Service employees will have access to COVID-19 vaccines. The goal is for everyone to be able to get a COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible.

Currently, the supply of COVID-19 vaccines in the United States is limited, but we are starting to hear that more vaccines should become available soon.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and others are providing recommendations to federal, state and local governments about who should be vaccinated first. The collective recommendation is that Postal Service employees be considered during the Phase 1B rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in state and local jurisdictions.

While the Postal Service continues to strive toward a standardized priority opportunity for our employees who choose to get the vaccine, we urge you not to delay your own access to a COVID-19 vaccination.

States, and in many cases, local jurisdictions, have their own plans for deciding which groups of people will be vaccinated first. We strongly urge you to review the information on your state and/or local public health websites, sign up for alerts and schedule a COVID-19 vaccination at the first opportunity available to you.

We will continue to provide updates as more information regarding access to COVID-19 vaccinations for our employees becomes available. Thank you for listening.

New National Agreement Sent for Ratification

As most of you know, the USPS and NALC have reached an agreement for a new tentative contract. The next step in making this contract official (or going back to the negotiating table) is the ratification process. The following is a summary of what happens next.

The Ratification Process

A copy of the proposed agreement has been sent to every active member of the NALC (sorry retirees, you are not included). A ballot has also been sent – this mailing began on January 11, and was completed on January 20. All ballots must be received by NALC headquarters by February 16. We strongly encourage all members in the branch to return their ballots and have your voice heard, as we take great pride in being a democratic Union that belongs to its members.

All received votes will be counted according to NALC constitutional guidelines, and the results will be announced as they are known. If the contract is ratified, the period for negotiating local agreements will be from April 29 to May 28.

The Highlights

As stated above, every member will receive a copy of the entire proposed National Agreement. Some highlights of provisions/changes from the previous contract are listed below:

- 44 month (nearly four year) length, retroactive to September 20, 2019 and in effect until November 19, 2022
- 4 general wage increases, totaling %4.8, and 7 cost of living adjustments
- Retroactive wage increases and COLAs will be calculated and paid in a lump sum as soon as practicable after contract ratification
- 4 CCA wage increases in addition to the general wage increases
- Automatic CCA conversion to career status (PTF) after two years of service, if they have not made regular by that time
- Decrease of %1 in USPS contributions to health care coverage
- Increase in uniform allowance

- Carriers who work on the holiday schedule instead of taking their holiday will have the option of adding 8 hours of AL to their total instead of collecting their holiday pay
- Street MSP points will be eliminated
- A new top step (step P) will be created for the top rate of pay

Our Opinion

The NALC national officers have unanimously approved the proposed agreement and recommend ratification. Branch 258 vice-president Rich McDonough attended a virtual conference discussing the details of the contract, and has reported to the officers at our monthly board meeting. After discussion, the officers of Branch 258 support the ratification of the new National Agreement, and encourage a “yes” vote from our members.

The Last Word

Regardless of the opinion of our board, we are a democratic union and you, the member, have the final say. If you, the members, vote yes, we will have a new contract. If you, the members, vote no, the NALC will return to negotiations, which left off with an arbitration scheduled to proceed. Either way, the result is, in the end, your decision, along with every other eligible voter in this union.

Editors note: The following is reprinted from the NALC national website. While the stated publication date of this Nalcaster seems to make this information untimely, the date which our members will actually receive it may be early enough for this to be useful
January 22, 2021

Didn't Receive a Ratification Ballot?

Beginning on Jan. 11, every active letter carrier eligible to vote in the contract ratification election was mailed a copy of the proposed 2019-2023 National Agreement between NALC and USPS. Mailing of ballots was completed on Jan. 20.

Included in the mailing is a letter from NALC President Fredric Rolando, a summary of the contract's provisions, a ballot and secrecy envelope, a return envelope and instructions for casting a vote. For a ballot to be counted, it must be received by noon on Feb. 16.

If you are eligible to vote on the proposed agreement and have not received a ballot by Jan. 25, call NALC Headquarters at 202-393-4836 (9 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Eastern Time) to request a replacement ballot. A replacement ballot will be mailed after your eligibility is verified.



Some Notes on Vacation Bidding

Bidding on AL has been in full swing since the beginning of the year, as carriers are in the bidding cycle for locking in full weeks during the prime time periods of 2021. It is, therefore, particularly timely, to share some tips on vacation bidding which can be beneficial when you look ahead to the rest of the year. This information, for most, will be a review and reminder, but should still be beneficial to all to some degree.

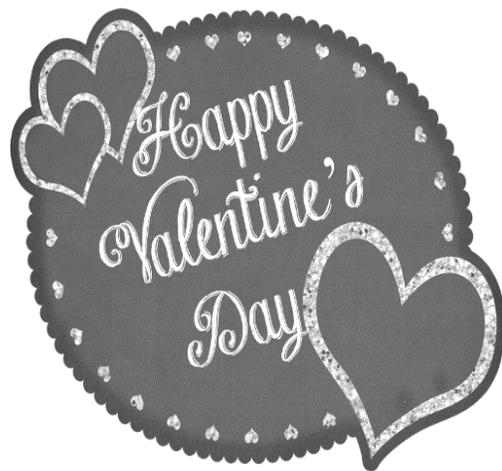
1. Be aware of your opts rights. We know that you can bid two prime weeks per year. Well, not exactly. You have two “opts,” which can be for one or two weeks. You can bid two 1-week opts, 1 single week AND 1 two-week opt, or one opt of either type. So, if you choose to bid a one and a two week opt, you can actually end up having AL for three weeks of prime time.
2. Know your day to bid prime weeks. If you miss it, you will have to wait until the inverse seniority period to try again and risk the board slots becoming full. If your day to bid falls on your day off, make arrangements for your slips to be turned in.
3. Know your scheduled day off. We can “save” a vacation day by bidding a week that falls on our weekend off – four days of AL committed instead of five.
4. Try to save a couple days just in case. We often have things that come up that we didn’t know about in the beginning of the year – family gatherings, weddings, the big game, a surprise invitation, helping a friend move (well maybe we avoid that). The point is, it is always a good idea to keep a couple days in your pocket for those unexpected events. Otherwise, if you take that extra day for the wedding and end up with a short leave balance, you may be forced to rescind your week(s) later in the year.
5. Take advantage of single days, when it works for you. Many (most) carriers across the country do not have the option to take single days of AL, because it was never negotiated into their local contract. Appreciate and take advantage of your right to do so. If you want to lock in a long weekend, or protect yourself from being forced on a particular day, or just want to take a short time instead of a full week, by all means, do so.
6. Look ahead to holidays. You have every right to lock in your holiday weekend by taking a day of AL before or after, but you cannot do so AFTER the holiday schedule is posted. You can always take your chances on being forced, but if you want to remove all doubt, do not wait until after they tell you are forced before trying to prevent it.
7. If you are a CCA, make sure that you know the rule differences – if you have a question, ask your shop steward or someone you absolutely trust – do not get information from someone who is basing their answer on their situation as a regular.
8. Partial weeks – if there is room on the board (and there usually is), adding individual days up to your day off before and/or after your full week can extend your vacation time considerably – essentially adding an extra week’s worth of days without actually using an opt to bid a standard choice week.

9. Watch for rescinds. Junior carriers can often pick up a week they wanted, but couldn't initially get, by bidding that week after it is rescinded by someone later in the year.
10. Be mindful of changes in your route assignment. If you bid to (or are assigned to) a new route, your rotating day off may also change. This may affect your vacation day planning, especially if you have upcoming single days. Re-evaluate your calendar, and rescind or add days as needed.
11. Be aware of differences on the East side and West side. Our local is also fairly unique in the fact that we are split among "east side" and "west side" zones. The west side has less carriers, but also less slots which tend to fill up faster, and also has a greater average seniority. This may influence your strategy for getting days that you may want (and may also influence your bidding preferences for route assignments).
12. Know the rules, and resolve any confusion while there is still time to do something about it. For example, you have to rescind AL 14 days ahead of time IF the board is full – you are out of luck if you remember that four days before the day (or) week you want to rescind.
13. Do not allow your carry-over to exceed maximum thresholds. Many of you prefer to take little or no vacation, and allow your balance to continue building. That is fine – as a matter of fact, you can look forward to a nice payoff when you retire and the Postal Service pays you for unused AL. But please, DO NOT allow your carry over to exceed the maximum hours. Use it, donate it to the leave sharing program, but do not let it simply disappear. It is wasteful, and it looks bad when the union and management argue over benefits that we should get in the next contract.

Remember that this is a BENEFIT that we can use for whatever purpose we choose. Whether you just like to get away from time to time, or really just need to have a couple days to recharge emotionally/physically, or if you need to set aside extra days/weeks for another aspect of your life, or if you want to save it for a later longer vacation, or if you want to get a head start/payoff on retirement, this is yours. Use it wisely, in whatever way is wise to you.

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www.EAP4YOU.com
You can call the EAP or go to the website
24 hours a day for information and help.



Safety Corner

DOG BITE PREVENTION

Loose dogs are a serious problem for everyone. Letter carriers are the third most frequent victims of dog attacks, but children and the elderly rank first and second.

One tool we have in controlling the dog problem is a policy of withholding delivery where dogs are a threat. Report all incidents to the postmaster/manager or the carrier supervisor, who will decide what action needs to be taken. If a phone call to the customer doesn't take care of the situation, we have a series of progressive warning letters that could ultimately lead to the suspension of mail service to the customer's home.

Besides making us all aware of potential dog bite problems that need to be addressed, there are several things you can do to avoid dog bite situations:

- Watch out for dogs along your route and be aware of places a dog can hide.
- Always carry a satchel (even if empty) as a line of defense between you and a dog.
- Carry your dog spray at all times. Check the spray can occasionally to make sure it remains in good condition. Know its location and practice removing it so that you'll be comfortable doing so when a need arises.
- Spray the dog in the area of the snout/face/eyes. The estimated effective range of the repellent is up to 10 feet.
- Never hand mail to a child or adult while in view of a dog.
- Place one foot at the base of doors that open outward to prevent a dog from rushing out.
- Learn to recognize the warning signs that a dog is about to attack: tail high and stiff, ears up, hair on back standing up, and teeth showing.
- Report all incidents regarding dogs to supervisors.
- Dogs are very territorial animals who react aggressively when someone invades their territory or "danger zone." When you find yourself in a dog's danger zone, you should stop immediately and remain still, allowing the dog's anger to subside.
- If confronted, face the dog without making direct eye contact and back away slowly. Be submissive, but don't run. If you run, the dog is going to try to knock you to the ground and you could be seriously hurt.
- Put something between you and the dog (i.e., your satchel, a package or pouch). Don't try to make friends with the dog, pet it, or put your hands or face near it. And if the dog does bite, try not to pull away because that may cause further injury. Instead, try to make the dog release its hold.
- Quickly obtain medical attention and report all injuries.

Be vigilant about the threat of animal attacks for your safety, for your family, and for the children and elderly in our community.

About Our Members



Branch 258 is proud to congratulate Richard Hidalgo on his recent retirement. Good luck to you as you move on to the next stage in life. We hope that your retirement years are as happy and fulfilling as you want them to be!

It has come to my attention that several members have lost family members, especially parents, since the last issue. I am not comfortable putting their names in print, because I have not asked for their permission to do so. I just want to let all of you know that these members are in our thoughts, and want to encourage our members to keep your brother and sister carriers in your prayers during their sorrowful times.



The following carriers have completed years on the seniority list* since the publication of our last newsletter:

David Dry – 35 years; Craig Reifsnyder – 35 years; David Bohrman – 34 years; Mitchell Given – 27 years; Daniel Gresoi – 26 years; James Schlouch – 25 years; Theresa Fries – 20 years; Michelle Schaeffer – 20 years; Gregory Clarke – 20 years; Bryan Becker – 20 years; Cheryl Newton – 20 years; David Soroko – 19 years; Christine Butler – 19 years; Andrew Pilman – 5 years; Dennis Callaghan – 5 years; Richard Miller – 5 years; Albert Dalley – 4 years; Raysa Cruz – 3 years; Kevin Stephen – 2 years; Wildris Rodriguez – 2 years; Thomas Welch – 2 years; Jose Colon Cruz – 2 years; Jeffery Soto – 1 year And in CCA service – Juan Rivera – 2 years; Naomi Torres – 2 years; Nolberto DeLaRosa – 2 years; Christopher Lorah – 2 years; Victor Colon – 1 year; Carlos Avila-Chavez – 1 year

*list is taken directly from the Reading installation seniority report, and reflects time since entered into full time carrier appointment in the Reading area, it does not reflect time before transferring or before career carrier appointment; carriers at AO's can be included on this list by forwarding a seniority list for that office to the editor

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The NALCASTER is a publication of, by, and for the members of Pagoda Branch #258, NALC, Reading, PA. The opinions expressed herein, may but do not necessarily reflect those of the editor or Branch #258. All contributions are welcome. Members of NALC may use any items in this newsletter, just inform your readers of the source.

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