

## National Business Agent's Report

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On Monday, April 14, yet another senseless act of violence against a letter carrier hit home here in Region 5. While delivering the mail on his regular route in south St. Louis, Terry Marcrum was shot twice by an unknown assailant. Although he was later placed in intensive care and listed in critical, but stable condition, Terry was able to talk with investigators at the scene and provide a description of his attacker. The police and Postal Inspection Service immediately began to canvass the area, looking for clues and questioning other witnesses. The TE carrier who was assigned to complete Terry's route that afternoon was accompanied by postal inspectors. The next day, the postal police escorted the replacement carrier, while authorities continued the search for this 18 year veteran's assailant.

On Monday evening, several carriers went to the hospital to check on their friend and colleague. They were relieved to find him doing much better than earlier reports had indicated. (One TV station initially announced that he had died.) Still, they were shocked and shaken by the incident and justifiably concerned about their own safety; particularly since no one knew, at that time, whether this was a random act of violence or a calculated robbery, and the assailant was still at large. Several of Terry's customers expressed their concern for him and spoke well of him as a worker and an individual. His relationship with his patrons mirrors that of so many letter carriers across the country whose work ethic and friendly demeanor have earned the Postal Service the title of most trusted federal agency for the third consecutive year.

On the following day, the Postmaster, Manager of Labor Relations and MCSO showed up at Gravois Station to update the carriers on Terry's condition, the state of the investigation and the postal inspectors' plan to have a significant presence in the zone until the assailant was apprehended. Branch 343 President Keith Gentry, and I, along with Workplace Improvement Analyst Art Neal and the EAP provider representative Barb Fosch visited the station to talk with the carriers and give them a chance to express their feelings and concerns. I expected to hear emotions like sadness, fear, anxiety, anger and pleas for reassurance as natural emotional responses to such a shockingly unexpected display of violence against a fellow carrier in their own backyard. But I was surprised and shocked anew to hear so many talk about their personal experiences with patrons in the past, including verbal and physical confrontations which were reported to management and the lack of responsiveness, effective or otherwise, to address the situations and

allay the carriers' fears for their safety. Each day, carriers were facing the prospect of delivering mail in a less than desirable environment without being able to count on management's support to handle any unsafe conditions they might encounter. Such an approach was, and is, completely unacceptable! A letter carrier's job is already inherently dangerous. We deliver mail across all sorts of terrain, in all kinds of weather, through varying traffic patterns, on unstable surfaces, in the dark, fending off aggressive dogs, etc. Now, we have the added component of potentially violent attacks from customers and others while the attention of supervisors and managers seems to be focused on "making the numbers" rather than ensuring the safety of their employees.

Later on Tuesday morning, during an intervention at another station, we discovered that an individual had engaged in actions that were provocative, at best, and could have been interpreted as threatening; but management did nothing to address them. While no violence occurred as a result, such an approach further exacerbated an already hostile workplace environment where the safety and health of the employees are secondary considerations. It also served to undermine any possibility of management and craft developing a mutually beneficial relationship to make the office a better place to work for all parties concerned.

The NALC is well aware of the difficult financial situation faced by the Postal Service in the current recessionary cycle. We have been doing our part to help weather the storm that even our competitors like UPS and FEDEX are experiencing as well. But we will **not** allow the economic downturn to be used as an excuse to sacrifice letter carriers' safety for the implementation of unreasonable policies designed to browbeat carriers into doing more than possible in less time than necessary.

We are all relieved that Terry has survived his ordeal, and we wish him well in his recovery and eventual return to work. We also appreciate the Postal Service's quick and compassionate response. But if any lesson can be derived from this horrific episode, it should be that we cannot sit back and simply react to each headline event as it occurs. While we cannot provide any guarantees in life, we must put guidelines in place to address carriers' safety concerns more quickly and effectively as they arise; thereby minimizing the opportunities for such life-altering incidents to occur. As we meet over the coming weeks to discuss and evaluate possible approaches to providing a safer working environment on the street, I intend to ensure that we do not forget that lesson.