

National Business Agent's Report
Mike Weir
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Spring is here, and none too soon. This has been a brutal winter all across the four-state region. Trudging through ice and snow in high winds and sub-zero temperatures, letter carriers found themselves working longer hours and experiencing extreme physical and mental exhaustion. You would drag yourselves home in the dark for a brief respite with friends and family before, somehow, summoning enough energy to report to work the following day where you were "greeted" with clipboards, numbers and dismissive attitudes. Rather than offer encouragement and express appreciation, supervisors added to the emotional strain by managing to make a difficult situation even more difficult. In the middle of the deep freeze, I asked a manager if she was instructing her subordinates to thank carriers for going above and beyond the call to provide service to their customers. Unbelievably, the question appeared to confuse her. It was almost as though I were speaking another language and articulating a foreign concept.

I, for one, am amazed at the level of service letter carriers provided under some of the most difficult conditions imaginable. Your dedication to the job and your desire to take care of your customers carried the day in the face of severe weather and in spite of overbearing supervisors. And although management failed to acknowledge your efforts, accolades came rolling in from customers and columnists who had the good sense to recognize and appreciate you for continuing to perform your duties while they were having difficulty just digging out of their driveways. When I am in Washington, DC on my upcoming lobbying trip, I intend to ensure that our representatives understand the quality of your work and the importance of your contributions. It will be the perfect segue to convince Congress to take the necessary steps to preserve the Postal Service and protect the jobs, wages and benefits of the workers who so faithfully serve the American public.



The winter weather also brought a spotlight to bear on the serious understaffing issues we face. It further exacerbated the contractual violations, particularly mandatory overtime, that are driven by the lack of complement. Unfortunately, after a brief break over the next month or so, we will be heading into prime time vacation scheduling. I have no doubt that understaffing will rear its ugly head again at that time. It will fuel the daily confrontations on the workroom floor over workload, pivoting and mandatory overtime. In recent and upcoming training sessions for stewards and local officers, we have been concentrating on preparing them to handle overtime and staffing grievances. We have also been focusing on harassment and Joint Statement violations. All too often, management has been taking the low road in response to USPS' financial woes. Rather than cut some of our unnecessary overhead and trim unproductive fat from the budget (in other words, themselves), management prefers the tactic of trying to squeeze more work out of the most productive employees on the rolls (letter carriers). In their zeal to pinch pennies, they waste thousands to settle their contractual violations. This is not good business, and it is not appropriate behavior either. Knowledge is power. The education that we provide to the field will, ultimately, pay dividends in the quality of the representation provided to the membership and the completeness of the grievance files developed to enforce the National Agreement and protect letter carriers' rights.

Lately, I find myself cringing every time the Postmaster General releases an issue statement. It all started with his directive to the field describing collective-bargaining agreements as "our bond with our employees." He detailed the importance of abiding by them and exhorted his managers to respect and protect the provisions of those agreements. Shortly thereafter, all hell broke loose on the grievance front. Management declared open season on the National Agreement, and we have been engaged in trench warfare ever since. Now, he has presented a 'plan for the future' to save the Postal Service, one which involves eliminating six-day delivery, creating more "workforce flexibility" and restructuring wages and benefits. The last two are,



obviously, directed at us. And, so is the first one, since it will ultimately result in the demise of the Postal Service. Unlike the PMG, I do not have two big-time consulting firms advising me on how to develop a strategy for "success." Truth be told, I would rather rely on good old fashioned common sense anyway. And common sense tells me that raising revenue is not accomplished by cutting service. Unfortunately, during my thirty-seven years in this company, I have not found that common sense often prevails. So, once again, NALC will have to take the lead in charting a legitimate strategy for putting the Postal Service back on a sound financial footing. It will not be easy; but I believe we are up to the task. In the coming months, we will lay out our approach and notify the membership as to how we can help each other accomplish this goal.

On another note, the annual NALC Food Drive is scheduled for Saturday, May 8. The recession has hit families very hard over the last year, and the need to fill the food banks across the country has never been greater. This is a chance for us to offer assistance to those less fortunate and to provide an additional service in the communities where we work. Please participate in this worthwhile undertaking, and help make life a little better, especially for the children who, too often, go to bed hungry. This is one way we can all help give them a feeling of hope for the future.

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