

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



THE SENTINEL

October 2020



President

**Thank a
Veteran!**

by Mike O'Neill

Allow me to first express my sincere gratitude to all of our veterans, as well as all of our active military men and women, for their dedication and service to our country. We owe each of them our undying gratitude. It is because of their sacrifice, and the sacrifice of their families, that we are able to enjoy the freedoms and privileges we enjoy today.

One of the most important of those privileges is the right to vote. Because of the service and sacrifice of our military over the course of our nation's history, we have the right and obligation to choose the people who represent us in our government. It is my hope that each of you take that obligation to heart, and have your voice heard during this year's election. If you have not already voted by mail, please be sure to vote on November 3,

Although Branch 38 is not a part of Region 12, we have always considered the letter carriers and the officers in Region 12 to be our friends, because Region 12 represents much of New Jersey. With that in mind, I want to congratulate Region 12 National Business Agent, Dave Napadano, on his very well deserved retirement. Throughout his career, Dave has set an example for all of us by making the best interests of the members always his top priority. Dave has served the membership with integrity and humility for many years. He has assisted our Branch on many occasions, and has made us welcome at his training seminars for many years. He has been a mentor and an inspiration to me, and I want to wish him all the best in a long and healthy retirement.

I am sorry to have to announce the cancellation of additional Branch 38 events. Due to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have no choice other than to cancel our holiday party and our Shop Steward Training Seminar. We will be working on an alternative training program, probably virtual, to begin in the new year.

We had already announced the cancellation of the Retiree Breakfast in October. The Retiree Luncheon, honoring those who retired in 2019, had been cancelled in April. Those members will be receiving a letter in the mail explaining our plans to hold a luncheon in their honor next year, and requesting their jacket size, so we can send them their retiree jackets, as per the Branch By-Laws.

Please make note of the link to our November and December Branch 38 Membership Meetings via Zoom on pages 4 & 5. Over the last two months, we have had the pleasure of having President Rolando and Executive Vice President Renfroe join the meeting and report on the latest news at the national level. Stephanie Stewart, the Director of NALC Health Benefit Plan will join us in November. The turn-out has been very good, and all members are welcome and encouraged to attend.

I'd like to wish all of you and your families a happy Thanksgiving. As difficult as this year has been, it's important to focus on the positive, and be grateful for all of our blessings. I want to publicly thank the officers and staff of Branch 38 for their tireless work during this most challenging of times. They have honored their commitment to serve and represent the membership under these most difficult of circumstances. I appreciate each of them.

I also want you to know how much I appreciate every member of Branch 38. Letter carriers have continued to serve their customers in the face of the pandemic, with valid concern for their health and the well being of their families. The workload has been unprecedented, and absences due to the coronavirus and child care issues have compounded the strain on everyone. You should be proud of your status as essential workers and heroes of 2020. Remain strong and remain united. We will get through this together. Again, blessings on you and your family for a happy Thanksgiving. Be safe.

NEW JERSEY MERGED BRANCH 38

National Association of Letter Carriers

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973-564-7673

Branch Officers

Michael J.O'Neill	President
Dan Szucs	Executive Vice President
Joseph S. Rutkoski III	Treasurer
Mark McGrady	Director of City Delivery
Christine A. Strasser	Financial Secretary
Pete Bednarz	FT Area Rep/HBR
Roy Jancio	Sergeant-At-Arms
Ron Villegas	Director of Retirees

BRANCH 38 TRUSTEES

Keith Hemmings	Richard O'Connell Jr.
Joseph Otero	Armando Pedreira
	Dominic Walton

PART TIME AREA REPRESENTATIVES

Clint Colie	Mike Hedglin
Roy Jancio	Joe Otero
Armando Pedreira	Dominic Walton
	Joseph Zammito

NATIONAL BUSINESS AGENT

Larry Cirelli 212-868-0284

BRANCH 38 ATTORNEY

Donald Millman, Esq. 973-669-9776

MUTUAL BENEFIT REPRESENTATIVE

Tamara Humphrey 973-444-5128

DATES TO REMEMBER

BRANCH MEETINGS

November 4, 2020

December 2, 2020

January 6, 2021

SPECIAL EVENTS

Retirement Seminar
via Zoom
October 25, 2020

Election Day
November 3, 2020

Veterans Day
November 11, 2020

Thanksgiving
November 26, 2020

**NJ Merged Branch 38
Web Site**

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

Branch 38 Retirement Training

NJ Merged Branch 38 will be holding a retirement seminar via zoom for those considering their option to retire during the next few years. Information relative to CSRS and FERS retirement plans will be addressed.

We will be covering topics such as how to calculate your annuity and carrying health and life insurance into retirement. We will discuss what information you will need to complete the application for retirement, and what you need to do to prepare for retirement.

Below is the link and phone numbers to log onto the meeting.

Topic: Branch 38 Retirement Training

Time: Oct 25, 2020 10:00 AM Eastern

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6988072647>

Meeting ID: 698 807 2647

One tap mobile

+13017158592,,6988072647# US (Germantown)

+13126266799,,6988072647# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location

+1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 698 807 2647

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kbFxr2s7fD>



NALC Stamp Out Hunger Donor Drive

The NALC has established the Stamp Out Hunger Donor Drive to temporarily replace the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive, which was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has resulted in more families being in need of assistance, and the food banks' ability to collect donations and provide that assistance has been hampered by the pandemic.

The Donor Drive is designed to enable our members, their family and friends to make a monetary donation to a food bank in or near your community. Simply go to nalc.org. wait for the Stamp Out Hunger Donor Drive banner, click on "More Information," scroll down to "Select Your State Food Bank," select New Jersey, and click the link to the food bank of your choice.

As Thanksgiving approaches, this would be a wonderful way to express your gratitude for the many blessings in your life, by sharing with those less fortunate. Your generosity will see that a child in your community doesn't have to go to bed hungry. Thank you for your very kind support.

November 4, 2020 Branch 38 Meeting

Via Zoom

In the best interest of the safety and health of our members and their families, and given the Governor's regulations regarding gatherings during the current COVID-19 pandemic, the monthly Branch 38 meeting scheduled for November 4, 2020 will be conducted via Zoom. Attached below is the information regarding how to attend the meeting on your computer or phone.

Topic: Branch 38 November Membership Meeting

Time: Nov 4, 2020 07:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6988072647>

Meeting ID: 698 807 2647

One tap mobile

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Check Out The New
Branch 38
Facebook Page

"NJ Merged Branch 38"

Stay Connected

Membership Recognition

The NALC provides lapel pins in recognition for membership of 25 years or more, for each additional five years. We also award Gold Cards for 50 years of membership, and plaques for 70 & 75 years of membership. The Gold Card comes with the added benefit of no more dues. All of these special awards are available upon request. If you believe that you are entitled to any of these awards, contact Director of Retirees, Ron Villegas at 973-564-7244 (Ext.21) and we will check our records and request the awards from NALC Headquarters. Thanks to all of you for your loyal support.

December 2, 2020 Branch 38 Meeting

Via Zoom

In the best interest of the safety and health of our members and their families, and given the Governor's regulations regarding gatherings during the current COVID-19 pandemic, the monthly Branch 38 meeting scheduled for December 2, 2020 will be conducted via Zoom. Attached below is the information regarding how to attend the meeting on your computer or phone.

Topic: Branch 38 December Membership Meeting

Time: Dec 2, 2020 07:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6988072647>

Meeting ID: 698 807 2647

One tap mobile

+13017158592,,6988072647# US (Germantown)

+13126266799,,6988072647# US (Chicago)

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+1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 698 807 2647

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6988072647>

Sign Up for the Letter Carrier

Political Fund Now!!!

**Your Job is in
the Ballance!**

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

Letter Carrier Political Fund

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.

Health Benefit Open Season *Virtual Event Series*

NALC Health Benefit Plan is excited to offer our first live speaker Virtual Event series. Starting on October 26th, and continuing for over seven weeks, we will hold seventeen sessions to provide information about our plans' history and benefits. We understand that your time is precious, session dates and times are designed to offer options that fit around the Letter Carrier, Postal and other Federal Employee work schedules. Each live 90 minute session will include the same presentation, so you only need to join us once.

Our virtual Event goal is simple. We want to speak to Postal and Federal Employees about the NALC Health Benefit Plan, provide information about our benefits and empower you with knowledge. Selecting the right health plan is a complicated decision and an important link to your health.

What can you expect? Attendees will hear about the three plan options we offer, key benefits, 2021 changes, special programs and more. You will also have access to a presentation that may help you avoid common financial pitfalls when selecting a health insurance plan. Our presentation will even include ways NALC Health Benefit Plan can help you put money back in your pocket.

In order to enroll today to be part of our first ever Virtual Experience, go to www.nalchbp.org, wait for the "Live Speaker Virtual Event Series," and click on "Register Now."

Branch 38 is proud to have the most members of any Branch in the NALC enlisted in the NALC Health Benefit Plan. Each year many more members have become aware of the benefits and savings provided by the Plan, mostly by word of mouth from their fellow carriers. This is a wonderful opportunity to find out more about the Plan from the comfort of your own home.

Stephanie Stewart, the Director of the NALC Health Benefit Plan will also be in attendance at the Branch 38 Membership Meeting via Zoom on November 4, 2020, at 7:30 PM. This will be another opportunity for you to ask questions about the Plan, and help you to make the best choice for you and your family.

COVID-19 Information

Information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and how it applies to the Postal Service and letter carriers continues to change almost daily. A comprehensive source for all of the relevant information can be found at the NALC website, nalc.org. Here is a short list of what you will find there:

- Statements from NALC President Fred Rolando
- Podcasts with updates regarding COVID-19
- MOU's in effect during the pandemic
- All mandatory COVID-19 related stand-up talks
- Instructions for conducting 1838c's and 3999's
- An email address for COVID-19 questions

Additional information can be found on the Center for Disease Control website, cdc.gov/coronavirus.

COVID-19 Leave Issues

There have been several changes in leave usage during the COVID-19 pandemic as the result of Congressional action and agreements between the Postal Service and NALC. Here is a short list:

- 80 hours of Emergency Sick Leave is available over and above the employee's sick leave balance for COVID related absences and child care issues
- 12 weeks of Extended Family Medical Leave for child care issues
- 80 hours of sick leave for dependent care may be used for child care issues resulting from the pandemic.
- An additional 80 hours of paid leave for CCA's for COVID related absences

For additional information regarding COVID leave related issues, contact your Area Representative or the Branch office.

Your Right to Representation



Financial Secretary

by Christine Strasser

I can't tell you how many times I have received a phone call from a member in tears. The member was just questioned by Postal Inspectors, and could not recall the questions that were asked. Many other times I have had to stop a letter carrier before entering into a supervisor's office to remind them that they need to ask if the conversation may lead to discipline. They need to be reminded to request union representation.

As an employee, you are entitled to representation under your Weingarten Rights. These rights were granted through the 1975 Supreme Court decision, *NLRB v. J. Weingarten, Inc.* The decision provides that a union-represented employee has the right to a steward when facing an investigatory interview (II). An investigatory interview, or sometimes referred to as a pre-disciplinary interview (PDI), can be conducted by supervisors, postmasters, or postal inspectors.

An investigatory interview, or PDI, is usually referred to as "your day in court." A set of questions are asked to obtain answers which will be used to decide if discipline, up to and including removal, is warranted. If the interview is conducted by postal inspectors, the employee could be charged criminally. Before ever entering into any interview, it is your responsibility to request representation. It is not the obligation of the employer to inform you of your rights to representation. Your shop steward cannot request to be included in the meeting. You must request representation.

Whether you are a veteran letter carrier or new to your postal career, you do not want to be interrogated alone. First, try to remain calm. Second, clearly request your union steward as your representative during the interview. If you are denied a representative, inform the interviewer that you will not answer any questions until you have a steward present. You may be working in a post office that does not have a designated steward in your immediate office, or your steward may be on vacation. Do not answer any questions until management has provided a designated union representative to assist you. You may your area representative at the Branch. If you are unsure or you area representative, the

branch phone number is (973) 564-7244. Select extension 10, and request to be connected to your area representative.

Being represented from the start protects your rights. Before being interviewed in private, you should have an idea of what you are about to be questioned about. If you have questions for you steward, ask them before the interview begins. When the interview is in progress, if you feel uncomfortable with the questioning you can request to speak to your representative privately. The steward is able to write every question asked and every answer provided during the interview. Please be patient during the interview. You are required to answer each question to the best of your ability, if you are unclear of a question, ask the question to be repeated. This is important in case management misquotes an answer you provided during the interview.

After the interview, if you are issued discipline, it is your responsibility to notify your steward or area representative as soon as possible. You are not required to sign the discipline, but the date you sign or refused to sign the discipline is the date used to begin the grievance procedure. You only have fourteen days to file a grievance from the date the discipline is issued. Next time you are invited into an office by your supervisor, postmaster, or postal inspector, smile and simply ask, "Can this lead to discipline and do I need representation?"

NALC Veterans' Group

Gratitude is often expressed in words such as "thank you," but it's rarely followed up with any tangible expressions. The creation of the NALC Veterans Group is intended to be something tangible and useful.

The NALC Veterans Group is designed to provide NALC members who are military veterans access to the information and tools specific to veterans' rights and benefits within the U.S Postal Service. It seeks to provide all NALC members who are also military veterans—active full-time and part-time letter carriers, as well as retired letter carriers—resources, rights information and a sense of camaraderie.

The Veterans Group will provide the ability to connect with fellow NALC veterans and stay informed on issues of importance to letter carrier veterans. Members receive a pin as a symbol of gratitude for your military service and membership in the NALC.

If you are interested in joining the group, please go to nalc.org , click on "Member Benefits," then click "Military Veterans," then follow the instructions. Alternatively you may request a sign-up card from your Area Representative or the Branch Office.

THE SENTINEL
NJ Merged Branch 38, NALC
374 Morris Avenue
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.