



THE SENTINEL

September 2020



President

**Do You Part
Vote!**

by Mike O'Neill

Only sixty percent of America's eligible voters decided to vote in the 2016 presidential election. Unfortunately, that is the norm rather than the exception. The numbers are even less in the mid-term elections. When you consider the many brave men and women who have fought and often given their lives in battle during the history of this great nation to win and protect our democratic way of life, sixty percent is a very disappointing number.

I'm not sure what the percentage of letter carriers who take advantage of the privilege to participate in our elections is, but I would not be surprised if it is similar to the rest of the American public. Our membership does, after all, generally reflect the rest of the country in every way, including their political beliefs and interest. One would hope, however, that the fact that the future of the Postal Service, as well as our wages and benefits, is directly controlled by Congress and the White House may lead letter carriers to be more inclined to want to have a say in who holds those positions.

You may be one of the forty percent who didn't vote in 2016. Maybe you were too busy to take the time to register or to make it to the polls. Maybe you don't like politics, or maybe you think that your vote doesn't count or matter. Maybe you just forgot, or maybe you weren't yet eligible. Regardless of the reason, please consider getting involved in 2020. There is so much at stake relative to the Postal Service and the financial future of our families. We can't afford to have anyone remain on the side lines.

There is information regarding voter registration on page 4 of this publication. The NALC has a page on their web site, nalc.org, entitled "2020 Election Resource." It contains information regarding procedures for registering to vote and how to vote in every State in the Union. So many States have changed their regulations for this election in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. NALC has made it easy for everyone to make a plan to make sure you have the opportunity to vote and have your voice heard.

You can check to see if you are in fact registered to vote. If you have moved or have not voted in recent elections, you may not be registered. Now is the time to check. You will also find information on how to register in your State. You can also find out if your State allows you to vote by mail, and how to go about doing so. Your State may have early voting. Here is where you can find out.

Due in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a staggering shortage of poll workers this year. This could result in long lines, and may possibly cause people to stay away and forfeit their chance to vote. The NALC 2020 Election Resource page provides an opportunity to those who would like to volunteer to serve and help out at the polls to submit their names. The process to become a poll worker can be a bit complicated, but don't worry: the Power the Polls team will help you along the way. In the coming weeks, Power the Polls will host briefings to provide you with more information about the application process and what to expect when you become a poll worker. If you or a family member or friend is interested, this is a wonderful way to be more involved and serve your country by helping to conduct a fair and safe election.

There is also an opportunity for you to volunteer to participate in a virtual volunteer phone bank, designed to encourage union members to vote and make a difference. NALC members have a long history of political activism, and have participated in grassroots efforts every election cycle. There will be no door to door efforts this year, but the phone banks will give members an opportunity to speak one on one with other union brothers and sisters about the importance of their vote, and what is at stake in this election. There is a link on the 2020 Election Resource page for you to sign up to work on a virtual phone bank on any Sunday from now to election day. This is another great way to become more involved. Thank you in advance for voting and helping out.

NEW JERSEY MERGED BRANCH 38

National Association of Letter Carriers

**374 Morris Avenue
Springfield, NJ 07081**

**Phone
973-564-7244**

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

**FAX
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

October 7, 2020

November 4, 2020

December 2, 2020

SPECIAL EVENTS

Charlie Connell Golf Outing
October 12, 2020

Columbus Day Holiday
October 12, 2020

Election Day
November 3, 2020

Veterans Day
November 11, 2020

**NJ Merged Branch 38
Web Site**

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

Family First Act Update



Executive Vice President

by Dan Szucs

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA or Act) requires the Postal Service to provide their employees with an additional 80 hours of paid sick leave and 12 weeks of expanded family and medical leave (10 of which are paid) for specified reasons related to COVID-19. The Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division (WHD) administers and enforces the new law's paid leave requirements. These provisions will apply from the effective date through December 31, 2020. The Postal Service is required to follow the guidelines of the Department of Labor.

This is the link to the DOL's Q & A on FFCRA; <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-questions>.

We have experienced an unprecedented pandemic that has affected all of us in one way or another. As an essential employee, it is important that you understand your rights provided in the FFCRA. Recently, the Northern New Jersey District sent an email to every post office, clarifying the provision of the Act. There is much confusion in the field on the application of the FFCRA. Please utilize the DOL's Q & A link, and contact your Area Representative for additional assistance.

One question involves an employee whose child's school has offered the opportunity for the student to go to school or virtual learning, and the parent chooses virtual learning. In that case, the employee is not eligible for EFML. The school is not "closed."

Another often asked question is listed as Question 22, which reads: *May I take my expanded family and medical leave intermittently while my child's school or place of care is closed, or child care provider is unavailable, due to COVID-19 related reasons, if I am not teleworking?*

Yes, but only with your employer's permission. Intermittent expanded family and medical leave should be permitted only when you and your employer agree upon such a schedule. For example, if your employer and you agree, you may take expanded family and medical leave on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, but work Tuesdays and Thursdays, while your child is at home be-

cause your child's school or place of care is closed, or child care provider is unavailable, due to COVID-19 related reasons, for the duration of your leave. The Department encourages employers and employees to collaborate to achieve flexibility. Therefore, if employers and employees agree to intermittent leave on a day-by-day basis, the Department supports such voluntary arrangements.

Another issue that has arisen involves employees whose child's school is closed. The Postal Service has taken the position that the employee may be required to work on the weekends. This may or may not be accurate. If the child care provider is not available due to COVID-19 related reasons on the weekend, the employee is entitled to continuous EFMLA. If the employee does have child care available on the weekend, that employee may use EFMLA intermittently, thereby extending the time frame during which the EFMLA will be available. If the employee indicates he or she also requires weekends off for childcare purposes, the employee will have to provide documentation that the normal childcare provider is unavailable because of COVID-19. The documentation requirement is minimal, and is included in the DOL'S Q & A's.

Everyone's situation is different. School districts throughout the State have implemented many different plans to meet the CDC requirements and keep our children safe. You also must deal with childcare issues that you have not had to deal with in prior years. I encourage anyone in this situation to go to the DOL website (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-questions>) and review the Q & A's. If you need clarification, need help or are having problems with this issue, please contact your Area Representative or call the branch office.

Sign Up for the Letter Carrier

Political Fund Now!!!

**Your Job is in
Jeopardy!!!**

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

New Carrier Training



Treasurer

by Joseph Rutkoski

The Standard Training Program for City Letter Carriers is a joint agreement between the NALC and USPS, Re: Standard Training Program for Letter Carriers, M-01879. The program is intended to provide new letter carriers with the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully perform their duties. This training program consists of several phases: orientation, driver training, a shadow day, the carrier academy and the On the Job Instructor (OJI) program. This article will focus on the OJI program

After completing the Carrier Academy, new carriers receive on-the-job instruction with a qualified on-the-job instructor (OJI) at their assigned station. This phase of training includes a series of lessons, demonstrations and practices that instruct the new carrier in the tasks of a city letter carrier. It covers items such as conducting vehicle inspections, setting up the scanner, handling undeliverable mail, using the throwback case, pulling down the mail, loading the vehicle, and identifying types of mail.

The OJI completes the Individual Training Progress Sheet (PS Form 2432) daily to ensure the new carrier receives all of the appropriate training. The Standard Training for City Letter Carriers Administrator Guide states: OJI Training should encompass three days based on the On-the Job Training Guide. OJI training may be extended from 24 hours up to 40 hours if necessary.

Management must use a trained OJI, and cannot select any carrier of their choosing. The Standard Training for City Letter Carriers Administrator Guide states: Step 1: Select qualified city carrier classroom instructors, on-the-job instructors, and EAS delivery support personnel. While selection of city carrier facilitators and on-the-job instructors is management's responsibility, the selection will be made from a list of candidates provided by and agreed upon by the district manager and the national business agent or their designee. There is always a need for additional OJI. If interested, please contact your area representative. We will submit your name to the NBA.

Classroom instructors shall have a minimum of one year experience as a city carrier. Selection of qualified, enthusiastic employees as instructors and on-the-job instructors is critical to the success of the city carrier training program. Selected classroom instructors will receive course instruction from an area trainer as designated by the national parties. This training program was designed by many individuals from both the U.S. Postal Service as well as NALC.

In some offices, management has tried to change or shorten the amount of OJI training that a new employee receives. To ensure that the training is being employed effectively, each phase of training should be adhered to as set forth in the guidelines prescribed in the Standard Training for City Letter Carriers Administrator Guide. On-the-job instructors, fellow city letter carriers, and NALC representatives such as shop stewards, are the eyes and ears on the workroom floor and are needed to observe deviations from these guidelines. There should be a local effort to converse with new carriers to see if they are provided the training and shadow day appropriately. If there are any issues, they should be reported to the Branch 38 Area Representative or the Branch President, who in turn can report issues to the National Business Agent.

Register to Vote

If there was ever a year in which we needed every letter carrier and their family registered to vote, this is the year. Regardless of your party affiliation or your conservative or liberal tendencies, we need you to vote. The fact that you received this publication in the mail means that you are an active or retired letter carrier, and a member of NJ Merged Branch 38, NALC. That means that the future of your income and benefits will be decided by the men and women who are elected in November.

In order to be eligible to vote, you must first become a registered voter. Nothing could be easier. If you live in New Jersey, go to <https://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/voter-registration.shtml>. That is the Department of State, New Jersey Division of Elections. Everything you need is right on that page. You can check to see if you are already registered. If you've moved or haven't voted in a while, you may no longer be registered. Take a minute to check. You can fill out and print a Voter Registration Application for the county in which you live. You can find out where you can go to vote, or, better yet, you can sign up to vote by mail.

Please take a few minutes to register to vote, and ask you family and friends to do the same. Voting in this great country of ours is not only a right, it is a duty. We are all ultimately responsible for choosing who formulates the direction and future of America. We need to make sure the people we choose envision a strong and vibrant Postal Service as part of that future.

October 7, 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 October 7, 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 October Membership Meeting

Time: Oct 7, 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)

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/j/6988072647>

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.

Retirement Help



Director of Retirees

by Ron Villegas

Although we have been unable to schedule our Retirement Training Seminar due to the impact of COVID-19, I am always happy to answer any retirement questions and assist you in filling out your application for retirement (Bluebook). I can be reached at the Branch office at (973) 564-7244 (ext.21) or email ronvill38@gmail.com. Like many people, I am working from home as much as possible. When leaving a message please let me know your office, the spelling of your name and most importantly the best time for me to reach you. Be aware that I block my number when calling from my home, so if your phone doesn't receive calls from blocked numbers, an email might be your best bet.

Here is a list of important things you should be doing in preparation for your retirement. Please do not hesitate to call with any questions you may have.

■ At least one year before retirement:

Determine when you will be eligible to retire and when you wish to retire. Your personnel office is HRSSC, also known as Human Resources Shared Service Center. You may call them at 877-477-3273 to check on any period of service for which you might need or want to make deposit to receive credit.

If applicable, ask HRSSC for the application forms and apply to make deposit for civilian and post-1956 military service. Upon application you will receive a payment election form with a letter from OPM that explains the effect that credit for additional service will have on your annuity.

Gather information about any other pensions or benefits for which you might be eligible (e.g. Social Security, Veterans' Administration, pensions from private industry).

Request an annuity estimate from HRSSC based on your intended retirement date(s). This computation will also aid in making decisions about survivor benefits, waiving military retirement pay and paying deposits or redeposits.

To further aid your financial planning, estimate the monthly deductions (health benefits, life insurance, taxes, etc.). Keep in mind that the HRSSC annuity estimate is an estimate only- but hopefully it will be fairly close to the final annuity figure from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

Think about when and how you wish to receive Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) funds. If applicable, arrange to pay off any TSP loans before retirement to avoid any delays in receiving TSP distributions. Call the Thriftline 877-968-3778 or visit www.tsp.gov.

■ Six months before retirement:

Obtain appropriate application forms, a.k.a. retirement packet, or blue book by calling HRSSC: • SF 2801, Application for Immediate Retirement under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS); or • SF 3107, Application for Immediate Retirement under the Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS);

Call HRSSC immediately upon receipt of your blue book to schedule retirement counselling. The HRSSC schedule tends to fill up far sooner than anticipated due to backlogs.

The goal is to have HRSSC provide you with individual retirement counselling early enough to allow time to answer any questions you may have or to resolve any problems you may be experiencing.

Review your Official Personnel File, which is available on <http://liteblue.usps.gov>, to ensure the record of your service and benefits is correct, including health benefits, life insurance coverage and verification of service credit for which deposit was made. It is recommended to save a copy of your entire e-OPF, either on your computer or printed on paper. Your access to liteblue will be terminated as of the date of retirement.

■ Two to four months before retirement:

Complete and submit the retirement forms in the blue book and any related forms to: HR Shared Service Center P.O. Box 970500 Greensboro, NC 27497-0500 Read the information and instructions contained in the package carefully before filling out the forms. For some individuals there will be steps in addition to those in this brochure.

■ **Useful Resources** OPM – U.S. Office of Personnel Management Find information on the CSRS and FERS retirement systems as well as useful planning tools.

www.opm.gov

• FEGLI calculator

• The Federal Ballpark E\$timator

• Federal Tax Withholding Calculator

Tel. 888-767-6738

Medical Documentation



Director
of
City
Delivery

by Mark McGrady

Management seems to be placing more and more carriers on the Deems Desirable list and asking for Medical Documentation when carriers use their sick leave. If you have a reasonably good sick leave record, you should not be placed on the Deems Desirable list, and we can grieve this action. If you are placed on the Deems Desirable list, inform your Shop Steward immediately.

The National Agreement, Article 10.5 and the Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM) Section 513.36 is specific on the requirements for Medical Documentation.

513.361 Three Days or Less

For periods of absence of 3 days or less, supervisors may accept the employee's statement explaining the absence. Medical documentation or other acceptable evidence of incapacity for work or need to care for a family member is required only when the employee is on restricted sick leave (see 513.39) or when the supervisor deems documentation desirable for the protection of the interests of the Postal Service. Substantiation of the family relationship must be provided if requested.

513.362 Over Three Days

For absences in excess of 3 days, employees are required to submit medical documentation or other acceptable evidence of incapacity for work or of need to care for a family member and, if requested, substantiation of the family relationship.

513.364 Medical Documentation or Other Acceptable Evidence

When employees are required to submit medical documentation, such documentation should be furnished by the employee's attending physician or other attending practitioner who is performing within the scope of his or her practice. The documentation should provide an explanation of the nature of the employee's illness or injury sufficient to indicate to management that the em-

ployee was (or will be) unable to perform his or her normal duties for the period of absence. Normally, medical statements such as "under my care" or "received treatment" are not acceptable evidence of incapacitation to perform duties. Supervisors may accept substantiation other than medical documentation if they believe it supports approval of the sick leave request.

513.365 Failure to Furnish Required Documentation

If acceptable substantiation of incapacitation is not furnished, the absence may be charged to annual leave, LWOP, or AWOL.

Upon returning to work after using sick leave, and if medical documentation was requested, immediately submit your medical documentation and PS Form 3971, Notification of Absence, to your supervisor. Failure to present the required medical documentation may result in non-payment of sick leave, and being charged with AWOL. Remember, even though you submit medical documentation for your illness, the leave is still unscheduled and will be counted toward your attendance. Stay safe.

Retirement Planning Resources

U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
opm.gov

Telephone: 888-767-6738

Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) tsp.gov

Telephone: 877-968-3778

Social Security

ssa.gov

Telephone: 800-772-1213

USPS Human Resource Shared Services Center (HRSSC) liteblue.usps.gov

Telephone: 877-477-3273, Option 5

Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS)
dfas.mil

Telephone: 888-332-7411

Veterans Administration (VA) va.gov

Telephone: 800-827-1000

You can also call the NALC Retirement Department at 202- 393-4695, Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. 4:30pm ET

FEGLI - Your Options



Financial Secretary

by Christine Strasser

When a City Carrier Assistants (CCA's) is converted to career status, there are important choices to be made within sixty days of the conversion. One choice is to select a health benefits plan that suits the needs of your family. Another is to make a decision regarding Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance. Once you are converted, you will receive a thin book from human resources (HRSSC) containing information on options you need to consider within sixty days. One option concerns the Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance Program (FEGLI). The forms to waive or elect insurance are included in the book.

FEGLI was established by the Federal Government in 1954. It is the largest group life insurance program in the world, and provides term life insurance. Term life insurance does not have a cash value, cannot be borrowed against, and does not come with an individual policy number. FEGLI offers two types of insurance; Basic and Optional.

Basic life insurance is provided to each employee of the Postal Service at no additional cost. The Postal Service automatically covers the cost in your bi-weekly pay check, unless you choose to waive the insurance. If you choose to waive Basic life insurance, you do so by completing Standard Form 2817, Life Insurance Election within sixty days of your appointment to career status. If you choose to elect the Basic Insurance, you simply do nothing. The insurance carries a Basic Insurance Amount (BIA), which is the greater of two amounts: your salary rounded to the next thousandth plus two thousand dollars, or a flat amount of \$10,000. Basic also has an "Extra Benefit" for employees younger than 35, up until the age of 45.

There are three optional insurance plans: Option A Standard, Option B Additional, and Option C Family. To elect any of these three options you must have Basic Insurance, and the enrollment is not automatic. You can elect one, two, or all three by completing Standard Form 2817, Life Insurance Election. Deciding on the three Optional Insurance Plans can be daunting and confusing. Option A provides a standard amount of insurance of \$10,000

and is paid to your beneficiary. Option B provides additional insurance in the amount of one, two, three, four, or five times the amount of your basic salary, rounded up to the next thousandth and paid to your beneficiary. Option C provides family insurance for your spouse and eligible dependent children. If elected, all eligible family members are automatically covered, and paid to you. Under Option C, the election of one, two, three, four, or five times multiples must be decided. A multiple for Option C is equal to \$5,000, for your spouse and \$2,500, for each eligible dependent child. All multiples must be elected in the same amount for your spouse and children.

After you choose the insurance that fits you and your family's needs, there are still a few decisions to make. First, you should decide on a beneficiary or beneficiaries. Completing the Standard Form 2823, Designation of Beneficiary, which is included in the thin book that you will receive at your address on record. It is advisable to keep your beneficiaries current throughout your career. Many get married, divorced, and have children, and realize they have never updated the form. Second, the insurance can be transferred through assignment, in which you still pay for the coverage, the insurance is still on your life, but another individual "owns" and controls your coverage. If you consider assignment it is irrevocable, you cannot cancel the assignment. Please research the assignment provision more before choosing this option.

If you choose not to take the insurance, or simply forget, there are three ways to obtain the insurance later. One way is through Open Season, which is held very infrequently. It is not the same Open Season for health benefits, which is held every year. Another way is by providing medical information (a physical exam) after a year of waiving insurance. In this case, however Option C, Family insurance cannot be elected. The third way is through a life changing event. The life changing events for FEGLI are marriage, divorce, death of a spouse, or "acquisition" of an eligible child.

It is important for the newly converted employees to be familiar with their life insurance choices, which must be made within sixty days. You may want to visit the Office of Personal Management (OPM) website, which has videos and literature to explain FEGLI Insurance in depth. There is also a calculator available to provide the exact cost of each optional insurance. The website is www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-insurance/. You can also contact your area representative, who will be happy to answer any questions. Make those life insurance decisions early, in order to protect your family in the event of an unexpected death, and as always stay safe!!

Health Benefit Open Season



Full-Time
Area Rep

by Pete Bednarz

Mark your calendars for this year's open season to enroll or change your health benefit plan for 2021; November 9 through December 14, 2020. As of this writing, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), has not announced the premiums for any of the health plans that participate in FEHB. Just like in past years, however, it is almost guaranteed that most, if not all of the health plans will have an increase in their premiums. Please pay close attention, because some health insurance plans have dramatically increased their rates over the years.

One of the benefits you have as a union member is the option to be enrolled in the NALC Health Benefits Plan. It is union operated, union owned and not-for-profit. While other health plans are designed to make a profit, the NALC health plan was formed over 60 years ago as a benefit for all NALC union members.

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 realize that the plan best serves the needs of you and your family. The best way to make an educated decision is to go to the OPM website 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/health-care/plan-information/compare-plans>. You will be surprised how much overall savings you can have by switching to the NALC Health Plan.

Over the past two years, there were over 350 Branch 38 members who switched from our competitors to join the NALC Health Benefit Plan. Many were able to save over \$100.00 dollars per pay check, or \$2,600.00 per year, just in premiums alone. Think about what you can do with that kind of savings.

The rates for the NALC High Option Health Benefit Plan for 2020 were: Self - \$87.56 (Code 321); Self Plus One - \$211.31 (Code 323); Family - \$181.15 (Code 322)

The 2020 monthly premiums for our retired members were: Self - \$196.82; Self Plus One - \$473.01; Family - \$408.94

NOTE: If there are only two of you, take the Family option instead of Self Plus One to save money.

The NALC partners with CIGNA and 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.

A couple of improvements last year were the Telehealth and Telemental programs. These are virtual visits from home, or from wherever you are, with physicians, nurse practitioners, psychiatrists or psychologists. These programs turned out to be very important when the country shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our members were able to make virtual visits via computers or hand-held devices, and did not have to leave their homes to see their doctor.

Current active letter carriers have four 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 three 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, 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 2020.

Heroic Achievement Award



**Sergeant-
At-Arms**

by Roy Jancio

Branch 38 is anxious to recognize any member who goes above and beyond the normal service to their customers and community. Our By-Laws provide for the presentation of an heroic achievement award to members who have gone the extra mile as public servants and community activists. Article 8, Section 3 of the Branch 38 By-Laws provides:

“An award for heroic achievement shall be presented to qualified Branch 38 members whose actions have distinguished them as heroes and/or heroines. In order to be eligible for this award, a member must be in good standing and must be nominated by a Branch 38 member. Details of the heroic deed, along with supporting documentation, shall be submitted to a committee of judges for consideration. Such committee, consisting of three (3) members, shall be appointed by the Branch President. All submissions must be endorsed by the applicant's Steward and/or Branch Representative. The committee shall determine which applicants qualify for the award based upon merit; no quota shall be

imposed which would otherwise disqualify a worthy recipient. The award shall consist of a certificate of recognition and/or a monetary award, depending upon the committee's recommendation, and shall be presented at the December Branch meeting.”

In an effort to encourage greater participation in two of the NALC's community service programs, the annual Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive and support of the Muscular Dystrophy, the Executive Board decided to expand upon the heroic achievement awards to include members who exhibit outstanding efforts in participating and promoting those programs.

There are three categories of the heroic achievement award. One Branch 38 member will receive recognition for excelling in the annual Letter Carrier Food Drive. Ways to excel in the food drive would be getting the word out to the public through the media (newspapers, TV, schools, churches and many more). The second award will be given to one Branch 38 member for leading the way in Branch 38's MDA yearly fund raising efforts. Some examples of achievement in this category would be raising the most individual money in a current Branch 38 fundraiser such as the Shamrock Drive, NY Jet Ticket Raffle, Tough Mudder Run, Day at the Races, etc. A member could also create a new fundraiser for MDA. Finally, the last award will be presented to the Branch 38 member who is a hero in his/her community. Example of this award would be a member saving a life, extensive volunteer work or any other activity that would promote a heroic achievement. Each winner of the three categories will receive a plaque recognizing their notable achievement at the monthly December Branch 38 meeting. Please contact your Area Representative if you know someone in your office who may qualify for an award.

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.



Charlie Connell Memorial Columbus Day Golf Outing

Monday, October 12, 2020

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 Chris Strasser at 973-564-7244 (Ext. 20)

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, please contact your Area Representative or the Branch office.

THE SENTINEL
NJ Merged Branch 38, NALC
374 Morris Avenue
Springfield, NJ 07081

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #398
TRENTON, NJ

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



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.