

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



THE SENTINEL

December 2023

Happy New Year



President

by Mike O'Neill

I want to begin by wishing everyone a Merry Christmas, Happy Holiday season, and health and happiness throughout 2024. I also want to thank the officers, staff, and each and every member of Branch 38 for your continued hard work and support for all of our programs and efforts. Our obligation as a union is to represent the interests of our members through the grievance/arbitration process and to keep them informed regarding issues important to maintaining and improving our jobs and continue our critical participation in our communities. Thanks to all of you working as a team, I believe we meet that obligation every day, and will continue to strive to improve as we move forward.

Training is an important part of what we do as a Branch, and we have continued to take advantage of the training offered by NALC and offer training at the local level for our shop stewards and any member interested in learning more about the National Agreement and USPS handbooks and manuals. We believe that our members are entitled to the best level of representation possible and we make every effort to provide the tools necessary for our shop stewards and officers to provide that representation. That commitment will continue into 2024 and beyond.

Legislation and participation in the political process remains a priority with NALC and Branch 38. Like it or not, our jobs and benefits are controlled by the people in Washington and we must be vigilant in our efforts to keep them informed and hold them accountable when it comes to protecting our interests. A large number of our members do their part by contributing to the Letter Carrier Political Fund, and we will be asking everyone to help out in the coming year. Contact our office for assistance in getting on board.

NALC offers the best health benefit plan in the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program, and Branch 38 goes the extra mile in spreading that news to our entire membership. We just completed the annual health benefit open season, and we are hopeful that many more of our members join the thousands of Branch 38 members who already enjoy the benefits of our plan. Anyone seeking information about the Plan in anticipation of the 2024 open season or any life changing events such as conversion to career status, marriage, or divorce, please contact the Branch office for assistance.

The totals for fund raising for the Muscular Dystrophy Association have not yet been announced, but we are confident that Branch 38 exceeded our total in 2022 and will be among the highest ranking branches in NALC again. Thanks go out to our members who support our fund raising efforts for MDA through participation and support of our events. We take the time every year to visit a MDA Summer Camp and words cannot adequately describe the joy on the faces of the campers during that very special week. It is truly inspiring and makes all the work in organizing and promoting our fund raisers worthwhile. Thanks again for your support.

The next year will present many challenges, as does every year. Together, and only together, will we be successful in meeting those challenges and prevailing in the end.

NEW JERSEY MERGED BRANCH 38

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Branch Officers

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

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| | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Clint Colie | Keith Hemmings |
| Richard O'Connell Jr. | Joseph Otero |
| | Armando Pedreira |

PART TIME AREA REPRESENTATIVES

| | |
|----------------|------------------|
| Clint Colie | Michael Hedglin |
| Joe Otero | Armando Pedreira |
| Dominic Walton | Joseph Zammito |

NATIONAL BUSINESS AGENT

Bruce Didriksen 212-868-0284

BRANCH 38 ATTORNEY

Donald Millman, Esq. 973-669-9776

MUTUAL BENEFIT REPRESENTATIVE

Roy Jancio 973-564-7244 (Ext.24)

DATES TO REMEMBER

BRANCH MEETINGS

January 3, 2024
February 7, 2024
March 6, 2024

SPECIAL EVENTS

Shop Steward Training & Awards Dinner
January 7-9, 2024

Martin Luther King, Jr.
January 15, 2024

Presidents Day
February 19, 2024

Shop Steward Training
March 28, 2024

Retiree Luncheon
April 21, 2024

NJ Merged Branch 38 Web Site

<http://www.Branch38nalc.com/>

Weingarten Rights



Executive
Vice President

by Dan Szucs

What are Weingarten Rights? The U.S. Supreme Court in 1975, in their ruling in the case NLRB vs. Weingarten, INC., created what is known as the Weingarten rule, giving each employee the right to representation during any investigatory interview which he or she reasonably believes may lead to discipline. This rule applies during any investigatory interview, whether management is searching for facts and trying to determine the employee's guilt or deciding whether to impose discipline. These questions could be posed during a closed-door meeting, through text messaging, a phone conversation or through an informal conversation at the supervisor's desk.

Prior to employees being disciplined by management, they should be given a pre-disciplinary interview (PDI) by management. If you are given one of these interviews, there is no doubt your supervisor or manager is looking for information to use against you so they can issue discipline. All letter carriers, including CCAs (regardless of how long they have been employed) have Weingarten Rights, which means you have the right to have a union steward present during a meeting in which management asks you questions that could lead to discipline. Stewards can assist you in any investigation by management and help ensure you get your "day in court."

In any situation, if the employee reasonably believes that discipline could result, they have Weingarten representation rights. Whether or not an employee's belief is "reasonable" depends on the circumstances of each case. Some cases are obvious, such as when a supervisor asks an employee whether they discarded deliverable mail. Generally, if you are asked a question concerning something you allegedly did wrong, you should reasonably believe that discipline is going to be issued. Before the interview goes any further, stop the meeting and you must ask this very important question, "If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working conditions, I respectfully request that my union representative or steward be present at this meeting. Without my union representa-

tive present, I respectfully choose not to answer any questions or participate in this discussion."

You must request a steward. The steward cannot exercise Weingarten Rights on the employee's behalf.

You can ask for representation at any point during an interview, even if you didn't ask for it in the beginning. No matter how smart you think you are, no matter how innocent you are, you should never, under any circumstances, participate in an investigative interview without a steward present.

Employees also have the right under Weingarten to a pre-interview consultation with a steward or other union representative. The employee has the right to a steward's assistance, not just a silent presence. The employer would violate an employee's Weingarten Rights if it refused to allow the representative to speak or tried to restrict the steward to the role of a passive observer. Although postal employees are required to cooperate with postal investigations, the carrier still has the right under Weingarten to have a steward present before answering questions. In the event a steward is not made readily available or if a steward is not present after you have asked for one, you may respond that you will be happy to cooperate in any investigation, but you will only answer questions once a steward is provided. This is all addressed in MOU-01667.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Branch office. We appreciate everything you do, have a safe and healthy holiday!

Bob Paccioretti MDA Shamrock Drive

We want to thank all of our friends and members who helped us to raise nearly \$14,000.00 during our Shamrock Drive for MDA in 2023. That got us off to a great start last year, and we hope to add to that total in 2024.

The battle is not over. A cure has not been found, and there are many clients still in need of assistance from MDA and friends such as you. The COVID-19 pandemic had impacted MDA and the clients they assist more than you might imagine. For people with muscular dystrophy, contracting COVID-19 would most likely be a death sentence. MDA's fund raising ability has also been severely restricted. They have been forced to reduce their operation in order to continue to provide services to their clients.

The Bob Paccioretti MDA Shamrock Campaign has become one of the most successful fund raisers in recent years, thanks to your help and generosity. We are again asking for your support. Please reach out to your shop steward or Area Representative and offer to purchase a Shamrock for \$5.00 in support of MDA and in memory of our friend and brother, Bob Paccioretti. Thank you all in advance for your help and continued generosity.

Thrift Savings Plan



Treasurer

by Joe Rutkoski

As the new year of 2024 approaches and we make our New Year's resolutions, please consider making a resolution to increase the amount you contribute into your Thrift Savings Plan account. The TSP is a tax-deferred program available to all federal and postal employees. It is similar to private sector 401 (k) plans. The TSP was created to supplement the Social Security and annuity benefits provided under the Federal Employees Retirement System. All employees of the USPS are permitted in 2024 to contribute up to \$23,000.00 per year to TSP. Not many letter carriers can afford to put aside such a large chunk of their paycheck, but FERS covered employees can ill afford not to participate at some level.

If you are covered by FERS and do not contribute at least 5% of your basic salary to the Thrift Savings Plan, you are turning down thousands of dollars every year! All carriers hired after January 1, 1984, are covered by FERS, as are a number of carriers who switched over from CSRS. The Postal Service automatically contributes an amount equal to one percent of your pay to your TSP account. They will also match your contributions (dollar for dollar on the first three percent of pay and 50 cents on the dollar on the next two percent contributed). This represents an additional 4% pay increase, or more than \$3,000. In addition to that, all contributions are tax deferred representing additional savings of hundreds of dollars, depending on your family's tax bracket.

Employees under FERS, without income from TSP, can expect an annuity 33% less than those under CSRS. With very few exceptions, a FERS annuity without additional income from TSP will not provide for a comfortable retirement for you and your family.

The TSP is a defined contribution plan, meaning that the retirement income you receive from your TSP account will depend on how much you and your agency put into your account during your working years and the earnings accumulated over that time. You will be able to choose from several funds with various de-

grees of risk. You need to be comfortable with the amount of risk you expect to take. Your investment comfort zone should allow you to use a long-term strategy so that you are not chasing market returns during upswings or abandoning your investment strategy during downswings.

For CCAs who have not yet converted to career letter carriers, NALC's Mutual Benefit Association (MBA) offers a CCA Retirement Savings Plan, where traditional IRA funds can be rolled into the TSP once the CCA becomes a career letter carrier.

As we are making our New Year's resolutions involving things such as eating better, drinking less, and exercising more. Let's also make a resolution to start doing things that will give us a more comfortable retirement like increasing the amount we put into our TSP accounts.

Additional and more thorough information can be found in a number of places: TSP's web site at www.tsp.gov; the publication Summary of the Thrift Savings Plan available from Shared Services; The NALC's publication Questions and Answers on FERS: The Federal Employees' Retirement System which is available through the Branch or at the NALC web site www.nalc.org. You can also contact your Branch 38 officers with any questions.

I would like to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas, the Happiest of Holidays, and a Great New Year.



Rocco Petrozzi, a retired letter carrier from the Newark Post Office, was recently recognized for his fifty-five years of membership in NALC.

Cold Weather Safety



Director
of
City
Delivery

by Mark McGrady

Winter and colder temperatures are here and with that comes the dangers of extreme cold and how it can affect our health and safety. Sometimes we do not realize how the cold will affect us as we spend several hours outside delivering our routes. It is important to be prepared for the cold and wintery mixes.

Delivering mail in cold weather can be very stressful. We must remember that as the cold weather arrives, we must take care of ourselves to avoid the risk of hypothermia or frostbite. When you leave your home in the morning to go to work, you should have whatever it takes to get you through the day safely. That means you must dress properly for the cold. Dress in layers of loose clothing to stay warm. Wear your winter coats, gloves, hats that cover your ears, warm boots, and rain gear if necessary. You should wear a face covering and sunscreen to protect you from wind chill. Remember you will be out in the cold all day, so be prepared.

Prolonged exposure to cold temperatures can cause your body to lose heat, which puts you at risk of hypothermia or frostbite. Frostbite occurs when skin is exposed to extreme cold for long periods and the skin and underlying tissue freeze. The fingers, toes, and feet are most commonly affected, but other extremities such as the nose, ears, and cheeks can also develop frostbite. At the first sign of frostbite, get out of the cold. Unless necessary, do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes. Do not rub the frostbitten area because it will cause more damage. Warm the affected area using body heat or by immersing in warm water; avoid using a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator for warming because direct heat can burn damaged tissue. Drink warm beverages to replace lost fluids.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's website has a search engine that will provide you with access to their information on cold-weather safety. It includes "moderate to severe symptoms of hypothermia," which are:

- As the body temperature continues to fall, symptoms will worsen, and shivering will stop.
- The worker may lose coordination and fumble with items in the

hand, become confused and disoriented.

• He or she may be unable to walk or stand, pupils become dilated, pulse and breathing become slowed, and loss of consciousness can occur. A person could die if help is not received immediately. In cases of severe frostbite or hypothermia, seek medical attention immediately.

Along with dressing properly we must be prepared for the wintery mixes in the street. Every carrier must do a vehicle check before driving a postal vehicle. See the expanded vehicle safety check in handbook M-41 Section 83. Before driving your postal vehicle, you must make sure it is clean of all snow. New Jersey state law states that there should be no snow on the roofs of all motor vehicles. That includes all postal vehicles. We cannot control how the roadways will be maintained, so be prepared for the hazards of driving in the freezing rain and snow. Take your time driving in bad weather and keep a safe distance between you and the vehicle in front of you.

Delivering mail in wintery mixed weather can lead to slips, trips, and falls. You should take precautions while delivering mail. Take shorter steps, only finger the mail when it is safe, and hold onto all handrails walking up and down the stairs. If you believe it is unsafe to deliver the mail to a house, don't deliver to that house. Note on the mail that it was unsafe, bring the mail back to the office, and notify your supervisor. You can deliver that mail the next day.

Every office should have regular safety meetings. Make the cold and wintery mixes one of the next topics to talk about at your next safety meeting. Remember you are the single most important person when it comes to your safety. Look out for yourself and your fellow carriers.

Download The NALC Member App

The app contains links to workplace resources, including the National Agreement, the JCAM, the MRS, CCA resources and more. It also includes legislative tools, such as a bill tracker, an individualized list of your Congressional Representatives and PAC information. One of the coolest features is an Interactive Non-Scheduled Days calendar. Available for iPhone and Android smartphones. The app is available at the Apple App Store or the Google Play Store. Search for "NALC Member App." Go to NALC.org for more information.

Honoring Our Veterans

Rahway shop steward, Ernesto Rivera, has presented the Branch 38 Executive Board with a unique way of honoring our military veterans. Ernesto, who is a veteran himself, spends much of his free time working with wood and designed a plaque to be presented to any Branch 38 member who is a veteran of any Branch of the United States Military upon request. Our veterans may request a plaque by contacting Ernesto at erivera178@icloud.com. The wording on the plaque reads, "While only one day of the year is dedicated solely to honoring our veterans, Americans must never forget the sacrifices that many of our countrymen have made to defend our country and protect our freedoms. Bless you all and thank you for your service." Thanks to our veterans and Ernesto.



Retirement Seminar

Sunday, April 21, 2024
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

WOODBRIIDGE ELKS LODGE #2116
665 RAHWAY AVENUE
WOODBRIIDGE, NJ 07095

NJ Merged Branch 38 will be holding a retirement seminar 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.

You will have a chance to ask questions and meet with some of the Branch 38 officers. Spouses are also welcome.

Please let us know if you plan to attend by contacting Ron Villegas at 973-564-7244 (Ext. 21) or your Area Rep no later than October 20, so that we will be sure to have an adequate supply of training material and space available.

Sign Up for the Letter Carrier Political Fund Now!!!

**Help Protect:
Your Job
Your Benefits
The Postal Service**

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

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.

PS Form 3996



Corresponding Secretary

by **Christine Strasser**

A PS Form 3996 is used when a letter carrier determines they cannot complete their assignment within eight hours. It can also be used when assisting another letter carrier or when you work on another assignment. I will concentrate on completing the PS Form 3996 when you cannot complete your assignment.

If you believe you will not complete your assignment within eight hours, you should verbally notify your manager. Under Handbook M-41, City Delivery Carriers Duties and Responsibilities Sections 131.41 and 134.42 it states the following:

131.41 It is your responsibility to verbally inform management when you are of the opinion that you will be unable to case all mail distributed to the route, perform other required duties, and leave on schedule or when you will be unable to complete delivery of all mail.

131.42 Inform management of this well in advance of the scheduled leaving time and not later than immediately following the final receipt of mail. Management will instruct you what to do.

It is highly unlikely that the manager will agree with you and may even make comments regarding your notification. Do not lose your cool. Act professionally. Your next request will be for PS Form 3996. Article 41.3.G of the National Agreement and Handbook M-39, Section 122.33 state management is required to provide one, when one is requested. If they do not provide one, request shop steward time and ensure your neighbor overhears your request. If a grievance is required, a witness will clarify any “he said-she said” argument.

It is important to complete the form correctly. In box “J. Reason For Use of Auxiliary” you must write down the reasons you cannot complete your assignment within eight hours. These reasons should be specific in nature, not general comments. For example, if you have excessive parcels, write approximately how many parcels you have over a normal day; “approximately fifty parcels over base.” The reason could involve street duties. For example, “road construction on Main Street.” The more concise the reasons, the less likely management will deny or challenge your reasons.

If a manager denies your PS Form 3996 for any reason such as, “demonstrated ability, not making standards, or DOIS projects” these are not valid or justified reasons to deny your PS Form 3996. I have recently been informed that managers are being instructed below box “N. in the deliver column,” to write in your letter and flat volume, along with casing eighteen and eight, pull down time, parcel and spur volume, load time, street time to arrive at how long it should take on that given day to complete your assignment. These comments and listing of volumes, pull down time, load time, and street time do not change the request. They are merely an attempt to annoy you, have you lose your temper, or have you act unprofessionally which could possibly end

up with you being issued some type of discipline for conduct. Let me reiterate any projection may not be used to deny auxiliary assistance on a PS Form 3996. Under M-01769, it states the following:

Projections are not the sole determinant of a carrier's leaving or return time, or daily workload. The use of any management created system or tool that calculates a workload projection does not change the letter carrier's reporting requirements outlined in section 131.4 of Handbook M-41, the supervisor's scheduling responsibilities outlined in section 122 of Handbook M-39, or the letter carrier's and supervisor's responsibilities contained in Section 28 of Handbook M-41.

If a manager attempts to use projections, do not argue. Request shop steward time, to initiate a grievance. After requesting shop steward time, request a copy of your denied PS Form 3996, and let the manager or postmaster know “you will do your best.” It is important to be aware that as provided in the National Agreement and M-39 management again is required to provide you with a copy of your denied or approved PS Form 3996. Complete your office duties and get on the road.

While you are on the street, make sure you take your negotiated breaks and lunch. Do not ever skip either of these or run your assignment to fulfill management’s denial of auxiliary assistance. If you start these practices, be prepared to continue them throughout your career. As letter carriers we do not approve overtime or get paid to make decisions regarding overtime. We get paid to case and deliver mail. That is it. If you have done your best to complete your assignment within eight hours and it is impossible, let your manager make the decision on what happens next.

If your office has a local instruction to call your manager at a specific time when not able to complete your assignment in the allotted time, then call at that time. If they do not, then call early enough to allow the manager to make the decision to send help, return to the office without completing your assignment, or authorize overtime. During the conversation, ask the manager whether they want you to return to the office with the undelivered mail in the previous approved time or finish your assignment. I am positive this will begin a litany of questions and unclear, longwinded management jargon attempting to trap you!

Again, stay calm, and request clear instructions. If your supervisor refuses to provide clear instructions, return to the office for further instructions. But before returning let them know you have not been provided clear instructions. At some point they will become frustrated, and their instruction would be “deliver your mail, you are not authorized to bring back mail.” That statement approves your overtime. Management can discipline you for unauthorized overtime, but not for returning to the office as per your morning instructions. If you dread making the phone call or refuse to use your cell phone, then use your scanner to receive further instructions. Be mindful that the scanner does not just inform your management, it is viewed by others in the District. Be professional. If you do return to the office with the undelivered mail and you are instructed to leave the mail and end tour, you must document the undelivered mail on a PS Form 1571. Request a copy of the PS Form 1571 to protect yourself.

Handbook M-41, Section 28 explains the entire procedure to complete a PS Form 3996 and is required to be at every letter carrier’s case. If you require further clarification regarding the PS Form 3996, see your shop steward or area representative. Management is pressured daily to have letter carriers complete downtime and to deny any and all submitted PS Form 3996’s. Do not get caught in the word game when requesting auxiliary assistance. If management chooses to use projections to deny your PS Form 3996, hopefully you are aware and better prepared to challenge their denial.

Medicare Integration



**Full-Time
Area Rep
& HBP Rep**

by Pete Bednarz

This article is addressed to all our active and retired letter carriers and is designed to put everyone at ease regarding next year's important changes to their health insurance and Medicare integration under the Postal Reform Act of 2022.

First, I want to address the reform of the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program. Effective January 1, 2025, FEHB will be divided into two groups. One will be for postal employees only, while the other one will be for all other federal employees. The postal employee group will be called the Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB) Program. Active and retired postal employees will retain all FEHB enrollment benefits but will have to move into the new group called PSHB.

The new enrollment period will be in the 2024 open season period from Monday, November 11, 2024, through Monday, December 9, 2024. There is no need to panic, as there will be plenty of notices coming from the Postal Service and the NALC before that date. Every employee and retiree will have to change their enrollment. The insurance plans will mirror the ones in the FEHB. For example, if you are happy with the NALC Health Plan, you just have to enroll in the PSHB version of the plan. Any future increases in premiums would be reduced because postal employees would be placed into a separate risk pool with new rules related to Medicare enrollment.

The other component I would like to address is Medicare Integration which allows the Postal Service and its employees and retirees to maximize savings on health care costs via integration with Medicare on a prospective basis. The health care reforms would lower the cost of health insurance, therefore improving the Postal Service's net income. Over the long term, the Postal service would save billions of dollars in savings in retiree health care cost. The financial stability of the Post Office gives letter carriers job security.

Currently, all postal employees contribute to Medicare via payroll deductions, therefore they are all entitled to it upon retire-

ment. At the age of 65, retirees can opt to take Medicare Part B which covers doctor and medical bills. The cost is currently \$170.00 per month. Medicare becomes the primary provider for health bills, while the retiree's FEHB plan pays for the remainder of the costs. In most cases the retiree does not have any out-of-pocket costs for health bills. The percentage of retired postal employees who are on Medicare Part B is 80 percent. The remainder are either living overseas where there are no Medicare providers, retirees that have coverage from Veteran Affairs, or retirees that simply did not opt for Medicare B. If a retiree did not opt for Medicare B at age 65, they incur heavy penalty fees of 10 percent for each year after 65. For example, if a retiree did not get Medicare B at age 65 and is currently 75 years old, the monthly fee for him to join Medicare B would be 100 percent more (\$340.00 per month). There are many retirees who regret not signing up for Medicare at age 65 who simply can't afford the late fees.

How does Medicare Integration help those who did not sign up for Medicare B in the past? They will have the opportunity in Spring of 2024 to sign up without any late fee charges. The Postal Service has agreed to pay all the late fees for any retiree that wishes to sign up for Medicare B during this special enrollment date. Secondly, all future Postal Service employees who retire on or after January 1, 2025, will be required to enroll in Medicare Parts A&B, with some exceptions. Those living overseas or who have coverage elsewhere such as VA benefits will not be required to sign up for Medicare. The new law will integrate more retirees into Medicare B which will cover more health care costs, since Medicare B will be the primary provider for most retirees.

The new law makes sense to create postal-only plans within FEHB and to maximize Medicare participation as it will reduce health care costs for both the Postal Service and postal participants in the federal insurance program. As a result, increases in premiums will be reduced for active and retired postal employees.

CCA Conversations to Career

As a result of the new provisions in the National Agreement, many CCA's are being converted to career status. It is important that these carriers are aware that when they are converted, management is obligated to provide Career Conversion Training to each employee. That normally is conducted at District Headquarters. During that training, employees are informed of their newly acquired benefits, which include health insurance and Federal Employee Life Insurance. There are strict time frames in which the employee must enroll in these programs, or wait until the next open season. Anyone who is converted to career status should contact the Branch office, and we will make sure you are included in the next available Career Conversion Class. We want to make sure every one of our new career letter carriers receives all they are entitled to.

Advanced Sick Leave



**Recording
Secretary**

by Roy Jancio

Letter carriers have many benefits, and every member should take advantage of those benefits when needed. In this article, I will discuss a benefit called advanced sick leave. This is one benefit that most carriers do not know they are entitled to. Below I will discuss the contract language and what it means to every member.

Advanced sick leave is a management contractual obligation to give a carrier up to 240 hours of pay. Most carriers do not know about this benefit, but this is how to get it and what you must fulfill to receive it.

The ELM reads in relevant part:

513.5 Advanced Sick Leave

513.511 May Not Exceed Thirty Days

Sick leave not to exceed 30 days (240 hours) may be advanced in cases of an employee's serious disability or illness if there is reason to believe the employee will return to duty. Sick leave may be advanced whether the employee has an annual leave or donated leave balance.

This means carriers can request advanced sick leave for up to 240 hours. The employee can have an annual leave balance when they request the leave. In other words, if I have four weeks of annual leave but I am going to be out for a scheduled surgery, I do not have to use the annual leave before I request the 240 hours of advanced sick leave.

513.512 Medical Document Required

Every request for advanced sick leave must be supported by medical documentation of the illness.

What this means is every employee that requests any advanced sick leave must have medical documentation to support the request for the time or number of hours the employee is requesting. Example: If I need three weeks of advanced sick leave because I got injured playing softball on the weekend. I should put a request in writing to the postmaster that I am requesting three weeks of advanced sick leave due to an illness that will require me to miss work. My request would look something like this:

Dear Postmaster, I am writing this letter because I am requesting three weeks advanced sick leave due to an injury I sustained on 12/10/2023. The doctor says I need 3 weeks off and will return to work on 1/2/2024. Thank you.

The request must be supported by a doctor's note that says: Roy was seen in my office on 12/11/2023 due to an injury he sustained on 12/10/2023. The patient will be out for the next three weeks and will not be able to work. The employee will be able to return three weeks from today on January 2, 2024.

The two key components are the letter from yourself to the postmaster requesting the leave and the note from your doctor supporting the request you submitted to the postmaster. If you have both components, you will get your advanced sick leave. Please note most postmasters or supervisors try not to give you advanced sick leave, so the union will have to file a grievance on your behalf to get the leave you need. Anytime you request advanced sick leave it is always a great idea to talk to your Area Representative, so the paperwork is right and processed correctly from the beginning. Below is the ELM language for management that they must follow to process your advanced sick leave request.

513.52 Administration

513.521 Installation Heads' Approval

Officials in charge of installations are authorized to approve these advances without reference to higher authority.

513.522 Forms Forwarded - PS Form 1221, Advanced Sick Leave Authorization, is completed and forwarded to the Eagan ASC when advanced sick leave is authorized.

The sick leave you are advanced is borrowed leave. You will repay this leave with the sick leave you earn while working. If you or another member are out of work or going to be out with an injury or illness, make sure the process is followed and always notify your area representative to help you or another member with the process.

**The Branch 38
Facebook Page**
“NJ Merged Branch 38”

All Branch 38 members are invited to join our closed Facebook page to stay in touch and keep up to date on NALC news and Branch events and activities.

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

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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
WOODBRIDGE, 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.