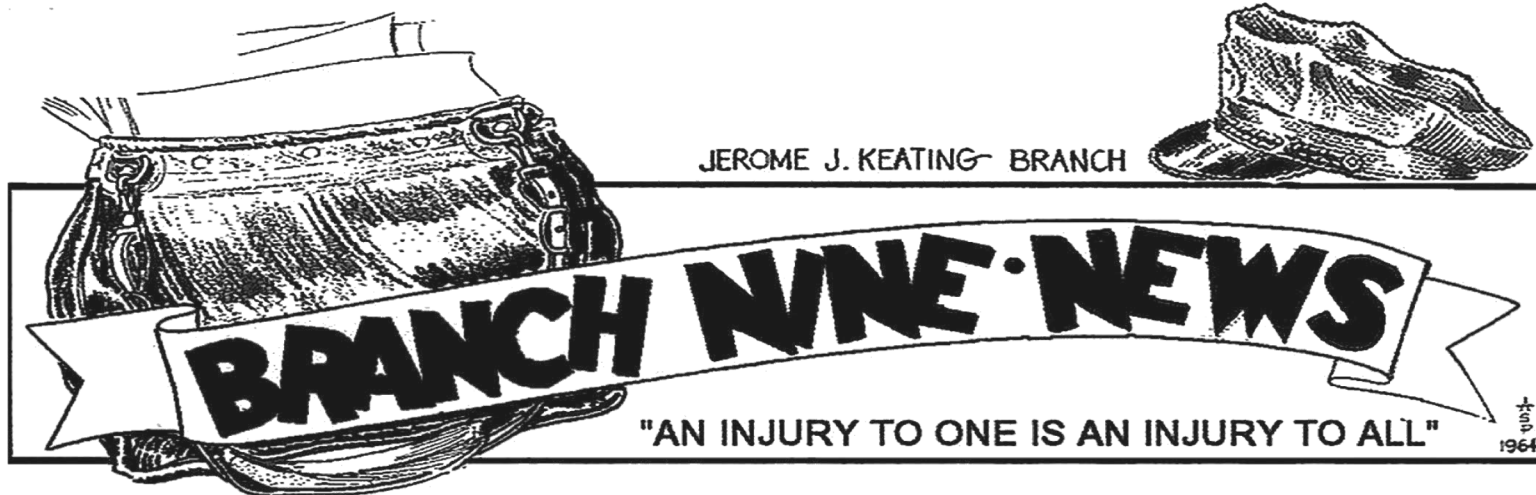




Volume 78 No 6

Official Publication of Branch Nine, NALC

August 2026

Don't Let Your Health Go Up In Smoke

If a nuclear explosion happened near Minneapolis, do you suppose the next day management's numbers would be telling them you have 30 minutes of undertime to capture? How about a giant asteroid hitting earth? Well, luckily those things aren't terribly likely, but the point is that the numbers don't care about our working conditions. The past few summers have brought a

new workplace hazard to focus; wildfire smoke. We can see it, we can smell it, we can taste it in our mouths, but apparently management has no plan to protect us from it. We've likely all come home at the end of the day and felt stinging in our eyes or scratchiness in our throats. However, the effects are much more than a few days of discomfort, and not just for those with pre-existing conditions that make them especially sensitive.

The effects of inhaling wildfire smoke are both short-term and long-term. We're likely pretty aware of the short effect term

from stand-up talks, but the long-term effects stem from the cumulative nature of the harm done by breathing particulate matter. One day of heavy smoke is pretty manageable for many of us, but a few days of smoke every summer for the next 10 years is another matter. Prolonged exposure to smoke over multiple years can have serious effects on your cardiovascular and respiratory health, even leading to increased mortality, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

NALC National Vice President Paul Barner wrote in a 2023 Postal Record article that "Leave is being granted on a case-by-case basis, but the NALC is urging that all employees with medical conditions that could be worsened by breathing in smoke be given leave automatically." If you have a medical condition that puts you at greater risk, ask your doctor for documentation stating your condition and ask them what your work limitations should be when the air quality is poor. Luckily as of writing this, we've only had a couple days of really bad smoke this summer, but don't wait till it's bad to get documentation for yourself.

According to guidance provided by Deputy Postmaster General Doug Tolino, "employees may voluntarily use filtering face piece masks if available." If your manager orders

hand warmers and ice spikes in the winter, why shouldn't they be able to order N95 masks for every carrier? The American Lung

Association advises "An AQI over 300 is considered hazardous and everyone should remain indoors," which we obviously can't do. Ask your supervisor every day if they've ordered N95 masks yet. Reach out to Safety Captain Dave Allman if your management team isn't acting on this.

If you are attacked by a dog, management will want to know if you were carrying your satchel and dog spray. But if you fall ill from inhaling wildfire smoke, are they going to ask if you wore a mask out on the street? If it means they can deny your OWCP claim, you better believe they will. You aren't doing yourself or anyone else a favor by choosing to work in unsafe conditions without proper equipment.

Wildfires in Northern Minnesota and Canada are likely to continue burning through the fall, meaning these poor air quality conditions aren't going anywhere. To stay updated on the air quality in your area visit airnow.gov.



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Welcome New Branch Niners

Kevin Berry
Kiara Booker
Scott Bordon
Anthony Bosak
Dylan Brenna
Farhan Dahir
Antoine Davis
Joseph Degroat
Paul Feehan
Abdulrashid Haji
Komlan Mawoussi
Angela Montiel
Brennan Monzel
Anthony Otterson
Stephanie Robinson
Justin Savage
Justin Stableski
Joshua Torborg
Mihail Udrescu
Calvin Walton
Patricio Angamarca Romero
William Dixon
Robert Frenstad
Brian Godel
Brennen Harmon
Steven Karels
Sergio Lazcano Orozco
William Simon
Robert Washington
Victoria Washington
Tia Wooten

Announcements

- The August General Membership Meeting will be a special meeting of the Branch 9 Building Corporation.
- National officer elections will be in November of this year. Make sure your address is up to date to ensure you get your ballot. Nominations for national officers will be made on August 5th.
- Come visit the Branch 9 kiosk at the Labor Pavillion (Corner of Dan Patch Ave and Cooper St) at the Minnesota State Fair August 27th - September 7th.
- The 2026 Muscle Walk for MDA will be held on September 19 at Wolfe Park in St Louis Park. To register, follow the link below:



Articles **MUST** be submitted to the editor by the night of the monthly GMM, and must be signed. The Editorial Staff reserves the right to edit or refuse to print articles which are derogatory in nature.

Send articles to:

branch9news@branch9nalc.com

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The opinions expressed by the writers are not necessarily those of the OFFICERS or of NALC Branch 9.

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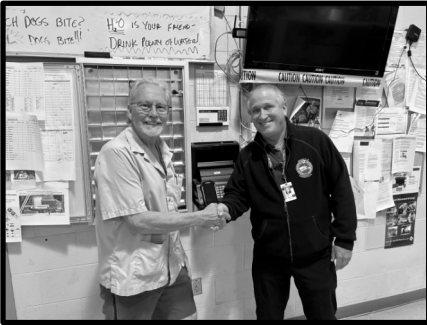
Dir of Retirees

Vince Froelich

Health Benefits Rep

Susan Becker

Retirements



Rob Osborne retires from Thomas Burnett Station with 40 years of service



Michael Watters retires from Chanhassen Station with 12 years of service



2026 MSALC Convention

October 4-7th

Sugar Lake Lodge

37584 Otis Lane

Cohasset, MN 55721

Request for funding due by
September 9th

Did you know?

Employees of the United States Postal Service are eligible for student loan forgiveness under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program. If you are employed in the Federal Government or in other qualifying public service jobs, you can have your student debt forgiven after 10 years of employment and 120 qualifying payments. Furthermore, parents of students may have their child's loans forgiven under certain plans (including some Parent Plus loans). Not all types of loans are eligible, to determine your eligibility go to studentaid.gov and search for the PSLF Help Tool.

Get out the Vote!

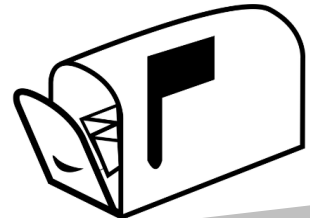
Primary Elections:

August 11th

Election Day:

November 3rd

The Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation invites candidates for elected positions to interview and earn their endorsement based on their stances on labor's most important issues. Check out their voter guide below.



MOVING?

Please notify the branch directly when you move, we are not notified otherwise!

Mail us notification of
your new address to:

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St. Louis Park, MN 55416

or call

(612) 781-9858

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400 POSTAL EMPLOYEES WERE ASSAULTED

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their communities.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

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NALC.ORG/ACTION



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

August Updates



Joe Rian

By the time you read this in August, the July heat wave will have passed, the NALC National Convention will have taken place, and nominations for NALC national officer elections will be complete. Meanwhile, the national contract remains stalled as we wait for the selection of a neutral arbitrator.

National AFL-CIO Convention

Looking back to mid-June, I was fortunate—thanks to NALC President Brian Renfro—to attend the National AFL-CIO Convention here in Minneapolis as an observer. It was a major event that highlighted national union solidarity.

The MN AFL-CIO was also honored for its work during the ICE occupation. What happened in Minnesota had not been done before, and we are now being recognized as a model for peaceful protest across the country.

Most of all, the convention reminded me that unions are fundamentally about workers' rights and fair wages that allow people to live the best lives possible. The difficult truth is that

employers—public or private—rarely provide those things without a fight.

NALC Contract Bargaining Meeting

That experience led into the first-ever NALC national contract bargaining meeting in Washington, D.C. In early June, NALC presidents and officers from across the country met for three days to hear updates and discuss the progress of contract negotiations.

More than 200 people attended. We had the opportunity to ask questions, offer input, and, at times, debate the opportunities and barriers that could affect the success of the contract.

Discussion of a Four-Day Work Week

You may have heard about the idea of a four-day work week with 10-hour days, which President Renfro brought forward. It had been included as one of the questions in a survey he commissioned earlier in the year.

The discussion was spirited about this. At first, most speakers opposed the idea, but as the

conversation continued, the mood in the room softened somewhat. It was an intriguing idea for some of us.

The proposed structure included:

- Four days on and two days off
- A rotating schedule with Sundays off
- One utility position for every two routes
- A five-day weekend every five weeks
- A rotation such as SMT, STW, SWT, STF, SFS, SMT

It is hard for me to imagine a 4 day work week because I am so used to the traditional eight-hour day, five-day week, and Sunday-rotating work week. But I'm also a fan of the rock blues band "Ten Years After". My vision of the future needs to be sharpened by letter carriers who have more modern tastes in lifestyles and work options.

Looking Ahead

Clearly, more work needs to be done before the 4/10 idea becomes

more than just a dream. Still, the idea represents outside-the-box thinking, and the possibility of change at USPS is in the air. The USPS is also pushing for AI-generated daily assignments instead of traditional routes, which could significantly change our workload, good and bad.

Many of the proposed changes to our national agreement will be flushed out in discussions at our National Convention, which I believe is how it should be. Maybe a change in leadership will do us all good as well. There is heavy competition for “the vision thing” right now. Is it the past 20 years the NALC is trying to

preserve or the next 20 years we are trying to build? The winner of this upcoming election will be the members who best define our collective vision and have a winning strategy to fight and win.

To me, in the simplest terms, in order to protect our jobs, all letter carriers, retired and active, must stay flexible, continue innovating, and be ready to outmaneuver USPS as these changes unfold. Solidarity is our strength. Act as one. Win as one. And remember if we fight like we’re “the third monkey trying to get on Noah’s Ark and it’s starting to rain”, victory will be ours.

Cathy Jones Appointed to New Role

The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 9 proudly announces the appointment of longtime letter carrier and union activist / Cathy Jones to serve as a Human Rights Commissioner for the City of Robbinsdale.

Branch 9 has a long tradition of advocating not only for the rights of its members, but also for the broader community. As a union deeply rooted in service, advocacy, and solidarity, this appointment reflects the values that letter carriers bring to the communities they serve every day.

Jones brings decades of experience as a city letter carrier and a committed community leader. Her work has included serving as a steward, safety captain, legislative liaison, and delegate within the labor movement. She also served as former Vice President of the Minneapolis NAACP and as a former Trustee on the Branch 9 Executive Board. Through these roles, she has consistently fought for fairness,

dignity, and respect—both on the workroom floor and in the community.

In her new role as Human Rights Commissioner, Jones will help address critical issues including equity, discrimination, housing access, and community relations in Robbinsdale. Her appointment strengthens the voice of working people in local decision-making and ensures that the perspective of frontline public servants is represented.

“Letter carriers don’t just deliver the mail—we serve the public every day in every neighborhood,” Jones said. “I am honored to bring that perspective to the Robbinsdale Human Rights Commission and to continue advocating for fairness, inclusion, and justice for all.”



I am incredibly grateful to have been selected as the recipient of the 2026 Jerome J. Keating/Austin B. Carlson Scholarship. My name is Alex Flaten, and I am the son of Brian and Diana Flaten. My dad, Brian, works as a letter carrier for the Blaine Post Office.

This fall, I will be attending the University of North Dakota, where I plan to pursue a bachelor’s degree in Commercial Aviation and Aviation Management. In addition, I am excited to continue my involvement in music by participating in the university’s marching band.

Receiving this scholarship will help me pursue my goal of becoming a commercial pilot and one day flying large passenger aircraft. I am truly honored to receive this award and deeply appreciate the support that my family and this scholarship represent. Thank you for investing in my education and future.

Jerome J. Keating/Austin B. Carlson Scholarship Winner



Chris Pennock

When to Say 'No' to Management

The theme for this month's article is going to be the limits of management's powers. We can and should say no to Management in certain circumstances! Today I'm going to outline some of those circumstances.

We recently received an arbitration award (on page 7) in our favor where management told carriers on an Amazon Sunday that they had to take their personal vehicles from one hub to another, in this case Coon Rapids to Brooklyn Center. One of the carriers got into a car crash on the way to Brooklyn Center. Unfortunately for this carrier his car insurance company denied his claim telling him that he did not have commercial coverage for his vehicle and left him on the hook for a car repair bill of over five thousand dollars. We filed the grievance saying that management was liable because the carrier was on the clock at the time doing work. Fortunately for the carrier we were successful in arbitration, although he must now file a tort claim.

If you get an order from your

supervisor to take your own vehicle to another station after you've already punched in DO NOT FOLLOW IT! That is an illegal order as almost none of us are going to have a rider on our personal insurance to use our vehicles for commercial purposes. If you do take your vehicle, you're effectively driving an uninsured vehicle, which

If you are asked to drive your personal vehicle on the clock, you are being asked to follow an illegal order!

is against the law. If you do drive your personal vehicle and get into an accident it could have life altering consequences for you.

Moving from illegal orders to unsafe ones, we've had a lot of air pollution from the Canadian wildfires mixed with very high

temperatures. I've heard from one station where management was telling carriers they had no choice but to go out and work in these conditions, I want to remind everyone that you always have a choice in these circumstances. What we recommend to people is to attempt delivery, and if you feel it's unsafe then come back and fill out a curtailment slip and request sick leave. In the Local Memorandum of Understanding (LMOU) negotiations that open up following the resolution of our next contract we will be pushing to get it so that management must provide N95 masks when the air quality is bad like this.

Our last instance for today in which we can refuse management's orders is when 8-hour (aka "non-ODL") carriers meet their daily workhour limits at 11 and a half hours. Here's what the new contract says in Article 8.2.D: Full time employees who are not on an "Overtime Desired" list or on the Work Assignment list, shall not be required to work beyond eleven and a half (11.5) hours of work in a day or sixty (60) hours of work in a service week, and shall not be subject to disciplinary action for terminating

their tour of duty when these limits on hours of work are reached.

This means that if you are an 8-hour carrier you do not have to work over 11.5 hours. When they say 11.5 hours, they mean that plus your lunch, so, 12 hours after you clock in you can clock out and you will not be disciplined for not continuing to work beyond your daily limit.



**Congratulations
to Ian Dupree,
son of Ryan
Dupree of Fridley
Station.**

J. Wesley Woods Scholarship Winner

REGULAR ARBITRATION PANEL

In the Matter of the Arbitration.	(	Grievant: Class Action
Between	)	Post Office: Minneapolis, MN
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE.	(	Case No.: 4J 23N-4J-C 25384150
and	)	Union No.: C-1313-25
National Association of Letter Carriers, AFL-CIO	(	DRT No.: 07-727624

BEFORE: Arbitrator Zachary C. Morris

APPEARANCES:

For the Service: Kirsten Loban, Labor Relations Specialist

For the Union: Dawn Ahnen, NALC Region 7 Arbitration Advocate

Place of Hearing: 1300 Godward St. NE, Minneapolis, MN 55413

Date of Hearing: Wednesday, June 17, 2026

AWARD:

Relevant Contract Provisions: Articles 19 & 41

Resolution: The grievance is sustained.

Date of Award: Tuesday, July 21, 2026

PANEL:

Minnesota-North Dakota

Award Summary

The grievance is sustained. The Union has carried its burden of showing that Management violated Articles 19 and 41 on July 20, 2025. An appropriate remedy is set forth below.

AWARD

For these reasons, the grievance is sustained. The arbitrator finds that Management violated Article 19 of the National Agreement by mandating that Mr. drive his personal vehicle to Brooklyn Center on July 20, 2025. Additionally, Management violated Article 41.3.P by failing to immediately inform President Rian of the grievant's motor vehicle accident as soon as they became aware of it.

The Service is reminded of its obligation under Article 41.3.P to promptly inform the local President of all job-related vehicle accidents. The Service shall, as soon as administratively possible, ensure the grievant is compensated at the appropriate rate for the mileage he drove from Coon Rapids Station to Brooklyn Center on July 20, 2025.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zachary C. Morris'.

Arbitrator Zachary C. Morris

Charlottesville, VA

July 21, 2026

Online Retirement is Here

By Kevin Gottlieb (Branch 79)

Those who want to retire in the future, which are all of us, will now file your retirement papers electronically online. It went into effect on January 2, 2026.

You will need an email address as communication with USPS Shared Services (HRSSC). While in the past, everything was done by submitting paperwork, you will have to submit marriage certificates, divorce degrees (if needed), and DD214 will now have to be scanned and submitted electronically.

Here is how the process works:

- 1. The first step is to contact HRSSC either by phone (877-477-3273) or by LiteBlue and notify them of your intent to retire. They will ask you what your intended retirement date is.
- 2. HRSSC will verify your email address to make sure it is correct. It takes about 3 days for you to receive a confirmation email with the link to start your process.
- 3. In the meantime, if you do not have one, you are required to create a Login.gov account with a username and password.
- This is used to access the Office of Personal Management (OPM).
- 4. OPM will contact you to verify your information and provide you with access to the required retirement forms. Now the fun begins.
- 5. You will follow the steps on the OPM Official Retirement Application (ORA) site. There

are questions to answer and documents to be uploaded. You will submit the forms to HRSSC, where your information and pay will be verified.

- 6. HRSSC will contact you if more documentation is needed and then return the forms to you for your review, after which you will submit them to OPM for final processing.

Your initial email from HRSSC will include what you will need to get started. It will also include a video link. I recommend you watch the video and prepare your documents for your adventure on processing your online retirement.

It is time to get prepared. This is what you will need to get your retirement processed, which is included in your initial email:

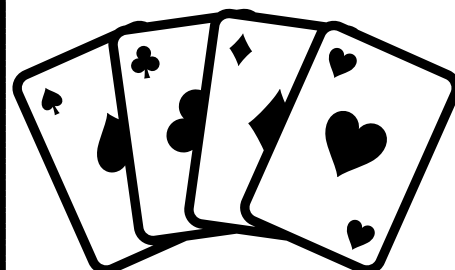
- Divorce Decree (if applicable)
 - Common Law Proofs (if applicable)
 - Military Finance Center's Letter to the Employee Accepting Waiver (if applicable)
 - Military Finance Office's Acknowledgment or Approval of Waiver (if applicable)
 - Military Orders in Lieu of DD214 (if applicable)
 - Military Retired Pay Order (if applicable)
 - Notice of Award (MRP chapter 1223 title 10 or combat incurred) (if applicable)
 - OWCP Award (if applicable)
- If you have all this prepared, then you will have an easier time processing your retirement online.
- Thank you to Branch 79 for allowing the reprint of their article appearing in the May 2026 edition of The Seventy-Niner.

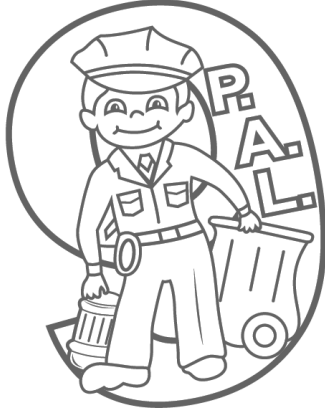
Branch 28 Retiree Cribbage Tournament

**When: Thursday Nov 5th
@ 10:30 AM**

**Where: Branch 28 Union Hall
1715 Van Dyke St.
Maplewood, MN 55109**

All Members Welcome





Thank You PAL 9 Contributors

Very Concerned Members (\$50 or more)

Chuck Glover

Concerned Members

Larry Chlebeck

Jennifer Schreiter

Michael Adams

EAP Monthly Focus

From Surviving to Thriving

Your EAP encourages USPS employees to move beyond stress management and begin creating a wellness approach that supports true thriving. Mental health exists on a continuum, and progress happens through intentional support, meaningful connections, and small, sustainable steps. In this month's page, you'll find tools to help define what thriving looks like for you.



800-327-4968 (800-EAP-4YOU) | TTY: 711

Get Involved! Join us at the MRRC

I would like to congratulate all the new retirees. One of my duties as Director of Retirees is attending the monthly MRRC meeting. The Minneapolis Regional Retiree Council (MRRC) is the retiree arm of the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation (MRLF), a collection of Unions banding together in solidarity for common needs/plans/issues.

Many Unions do not have a place for their retirees to stay active. We are fortunate in the NALC to have our retirees with us! We can help plan for their future as well with programs like NALCrest, offer support in dealing with OPM, and of course support for a widow/er in the event of a carrier's death. The MRRC provides some of these supports along with general concerns facing an aging population. Housing, Social Security and pensions, legislative issues around aging just to name a few.

From their Statement of Purpose "We join together in the MRRC to build and use our power to help ensure that we and future generations enjoy their elder

years; aging in homes of their choosing, in communities that are supportive and with adequate resources for their health, economic security and the ability to live meaningful lives."

Currently Branch 9 covers 2 slots on the council. We are looking to increase that membership next year. The Council meets one time per month at the United Labor Center building in downtown NE Mpls. Any retired Union member is welcome. Let Branch 9 know if you have interest in joining the council.



Come Join us at the Fridley Retiree Lunch

Second Tuesdays @ 11:30 AM

Route 47 Pub and Grill



Letter Carriers Set to Deliver Change in Upcoming Union Election

by Al Bradbury

A leadership change looks likely in the Letter Carriers (NALC) this fall. Members are mad about low pay and forced overtime, dangerous heat and robberies, the rejected contract imposed last year, the backlog of tens of thousands of grievances, and the president's secretive approach to bargaining.

There's not just one group pushing for change, but a whole ecosystem of reform groups, slates, and podcasters among the 5,000-plus delegates coming to Los Angeles for the union convention August 3-7. They'll rub elbows and hopefully build unity at a "Reformers Rum Party" on Sunday night, the eve of the convention.

Days before the August 5 nominations, it looks like a three-way race for president. The 200,000 members will get the chance to vote this fall—by mail ballot, of course—for 10 officers, three trustees, and 15 regional business agents.

Two reform tickets have been campaigning for two years. One is the Concerned Letter Carriers (CLC) slate, headlined by current Vice President James Henry and including a number of branch (local) presidents. The other is Mike Caref, business agent for Illinois, running solo for president.

Despite months of speculation about whether President Brian Renfroe would run again, he still hasn't made any announcement. But a third slate announced July 17 includes many other incumbents, led by Eddie Davidson, current business agent for Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas.

OVERLAPPING GROUPS

A vote-no movement on the 2024 contract was organized by a coalition of forces including Caref,

the CLC, the Build a Fighting NALC (BFN) caucus, and influential podcaster Corey Walton, number two on the CLC ticket.

Podcasts are big with letter carriers—you can listen while you slog through the workday. One called "Next Generation Carriers" has interviewed activists from all the vying groups and even Renfroe himself (Labor Notes staffers have also been guests). Co-host Margo O'Neill, a steward of Branch 352 in Des Moines, is also the treasurer for BFN. Her main goals at the convention, she said, are to grow the reach of the reform movement and to build unity across the various existing groups.

The Next Gen hosts have been agitating for a contract demand of "30 for 30": a starting wage of \$30 and no more than one manager per 30 carriers, to save money and alleviate micromanagement. New carriers start at about \$21, in an entry-level job called "city carrier assistant" where they're often made to work Sundays delivering Amazon packages. It can take two years to convert to a career position, and even then, everyone hired since 2013 is on second-tier Table 2 pay.

In the Massachusetts chapter of BFN, "we've been really pushing to get people more active, talking to CCAs about their rights on the job," said Chris Persampieri, legislative and political director of Branch 18. "A lot of people had no idea that if it's your day off, you're not on call. You don't have to pick up the phone.

"There's no union steward on Amazon Sundays, so they're on their own. We show up with flyers about their rights and a box of joe from Dunkin' Donuts, because it's Massachusetts and that's what we do here."

Some reform activists are backing the CLC; some are backing Caref; some like certain members of the Davidson slate. The election may yield a mixed executive council of people who ran on opposing tickets, and the new president will have to "mold that into a solid team," said Branch 3 President David Grosskopf of Buffalo, who's running for trustee with the CLC.

WINS NEEDED

Getting members into motion is the name of the game. "If we're ever going to get the participation up in the union, people have to feel there's a fight going on, and we have to get some wins," Caref said. "We've been taking a lot of losses, and it's really demoralizing for the carriers.

"You've got to start with a clear vision for where you want to be, and a strategy for how you're gonna get there. You get some little wins, you get more people involved, and you start moving in the right direction.

"That's why I always tell people, I only want to be president if you guys want me to be president," he said, "because I'm going to give you stuff to do right away."

For the full text of this article, and more coverage of labor news across all industries, follow the link below. This article was published with written permission from the author.



LABORNOTES

**Branch 9 thanks the following 2026
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Branch 9



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AUG 25

General Membership Meeting
Every 4th Tuesday 7PM

Crystal VFW

SEP 7

Labor Day

SEP 8

Steward Board Meeting
Every Second Tuesday 7PM

Crystal VFW

SEP 22

General Membership Meeting
Every 4th Tuesday 7PM

Crystal VFW

**Northside Retiree Breakfast
First Tuesdays @ 9:30**

Elsie's
729 Marshall St. NE
Minneapolis

**N Suburban Retiree Breakfast
First Fridays @ 8:30**

Denny's Restaurant
9020 Quadday Ave
Otsego

**Fridley Retiree Lunch
Second Tuesdays @ 11:30AM**

Route 47 Pub and Grub
7820 University Ave
Fridley

OCT 4-7

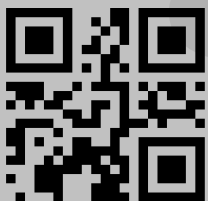
MSALC Convention

Sugar Lake Lodge
Cohasset, MN

DEC 6

Puss in Boots Holiday Show
@ Sidekick Theater

11411 Masonic Home Dr
Bloomington



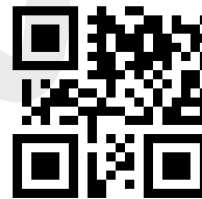
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