

Use your momentum to help NALC grow



Community and Membership Outreach Coordinator Pam Donato

I hope you've had a chance to bask in the afterglow of this year's fantastic national Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger® Food Drive. It takes the planning, work and willingness of hundreds of thousands of letter carriers, local leaders, partners and volunteers to get to a final result such as the one we had this year, so take a bow—you've earned it.

And though I know there are hundreds of branch and regional coordinators who are already planning for next year's drive, I'd like to shine a

spotlight on a more global view: using the momentum from the food drive to help your union, and thereby, yourself.

There is an enormous amount of praise and goodwill from the public for our work on the food drive, especially this year as we also celebrated our 25th year of work on the drive. We also experienced having many new partners join our efforts, adding to the drive's awareness and to our food-collecting campaign.

This tremendous recognition and support provide a great opportunity to boost several important issues related to NALC and our communities. I'll focus on three main areas where NALC members and branches can channel this positive energy to advance and strengthen other areas of the NALC for their benefit.

One of the wonderful things about the food drive is its need for every level of member participation. You don't have to know the contract, to commit to a lot of meetings or to speak in public. There's room in the drive for every age and physical ability. This opens up potential for every NALC member, as there are countless tasks needing to be done, with time demands ranging from five minutes to much more than that. And the food drive is a fun event for families, with many of our children and retirees finding important roles to play.

The food drive also allows us to work with other groups with which letter carriers and our family members are involved, and this can help foster deeper relationships between these groups and our members. And while the food drive is a great entry point for member involvement with NALC, it also provides members a chance at advancing to leadership roles within the union or to lead in specific areas, such as social media or photography.

The food drive also has broad appeal; for new members, it is a great introduction to the positive impact unions can have. In auto racing terms, you can "draft" off the pride and appreciation that was just highlighted by our food drive work.

A second area for growth is maintaining connections with local community groups that helped us with the food

drive. The drive operates best with collaborations from like-minded local groups, such as church groups, youth groups, veterans' organizations, other unions, United Ways, local stores, AARP groups, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and high school and college groups. Ask yourself: Are there other ways you can partner with these groups on different projects that are important to you, to your union brothers and sisters in your branch or to NALC as a whole? Use the months following your post-food drive celebration to find ways to continue collaborating with these groups on other events. This is a perfect time to build your community and to strengthen letter carriers' role in it.

And then there is building on the very public event of our food drive to stay in touch with local decision-makers, elected officials and members of Congress. Our food drive has broad, genuine bipartisan support. There truly are no party markers on the drive—neither political parties nor politics in general are present. The work our drive accomplishes in raising awareness of hunger in America can be viewed as helping the human condition. And no one does that better than America's letter carriers.

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The food drive is a big program. In the wake of all of our work, we can find some really interesting “side streets.” Take another look at this year's food drive—especially at all of the special people and groups that came together to help: CCAs, veteran letter carriers, retirees, community groups and local representatives. Then, explore the possibilities of increasing these folks' involvement in other activities in your local branch. Help a local letter carrier who has fallen ill. Plan a family-friendly gathering in your branch. Come together to support a local community project.

Reach out. Dream. Grow.