



Nalcrest celebrates





It opened 60 years ago, and it's still going strong. Nalcrest, NALC's retirement community in central Florida, celebrated six decades of fun for its retired letter carrier residents a few weeks ago.

The one-of-a-kind retirement venue, which broke ground in 1962 and welcomed its first residents 18 months later, hosts retired letter carriers and their companions in 500 garden-style apartments. Residents enjoy many amenities right outside their doorsteps.

Nalcrest's residents and guests marked last month's anniversary with celebrations. The guests included several family members of former NALC President William Doherty, who conceived of Nalcrest and made it a reality.

Doherty, a carrier from Cincinnati, OH Branch 43, was elected NALC president in 1941. In a visit to Europe, he saw retirement communities sponsored by labor unions, religious groups and fraternal organizations, and was inspired to start one for letter carriers. Doherty proposed at the NALC's 1954 Biennial Convention in Cleveland that NALC create its own affordable, nonprofit retirement community for letter carriers.

NALC created the Nalcrest Foundation (an acronym for NALC Retirement, Education, Security and Training) to

buy land, build homes and manage property for the new retirement community. A perfect source of low-risk financing for Nalcrest became available in 1959 when Congress passed a law providing loans to help build housing for seniors.

The union found a location on the shore of 15-square-mile Lake Weohyakapka in Polk County, FL, 40 miles south of Orlando. On July 1, 1962, President Doherty turned the first shovel of earth in a groundbreaking ceremony at the Florida site.

"The dream of many years is quickly approaching realization," Doherty wrote in the July 1962 *Postal Record*. "Nalcrest is on the way, and future generations of letter carriers will bless the wisdom and perseverance of those who made this dream possible."

Nalcrest's first residents arrived in late 1963 after the first phase of construction was complete. The community officially opened its doors on Jan. 20, 1964, with a dedication ceremony that attracted 2,000 residents and guests. The Miami letter carrier band entertained the crowd, along with The Singing Mailmen, which was a singing group composed of real letter carriers, as well as a local high school band and an all-female water ski team, the Aquamaids, that performed on the lake.

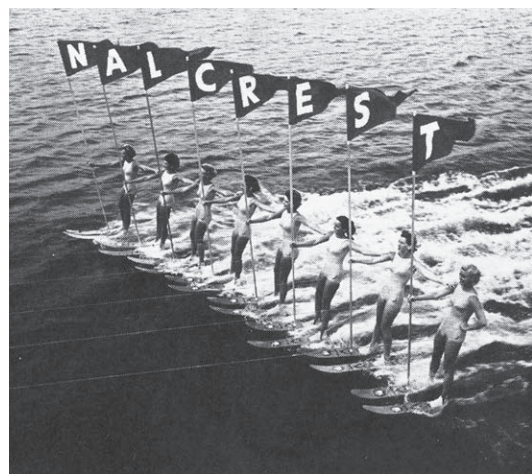


Opposite page: The beach at Nalcrest

Top: An aerial view of Nalcrest

Above: NALC President William Doherty turns the first shovel of earth on July 1, 1962.

Below: As part of the 1964 dedication, the water ski team, the Aquamaids, perform a show on Lake Weohyakapka.





Top: Nalcrest's town center prepares for the 60th anniversary

Above: Street signs at Nalcrest

Below: One resident's lawn ornament
Bottom: Part of the miniature golf course at Nalcrest



With NALC President Jerome J. Keating presiding, Postmaster General John A. Gronouski joined members of Congress and union leaders in giving speeches congratulating NALC for the achievement. U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson sent a congratulatory telegram. Doherty had moved on from NALC after President John F. Kennedy appointed him as U.S. ambassador to Jamaica a year earlier, but he couldn't bear to miss the opening ceremony.

Doherty's dream of a retirement community was later fulfilled in a personal sense when he joined his fellow retired carriers as a resident of Nalcrest, living there until his death in 1987.

Doherty's vision remains uncommon in the United States, which is one reason why it attracts so much attention. This unique community has attracted press coverage from news outlets around the country and around the world, including the largest U.S. newspaper, *The Wall Street Journal*, *National Geographic* and Swedish television. It appears to be the only retirement community in the United States created by a labor union, or any other organization, for its members.

A similar retirement community called Fedhaven, intended for other federal retirees, was built next to Nalcrest by a postal union that later merged with other unions to become the American Postal Workers Union (APWU). Fedhaven never got off the ground, though, and was sold to private owners and renamed Lakeshore.

The use of a federal loan for Nalcrest came with one important condition—Nalcrest could not actually restrict its residents to letter carriers. However, renting apartments to others helped keep Nalcrest financially stable in its early years. Nalcrest paid off the loan in 2002, and now only NALC members are admitted.

Building a community

Sixty years after its opening, life at Nalcrest is tranquil, yet never boring. The first residents set about creating a community—one that thrives to this day.

With the help of its residents, Nalcrest has grown into a town unto itself, with nearly 750 residents living in garden-style, single-level apartments. The amenities include a town center with basic conveniences; a 500-seat auditorium named for Doherty; a sports complex added in 1987 (named for NALC President Emeritus Vincent R. Sombrotto) with a heated, Olympic-size swimming pool and hot tub year-round; shuffleboard, horseshoes, basketball, bocce and tennis courts; and a miniature golf course.

The development is clustered around two peaceful lagoons connected to the lake, offering more recreational opportunities such as sailing, canoeing and fishing. Residents also can simply stroll along the shore,



where they might spy sandhill cranes, eagles, wild turkeys, and of course an alligator or two among oaks dripping with Spanish moss. A 150-acre area of the property has been left undeveloped. Conveniences are close at hand, too. The town center sports the fitness center, laundromat, restaurant and chapel.

Residents have formed a variety of clubs to bring people with similar interests together, whether to pursue hobbies, learn new skills, serve the community or just socialize. The Nalcrest Ladies Club, for instance, organizes recycling, greets newcomers, and celebrates major birthdays and anniversaries. The Ladies Club Garage—a thrift store that offers furniture, appliances and other needs for residents and donates the profits to charity—was organized by resident Janice Bobbitt, wife of retired carrier **Donald Bobbitt**.

The Bobbitts discovered Nalcrest when Janice noticed it in *The Postal Record* after he retired in 2012. “She said, ‘You know you all have a retirement place in Florida, don’t you?’ ” Donald Bobbitt explained. “We came down in 2016 to visit. We just fell in love with the place and we put our name on the list.”

Bobbitt, who finished his 32-year career in Jasper, AL, as a member of Branch 3099, moved to Nalcrest with Janice in 2017. With 22 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren between them, the couple splits their time between Nalcrest and visiting family.

As soon as he moved in, he knew he was home, Bobbitt said.

“It’s comfortable, convenient, affordable and [has] a beautiful view,” he said, “And it was so personable, and the people, our neighbors—we love them. So, it was an ideal fit for us.”

After 19 joint surgeries related to his hard work as a carrier, Bobbitt has another reason for liking Nalcrest.

“The warm weather is an added amenity for us,” he said. “I love the warmth. The sun is just like holistic medicine for me. I can get out and get in the sun and my joints feel so much better.”

Janice Bobbitt, who taught elementary school for 40 years, had wanted to open a thrift store and found the perfect opportunity at Nalcrest. The Ladies Club Garage raises funds for

Top: A footpath surrounding the community’s lagoon

Below: Donald and Janice Bobbitt

Bottom: A row of garden-style apartments





Top: As part of the 60th anniversary events, NALC President Brian L. Renfroe introduces the Executive Council to the Nalcrest community.

Above: Joe Nittoli

Below: Residents enjoy the celebratory catered dinner and dancing.



Nalcrest clubs and activities, Janice said, “and we donate for the homeless in some of the different schools, children that are in poverty, kids that miss their meals when they go home.”

“We also feel very secure here,” Donald Bobbitt added, thanks to volunteer security patrols, professional security at night and a remote location with only one entrance from the public road.

Joe Nittoli came for a visit and decided to go straight from his home in Livingston, NJ, to Nalcrest as soon as he retired.

“I thought it’d be a bunch of old letter carriers not doing anything or just not [being] active,” he said. On his weeklong visit, he said, “I went to the ball field, and I played softball and I played tennis, and I had horseshoes, and I went to the pool. It was just a sportsman’s paradise.”

The New Jersey Merged Branch 38 member carried the mail from 1965 to 2004 and has lived at Nalcrest ever since. “And I haven’t looked back,” he said.

“It’s the perfect location,” Nittoli said. “It’s away from everything, and yet it’s not that far to get to places you want to do things. And there’s plenty of stuff to do here. You can do as much as you want here or as little as you want.”

“Doherty and his team,” he added, “when they picked the location, picked the perfect spot.”

Like the Bobbitts, Nittoli loves the spirit of community.

“Everybody helps each other,” he added. “If somebody needs something, word just spreads.” He recalls a time when his computer monitor broke and he mentioned it to a tennis partner, and within hours a resident he didn’t know knocked on his door to offer a spare monitor. And then there was the time when someone needed help unloading a truck and a half-dozen residents showed up within a few minutes and got the job done.

“People get the call,” he said, “and we go and help each other.”

“And the people coming in, they’re all coming from all over the country,” Nittoli added, “and you get to meet people from other parts of the country—Washington (the state), North Dakota, Wyoming. And they’re all the same—they all want to get involved. They’re not a bunch of letter carriers with their spouses sitting around doing nothing.”

Celebration

Nalcrest marked its milestone anniversary with two celebrations Jan. 29 to Feb. 2—a catered dinner with entertainment in the evening, and a barbecue on the beach adjoining the retirement community on the shore of Lake Weohyakapka that featured more entertainment and door prizes. There also was a ceremony honoring military veterans and, with so many active

The anniversary events included a ceremony honoring military veterans.

residents at Nalcrest, several sporting events.

Guests included the members of the NALC Executive Council, which held its quarterly meeting at Nalcrest.

Members of Nalcrest's board of trustees—former Region 9 National Business Agent Matty Rose (board of trustees president), NALC Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine (board of trustees vice president), NALC Executive Vice President Paul Barner, former Tampa, FL Branch 599 President Tony Diaz, NALC Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Mack Julion, former NALC President Fredric Rolando, and NALC Director of Retired Members Dan Toth—attended the celebration. Diaz, Rolando and Rose make up the trustee standing committee that oversees Nalcrest's day-to-day operations. Former trustees Don Southern and Tom Young also attended.

The trustees have put Nalcrest on a sound financial footing and at full occupancy. While in the past there were some vacant units, Nalcrest now has a waiting list.

"The 60th anniversary of Nalcrest is an historic event for NALC," Rose said. "We are the only union that has a retirement community for its members. In the last decade, we've accomplished a monumental number of improvements that have benefited the residents, and we are working on more."

"The Nalcrest trustees and staff work diligently to ensure that President Doherty's dream of an amazing low-cost retirement community will continue to prosper and to serve our members for another 60 years and beyond," Rolando said.

Nalcrest has efficiencies, one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments



for rent. As mentioned above, there currently is a waiting list. To apply, simply fill out and mail the application and questionnaire found on page 49 of this magazine. NALC members who are interested can visit Nalcrest and even rent one of the guest apartments reserved for short stays (call 863-696-1121 for more information). You can visit nalc.org/nalcrest for a brochure and to print the application. **PR**

A golfing event was held during the anniversary weekend.

