



Tampa Letter Carrier

Volume 5 - Issue 1

A.R. "Tony" Huerta NALC Branch 599

Tampa, Florida

January 2006

President's Report

by Jim Good

President - Branch 599

Maybe This Year

As I sit down to write my last article of 2005, a number of issues come to mind that have negatively affected the lives of letter carriers in our area. As the New Year arrives I, along with our other branch officers hope to work with local management to try to put some of these issues to rest.

The main issue is forced overtime for carriers both on and off the overtime desired list, which has reached an all-time high. This is the result of a number of factors, including a shortage of carriers, withholding of residual vacancies because of Hurricane Katrina and over hiring in the Atlanta installation, a freeze on hiring and transferring in of carriers into Tampa and the fact that postal management at the area and national level has decided that it is more profitable to work carriers overtime than to hire new employees.

An article in the December 12th *Federal Times* states "At the December 6 Board of Governors meeting in Washington, Postmaster General John Potter proudly announced that the agency is, financially, in "the best position we've been since

1970s." I ask, at what cost? It was not all that long ago that if a carrier wanted to work forty hours a week that is what he/she would work. The overtime desired list was for people who wanted to work overtime, and if you didn't want or need the extra money you didn't get on the list. In the past two or three years, however, upper management has proven that they are more interested in making money than they are in the best interests of their employees.

This puts the pressure on local management to get the mail delivered with fewer carriers, and ultimately the carriers pay the price. Sure, it's nice to make \$65,000, \$75,000 or more per year, but not at the expense of giving up your family life.

But there may be hope. Postmaster Nancy Fryrear has said that she has requested the hiring of sixteen new part time flexible carriers. The withholding has been lifted resulting from Hurricane Katrina and should be lifted soon for the Atlanta situation. As far as upper management changing their thought process regarding overtime versus hiring, who knows? All the union can do is continue to police the *National Agreement* and ensure that the rules regarding forced overtime are followed.

Another important issue that I hope to resolve in the coming year is that of minor route adjustments. The union and Tampa management have agreed to try a new minor route adjustment method at Temple Terrace, Forest Hills Station and Commerce,

in that order, and if successful move into other stations to properly adjust routes that are out of adjustment. We should know by the middle of January if the new procedure is going to work.



Finally, our Labor Management Committee must discuss with Tampa management their reasoning for the issuance of discipline. As I stated in a previous article, management has been quick to issue harsh and punitive discipline, far more severe than is necessary to correct the action or error on the carrier's part. In some cases this has resulted in the carrier being removed from the Postal Service even though they may have had a long career with no prior infractions. Management must understand that everyone is human and that attempting to end an employee's career should be done only after all other corrective actions have been taken and have failed. Hopefully one day management will realize this.

I hope everyone had a very joyous Christmas and holiday season and look forward to a prosperous and healthy new year!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

EX. VICE-PRESIDENT'S REPORT.....	3
UNIONISM.....	5
POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE	6
AND THE BEAT GOES ON	7

Branch Meeting

January 5, 2006

7:30 PM

Branch 599 Officers

PRESIDENT	Jim Good	(813) 960-3759, cell 417-8877
EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT	Detlev Aepfel	(813) 907-9685, cell 505-7914
VICE-PRESIDENT	Gilbert Cabanas	(813) 855-0516, cell 597-7396
RECORDING SECRETARY	Cheryl Clothier	(727) 385-7337
FINANCIAL SECRETARY	Tony Diaz	(813) 598-9635
TREASURER	Michael Anderson	(813) 681-5688
TRUSTEE(Chairman)	Henry Dupree	(813) 621-6471
TRUSTEE	Jose Oliva	(813) 873-2747
TRUSTEE	Terry Franklin	(813) 657-9690
SERGEANT-AT-ARMS	J.C. Howard	(813) 621-1976
MBA / NSBA	Albert Guice	(813) 621-7931
HEALTH BENEFITS	Lance Jones	(813) 220-1292
DIRECTOR OF RETIREES	Jack Newman	(813) 805-2942
LABOR - MANAGEMENT	Eric Fleming	(813) 310-8274
LABOR - MANAGEMENT	Brian Obst	(727) 507-0135
MAPS COORDINATOR	Chris Albrecht	(727) 791-7162

Presidents Emeritus

Michael Anderson	Orbe Andux
James Butler	Milton McConnell
Don Thomas	Garland Tickle
Lenin Perez	

A.R. "Tony" Huerta NALC Branch 599

3003 W. Cypress St.

Tampa, Florida 33609-1617

Tel: (813) 875-0599 Fax: (813) 870-0599

email: nalc599@verizon.net

website: <http://www.nalc599.com>

Branch 599 Shop Stewards

Brandon	33510	Terry Franklin	(813) 657-9690
Brandon	33511	Terry Franklin	(813) 657-9690
Carrollwood	33618	Gilbert Cabanas	(813) 855-0516
Commerce	33602	Dook Ramotar Sr.	(813) 780-6254
Forest Hills	33612	Warren Sumlin	(813) 486-7612
Forest Hills Annex	33613	David Camuy	(813) 892-6553
Hilldale	33614	Gilbert Cabanas	(813) 855-0516
Hilldale Annex	33634	Lance Jones	(813) 220-1292
Hyde Park	33606	George McEndree	(813) 935-0244
Interbay	33611	Dean Minter	(813) 767-6538
Interbay	33629	Jim Knotz	(813) 832-6644
MacDill	33608	Jim Knotz	(813) 832-6644
Palm River	33619	J.C. Howard	(813) 621-1976
Plant City	33565	Misty Bauer	(813) 681-6890
Port Tampa	33616	Dean Minter	(813) 767-6538
Produce	33610	Eric Fleming	(813) 310-8274
Ruskin / Sun City Center	33570	Jack Hencoski	(813) 633-5422
Seminole Heights	33603	Tony Diaz	(813) 872-1542
Sulphur Springs	33604	Matt Kokich	(813) 431-3686
Tampa Carrier Annex	33607	Ken Lee	(940) 368-4771
Tampa Carrier Annex	33609	Brian Obst	(727) 458-0679
Temple Terrace	33617	Mike Stewart	(813) 310-1292
Town & Country	33615	Brian Obst	(727) 458-0679
Ybor City	33605	Detlev Aepfel	(813) 505-7914

TAMPA RETIREES BREAKFAST

First Monday of Every Month

9:00 AM at

The Coffee Cup

4407 N. Hubert

in Drew Park

BRANDON RETIREES BREAKFAST

Second Tuesday of every month

8:00 AM at

Buddy Freddy's

134 Gornto Lake Rd S.

in Brandon

The National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 599, 3003 W. Cypress Street, Tampa, FL 33609-1617, publishes The Tampa Letter Carrier monthly. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the writers, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Branch 599. It is the policy of this publication that all articles submitted for publication must be signed by the writer. All articles are subject to editing and revision at the discretion of the publisher & editor. Please submit articles to the branch office no later than the tenth of the month. Submit articles as .txt, .doc or .wpd documents attached to email sent to: newsletter@nalc599.com

Jim Good - Publisher

Kit Kelley - Editor

Executive Vice-President's Report

by Detlev Aepfel

Executive Vice-President - Branch 599

New Year's Resolutions

As we all know, the new year will bring many new opportunities and challenges. This will certainly be true for letter carriers. With the holidays behind us, life at the the USPS will return to what we consider normal. Keeping the following New Year's resolutions will ensure everyone has a better 2006:

1. Fill out a 3996 if you will need more than 8 hours to complete your assignment. In all likelihood management will renew their efforts to convince carriers that DOIS is an authoritative measurement of the time that they will need to do their work. If carriers fill out 3996's every time that overtime is needed, they will become fluent in estimating the actual time required and will not be duped into agreeing with what "the computer says" when they know better.
2. Fill out a 1571 any time you do not deliver all the mail available to be delivered. This includes all classes of mail. As letter carriers our mission is to deliver the mail. If your supervisor says leave the bulk then do so and fill out a 1571 for them to sign. If your supervisor brings

you late hot case mail on the street and tells you not to go back and deliver passed addresses then do as instructed and fill out a 1571 for them to sign.

3. Make management do their jobs. Give them your estimate and let them decide whether to give auxiliary assistance or authorize OT. If you get a late dispatch of mail after you have given your estimate then modify your estimate if necessary and let the supervisor decide whether to give assistance or not. If the supervisor says you don't need OT but then at 3 o'clock you realize he was wrong and you will be out until 5 o'clock or later, call the supervisor and let him decide whether you should carry it, bring it back, or get assistance. If you run out of marriage mail or flyers before your deliveries are completed and can't find any more in the station, tell the supervisor and let them decide what to do. If there are unsafe conditions on your route, tell the supervisor so the proper action can be taken. If your supervisor fails to do his job then let your steward know about it.

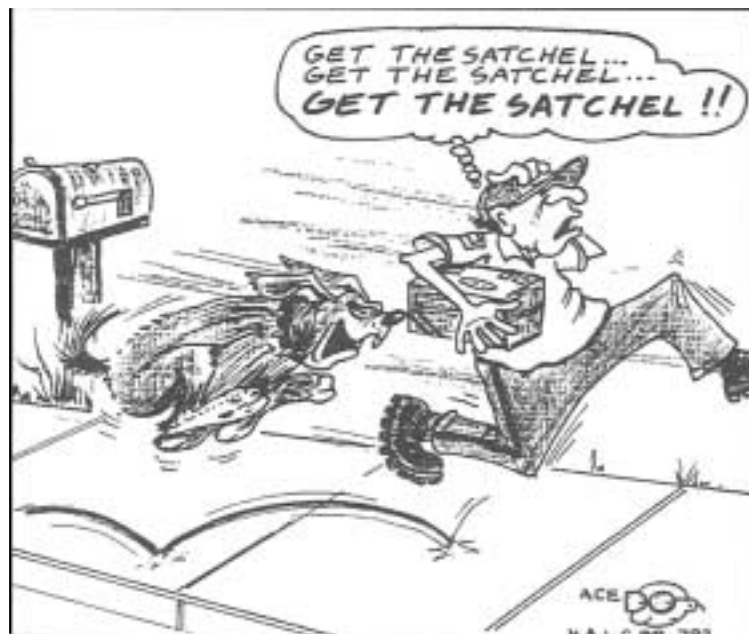
4. Become an *e-Activist*. If you are not already signed up as an e-Activist then do so now. Stay informed about the changes coming to the USPS. Don't hide behind cynicism by saying there is nothing you can do or your efforts don't matter. When the time comes to act, do what is asked of you by contacting your representatives in Congress.



5. Make automatic contributions to COLCPE. This applies to nearly everyone. There are fewer than 50 members of Branch 599 currently making regular automatic contributions to COLCPE. Branch 599 consists of over 1000 members. Everyone can afford to give something and no one can afford to give nothing.

Have a good new year and I'll see you at the Retirees - Installation Banquet on January 21st.

In Solidarity...





Newsletter Article Writers Wanted

Branch 599 members are invited to submit articles for publication in the *Tampa Letter Carrier* newsletter. Though most issues feature the same writers, this is often because they are the only ones submitting articles. We often run short on submissions so your article has a good chance of being printed. All points of view and opinions are welcome and writers need not be accomplished journalists or future Pulitzer prize winners as we have a team of proof-readers ready to assist in polishing your writings. For information on writing guidelines and submission procedures, go the Branch 599 website at <http://www.nalc599.com/writer.htm>, send an email to writer@nalc599.com, or call the branch office at 875-0599.

January Meetings:

- Tues 1-3-06 - Shop Stewards Meeting
Union Hall, 7:00 PM
- Thur 1-5-06 - Branch Meeting
Union Hall, 7:30 PM
- Tues 1-24-06 - TLC Board Of Directors Meeting
Union Hall, 7:00 PM
- Thur 1-26-06 - Executive Board Meeting
Union Hall, 7:00 PM

Attention All Members

The Tampa Letter Carriers, Inc. By-laws, Article 2, Section 11 reads: "When a vacancy occurs on the Board of Directors, and there are no alternates available to fill that vacancy, any member, in good standing, of Branch 599 NALC may submit a written request to be considered to fill the vacancy. The Board of Directors will decide by a majority vote as to whether the applicant(s) will be appointed".

Because of the resignation of a board member, TLC will be accepting applications for this position. Any member who wishes to be considered to fill this vacancy must submit his/her name to the following address by January 20, 2006. Tampa Letter Carriers, Inc., 3003 West Cypress, Tampa, FL 33609-1617. The new director will serve the remainder of the appointed term, which will end on election day in January of 2007.

Jim Good, Secretary - Tampa Letter Carriers, Inc.

ARSLAN UNIFORMS

Bill & Shirley Moran

Retired Letter Carrier Branch 1477 St. Petersburg

Honorary Member Branch 599 Tampa

NEED UNIFORMS IN A HURRY?

SHOP BY PHONE FROM HOME

320 PATLIN CIRCLE EAST PHONE: 727-584-4307

LARGO, FL 33770-3063 CELL: 727-543-0705 FAX: 727-585-9367

bilmor@tampabay.rr.com

Unionism

by Brian Obst

Chief Steward - Branch 599

The Closing of Another Year

Well, the year 2005 is rapidly coming to a close and the members of Branch 599 have seen another year of change in the city of Tampa. We have bid farewell to the previous postmaster, Rich Rome, and after a period of uncertainty we were able to welcome the new postmaster, Nancy Fryrear.

As always with a new regime, time will tell if things are better or worse than they were previously, but if the past several months are any indication of things to come it looks like we are in for a bumpy ride. With discipline on the rise and the number of carriers falling rapidly things are getting tighter for the present carriers in our branch. With this in mind I would like to address some things that may assist our members in the day to day operations of the Postal Service that we are involved in as city carriers.

Article 3 of the National Agreement deals with management rights and 3.A states "The employer shall have the exclusive right, subject to the provisions of this agreement and consistent with applicable laws and regulations: A. To direct employees of the employer in the performance of official duties" This statement is important for every carrier to know and understand. If the supervisor is supposed to direct the employees it is incumbent on the employees to ensure that the supervisor is doing just that. For the supervisor to direct the employee we as carriers need to provide the information they need to properly direct us in our duties. On a daily basis we must provide daily work estimates and fill out the proper documentation (i.e. 3996, 1571, accountable receipts etc.) and provide any known information on items that affect our ability to deliver the mail placed in our charge. If we have provided our supervisors with the needed information they should be able to direct us without conflict.

The morning estimate should be provided to the supervisor approx. 15 minutes after your last draw of mail. Some supervisors come around and ask for this information and others wait for you to come to them but either way this is not supposed to be a contentious meeting. When you provide the estimate, if questioned provide your reasons for your estimate and if the supervisor does not agree simply ask for direction. Do not argue with the supervisor simply ask them to direct you how to handle the mail. Let's face it, the person who best knows how long it will take to deliver the mail is the carrier who actually delivers it and if your supervisor disagrees with you then they should direct you what to do with the mail so it can be delivered in the time frame they want. This does not mean they can tell you to deliver it in less time than your estimate, it means that they can authorize you to work the needed time to deliver the mail or they can take mail away from you or they can ride with you to check your estimate. In any event they will direct you what you should do. Also in the absence of direction from your supervisor you should follow the given estimate as that is the last instruction given. Finally when you give an estimate it should be as accurate as possible so if you are having problems in this area ask for assistance from your shop steward or your supervisor in techniques for estimating the time needed for delivery.

Filling out the proper forms daily is extremely important for protecting you and your job from supervisors who seek to discipline for any reason. The 3996 form allows you to show everything affecting your route that day such as amount of DPS and cased mail, number of parcels for delivery, number of and type of accountable pieces for delivery, amount of CFS review, processing of COA forms, service talks to just name a few things. These things

all take time and will help you with estimating time for your route. If you request it your supervisor is **REQUIRED** to provide you a copy of your 3996 each day for your records.



The 1571 is the curtailed mail report form and is for any mail placed in your charge that you did not deliver **FOR ANY REASON**. This form should be filled out in the morning before departing the office and again in the evening when you return to the office. Some of the things that should be noted on this form are curtailed/delayed mail, DPS errors, CFS review mail, UBBM mail just to name a few and again if you request it your supervisor is **REQUIRED** to provide you a copy of this form after they have signed it.

As a carrier we run into many developments out on the route that may cause our times to change or affect our ability to properly deliver the mail in our charge. The simple solution to this any time that it happens is to stop what you are doing and call your supervisor to ask for direction. You are **NOT** required to use your personal cell phone nor are you required to pay for this call yourself. If you need to call do not be afraid to call collect to get the needed direction from your supervisor. If when you call the phone is busy hang up and continue to call until you get a hold of your supervisor as this is the only way we can be sure of the proper actions to take. Management has made this fact extremely clear during current discipline cases that had the carrier simply spoken to their supervisor the issue leading to discipline could have been avoided.

As a steward for the past seven years I have found that many situations could be avoided simply by letting the supervisors make the decisions. Many times asking the supervisor doesn't correct the problem

(continued on page 9)

A Point of Personal Privilege

The Days of Beer and Sandspurs

I hope that everyone had a Merry Christmas (happy holiday) and that we will all have a happy new year. Every year individuals make resolutions for the new year: weight loss, honey-do-list, etc. One of my wishes each and every year seems to be that management realize that this job is supposed to be a service of quality rather than a quantity of numbers. Our new postmaster of Tampa seems to be settling into her job as many stewards will attest. It never ceases to amaze me that changes in attitudes and actions against craft are tried but everything seems to remain the same. It is an endless circle. For example, management states that the USPS is over budget because of overtime, sick time, office times, street times, industrial injuries, vehicle accidents, etc. The microscope is always directed at craft. I believe we are subjected to a cause and effect theory I have developed over the years.

Many carriers quit or retire and are not replaced. When route evaluations are made the mail volume seems to disappear to all time low levels. (This has happened every one of my 43 route checks I have been through) Once adjustments are made the mail volume magically returns and the routes are over burdened because of the elimination of routes within each station. (Which supposedly justifies automation) DOIS then calculates your route as being 8 hours everyday. After this the office and street times are inaccurate and the carrier uses more overtime. Longer hours are worked which lowers your immune system and you usually get sick. You are put under mental stress to make the 5PM window of operation then you attempt to run the route which causes industrial and vehicle accidents to increase. So much for my theory.

Once again I have been accused of being a Bush-basher, of not supporting

the military fighting in Iraq and basically being unpatriotic. I can not in all honesty blindly praise or support the inept governing of the Bush Administration since the Supreme Court appointment after the 2000 election. This administration has been the most secretive, arrogant, belligerent, incompetent and untruthful in the history of the United States and there are 3 years remaining till the next election in 2008. I refuse to give this administration a vote of confidence because they falsely said: there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; Saddam Hussein had ties to al Qaeda; Iraq was part of the war on terror; the tax cuts for the rich would create 5.5 million new jobs; federal spending would be cut; they would uphold and defend the Constitution; this Administration would serve the people and have a "humble" foreign policy; the environment would be protected; and they would be uniters, not dividers. George W. Bush promised to cut the deficit in half over five years. He also stated, "I've been changing the tone in Washington..." and "I have no ambition whatsoever to use national security as a political issue." David Corn, the longtime Washington editor of *The Nation*, summed up Bush's propensity to stray from the straight and narrow: "*This president has treated the truth in a manner his predecessor treated an intern.*"

Most of the Bush supporters defend their man because he stated he would tell the truth and restore dignity to the Oval Office. Republicans argued during the Lewinsky scandal that the punishment must fit the crime. *If a lie about oral sex deserved impeachment, what is the appropriate punishment for a whole series of lies?* The GOP controls both houses of Congress and not one charge will be meted out for this administration's constant and blatant lying!

It has been revealed that on August 6, 2001, or approximately 36 days before 9-11, the Bush administration received

a *Presidential Daily Briefing* entitled

"*Presidential Daily Briefing - bin Ladin Determined to Strike in US - August 6, 2001*" in which Bush was told that Osama Bin Laden was planning to hijack airplanes. (see <http://fpc.state.gov/fpc/31435.htm> - Editor)



Later Condoleeza Rice told the press the briefing was only about attacks overseas. Yet, the title of the brief was "*bin Laden Determined to Strike in US*".

How can Republicans condemn the Clinton administration as being complacent in U. S. attempts to stop Bin Laden when they did nothing to prevent the attacks which they were warned about in writing in this presidential briefing?

Amazingly, Bush had the opportunity to kill Bin Laden when American Predator drone airplanes spotted Osama on three separate occasions prior to 9-11 yet no order was given to kill the al-Qaeda leader.

"In peace, sons bury their fathers; in war, fathers bury their sons."

Herodotus

Retirees / Officers Installation Dinner

The annual Retirees/Officers Installation Dinner will be held at the Letter Carriers Union Hall on Saturday, January 21, 2006. The doors will open at 6:00 pm with dinner being served at 6:30 pm. The Installation of Shop Stewards and dance will follow. I am very pleased to announce that NALC President Bill Young will be the installing officer. It is always a pleasure and honor to have Mr. Young visit us to share his knowledge of the current happenings at the national level in Washington, D.C. Please take advantage of this opportunity to meet and talk with your national union president and enjoy an evening with your fellow letter carriers. Active carriers can get tickets for this event from their station shop stewards (\$5.00 for two which will be reimbursed at the door). Retirees need to call the union hall at 875-0599 and your tickets will be mailed to your home address. The deadline for ordering tickets is Monday, January 16th. Hope to see you all on the 21st.

And The Beat Goes On

by Ray Wallace

The Bad and The Good

I hope you all have a healthy, wealthy and happy new year. The main item is to *stay healthy*. Without your health you're for sure not going to be happy and forget wealth, if the doctors don't get all your money, what ever is left, the hospital will. Talking about that, its kind of late to say this as the time to choose your health plan is over but I do hope you choose the *NALC Health Plan*. The #1 reason is it's union owned. I don't think there are many union health plans around. #2, they do have great benefits and their prescription plan is one of the best.

I know you all have heard about the St. Pete carriers supposed to have thrown away ADVO cards and they're up for termination. It was front page headline news in the *St. Pete Times*. How that will go no one knows.

One time I ran out of the ADVO papers and delivered the cards alone to about 50 stops on my route. I thought to myself, all the postal patrons throw them away so no one will complain about not getting the Flyer. Oh, yeah! When I got back the supervisor came up to me and said, "Wallace, I got a call from so & so and they got no Flyer, only the card." I replied, "I ran out but I have every intention of delivering them tomorrow." Who would

ever have thought some one would complain about not getting his Flyer?

It's so easy to get into trouble. One time I marked a 1st class letter wrong. The clerks, if they were nice, could have brought it to me for proper handling but instead they brought it to the manager and I was put in for a *Letter of Warning*. I don't know why, but some clerks enjoy seeing carriers punished. As all craft employees we should be all working together, not apart.

A carrier in Lakeland was terminated recently for the vehicle getting away from him. This, too, is very serious and we all know, "...off the seat, the ignition is off." But how many do that? It happens often and a lot of carriers won't tell anyone but it does happen. The name of the game today seems to be "*NO second chance, your terminated.*" So slow down and double check everything you do.

A carrier in Brandon, Danny Stewart, with 22 years in the post office (he worked in Tampa as a clerk prior to coming to Brandon), had the misfortune of having knee surgery go bad back in March 2005. From that point on he has had one surgery after the other and still more to come. He has been out of work since and he can not walk without crutches. He is 46 years old with a wife and two children.

The carriers in Brandon decided to help our

brother out. Shop Steward Terry Franklin got together with Phil Chirico and Arne Weijola and agreed to do something.

On December 7, at a Po Boys restaurant in Brandon, they staged a benefit. They told Danny they were going for a dinner to talk over old times. Surprise! There was well over 200 people in attendance: carriers, managers, retirees, neighbors. There was a 50-50 drawing and a lot of sports memorabilia was sold off to raise money to help Danny and his family. Unbelievable as it seems, he received about \$5,000 from the fundraiser.

I spoke to Danny and he said he is in shock. He said has never worked with a better group of people in his life. Also he said that President Jim Good went out of his way to help him with the paper work to put in for a disability retirement and that he prays that in the future he can be put back together good enough that he can go back to work in the post office, if not as a carrier in some other position.

So congratulations, Brandon -to all of you- for helping out a brother carrier. With all the misery we all read about on a daily basis, it is good to hear something nice.



Terry Franklin, Phil Chirico, Danny Stewart and Arne Weijola at the fundraiser for Stewart

(See more photos on the Branch website at <http://www.nalc599.com/members.htm>)

Around The Horn

by Tony Diaz

Financial Secretary - Branch 599

Questions & Answers On FMLA

Brothers and Sisters I would like to take this time to wish everyone a healthy and prosperous 2006!!!! Hope everyone had a very Merry Christmas also. The holidays are a special time for family and friends, and of course any time we have two days off makes the holidays even more special.

My article last month, judging from the responses I received was my most interesting to date. I appreciate the comments and feedback to all my columns; I am thrilled with how popular last month's subject matter was.

I again wanted to share information I obtained from the State Training Seminar in October. This month I wanted to touch on FMLA. FMLA can become an effective tool members can use to protect themselves against disciplinary action issued as a result of sick leave usage. Here are a few facts and answers about FMLA:

1) What is FMLA? short for Family Medical Leave Act.

2) How long has FMLA been around? FMLA became effective 9/5/03 and is classified as a federal law.

3) Who is eligible? a) you must have worked for the Postal Service for at least 12 months, b) you must have worked at least 1,250 hours during the 12 months prior to the start of the FMLA leave, c) you must work at a location where at least 50 employees are employed.

4) How long does FMLA cover me for? Up to a total of 12 workweeks of leave in a 12-month period.

5) What reasons will FMLA cover me for? a) For the birth of a child and to care for the newborn, b) for the placement with the employee of a child for adoption or foster care, and to care for the newly placed child, c) to care for an immediate family member (spouse, child or parent – but not a parent “in-law” with a serious health condition, d) when the employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition.

6) Does a father have the same right as a mother following childbirth to qualify for FMLA leave? Yes a father, as well as a mother may take FMLA leave for the adop-

tion, foster care and caring for the birth of a newborn during the 12 months following the date of birth.

Many FMLA cases result from situations mentioned in 5c, to care for an immediate family member (spouse, child or parent). If you are being forced to miss work for this reason or any of the others take advantage of FMLA and request FMLA papers the next time you call in for unscheduled leave. Your doctor will determine how many days you need per call-in depending on your situation. FMLA will protect you against discipline should there be a need for you to miss extended time caring for a loved one or for a personal health problem. The Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment Standards Administration enforces FMLA and investigates complaints of violations. Next month I will explain the differences between FMLA and SLDC (Sick Leave Dependant Care).

Look forward to talking to you again in the next *Around The Horn*.



TAMPA LETTER CARRIERS PRESENT BINGO

COME JOIN THE FUN

EVERY WEDNESDAY AND FRIDAY

DOORS OPEN AT 5:30

GAMES START AT 6:30

AT THE TAMPA LETTER CARRIERS HALL

3003 W. CYPRESS ST.

Tampa, Fl. 33609

813-877-4785

Health Benefits Report

by Lance Jones

Health Benefits Representative - Branch 599

To Your Health

I'd like to wish everyone a happy and prosperous new year.

MEDICARE PART B. All retired letter carriers who participate in the NALC Health Plan should be aware that the prescription drug program Caremark is better than, and in MANY instances, cheaper (costs per prescription) than the plans offered through Medicare Part B. Also, Caremark qualifies under the federal guidelines so that in the future, if you should decide to change to a Medicare Part B prescription program, there will be no penalty.

FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS. What are they? A flexible spending account is a medical savings account funded through a payroll deduction that is tax free (it comes out of your gross pay prior to taxation) that can be used at anytime during the year to pay medical expenses not covered under your insurance plan such as den-

tal, optical, child care, prescription co-payments and many more. It's a good thing and if you don't participate now you should consider it in the future. The money can be withdrawn any time during the year, even before you have paid the entire deduction. So if you have an operation that can be planned ahead, or a regimen of prescriptions and know what your yearly co-pay is, you would be able to set aside the money in a flexible spending account and draw on it. How can you get the money? Simple-call FSA at **1-800-842-2026** and request the forms, fill them out and return with the appropriate copy of the bill, or the estimate of medical expenses if it's for a pending surgery. By the way, CareMark's website at <http://www.caremark.com/wps/portal> has a feature that allows you to print a copy of an entire year of prescriptions, including what you paid. I've used it twice now for claims with no problems. Who can participate? Anyone currently employed and in an active pay status. Can retired people participate? Sorry-the answer is no.

I have a big problem with this. First,

many retired members have to pay taxes on part or all of their income. Second, their checks are constant and consistent so there's no problem about where to make the deduction for payment. Third, many retirees have a real need for flexible spending accounts as medical problems and the need for prescriptions drugs increases as we age. I think the federal government in passing this law neglected the senior citizens of this country, people who have earned the right to the same tax free benefits. Even though I haven't retired yet I've written my congressman and the NARP expressing my views. Everyone should be writing to their congressman on this particular issue. If you're not retired now, you will be some day and let's face it, fair is fair. If you pay taxes then you should be entitled to the same benefits of the tax benefits.

In Unity...



Unionism *(continued from page 5)*

but what it does is shift the responsibility from the carrier to the supervisor. If the supervisor is responsible for the problem then it is not possible for them to discipline the carrier for the supervisor's improper handling of the situation.

One more thought this month and that would be your vehicle. When you are on the street and you have to make a delivery always put your vehicle in park, curb your wheels, set your hand brake and lock your door after you shut your vehicle off and remove your keys. We have all heard of incidents where a vehicle has rolled away/run away or was stolen because the carrier failed to do these simple things. These are important issues not only for security of the mail and job safety but also for job security as failure to do these things and having an incident can cost you your job

or worse cost some innocent person their life should a vehicle run them over. Think when you get behind the wheel and always be safe.

Through these rambling thoughts I hope I have been able to strike a chord that will resonate in your mind throughout the upcoming year to help you with issues that we see daily on our job. If you ever need to talk to someone about these and other issues please ask to speak to your shop steward, or call your union office to speak to President Good, or call me up and I will be happy to help in any way I can. Together we can help each other to have a better working environment and protect our jobs by doing the right things to prevent potential discipline actions by management.

Remember, knowledge is the key.

Wishing you the happiest of holidays,

Brian Obst

Shop Steward
Town and Country

Toys For Tots Toy Drive Report

by Lori McMillion

Toys For Tots Toy Drive Coordinator - Branch 599

Toy Drive 2005

With this being my first year as Toys for Tots coordinator, I had no idea what was expected of me. During the first meeting back in June with all other coordinators from the Marines, Dept. Of Children and Families and HMO's, the only thing I learned was that I was going to be really busy once the kick-off came.

After the kick-off, I found myself driving around Tampa for two days to every post office to display the posters in lobbies. The VMF even supplied the vehicle. For about the next week or two, I was mostly on the phone making calls to schedule things like, getting the postage approved for the flyers and setting a date as to when they should be delivered; emailing every coordinator with an updated list of all post offices and phone numbers; getting a list of names of the Rough Riders who will be volunteering and at what stations; and arranging to have boxes and pallets sent to the stations that need them.

There are a few other duties as well, but the most exciting is the actual day

of the drive. This is when I spend most of the day at the warehouse where the toys will be coming in. I work side by side with two other volunteers to coordinate the box trucks as to which post office they should go to first, and which they travel to from there as they make their way in. Also at the warehouse is Jim Good, Wayne Tucker, Sgt.Maj.(ret.), as well as 30-40 marines to help unload those trucks.

It was an awesome sight and it warmed my heart to know the work we letter carriers did to help over 5,000 families have toys for their children! The carriers in Hillsborough County, through the efforts of those represented by Branch 599, collected 70,000 toys! That is a feeling you never forget, no matter how hard you tried to get something right and felt like giving up. Yes, I admit there were those times when I asked myself why was I doing this. I may never see these families, but I know they exist and as long as there is someone willing to ask for help, there should always be someone there for them. I may not have done things to the greatest potential, but I have next year to make it even better as long as my fellow carriers (rural carriers, too) are in it with me!

I would like to thank everyone who has

helped me along the way when I needed it: Susan Sinigaglia, a letter carrier from Carrollwood, for guiding me when I needed you; President Jim Good, for your smart inputs; Stan Sakowski-transportation coordinator; Wayne Tucker, U.S. Marines coordinator; Joe Rossiter, Rough Riders volunteer coordinator; Tampa Postmaster Nancy Fryrear and Jean Carlton, her secretary; Tim Williams, supplier and coordinator for Electric Supplytrucks; Nikki Heister from the Flyer; Gary Sawtelle; Tim Hyers; Ken Davies, VMF; Shirley Hickman, Branch 599 secretary; Lou Bottego, Jr., boxes and pallets; William Sands, supplier of Cardinal Health trucks; Sue Hutson; Herb Danica, for finding the warehouse; Bill Murray from Bay Area Disaster Kleenup for supplying trucks; Debbie Nix from HealthEase, the Distribution Coordinator; and all the carriers of Tampa (especially the ones who had to carry my route), supervisors and managers for the time to allow me to do this, those who had to give me directions and anyone else I may have missed. **THANK YOU GREATLY!**



Toys For Tots Toy Drive 2005



**See more Toy Drive photos on the Branch 599 website at
<http://www.nalc599.com/members.htm>**



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A.R. "Tony" Huerta NALC Branch 599
3003 West Cypress Street
Tampa FL 33609-1617
(813) 875-0599 fax (813) 870-0599
<http://www.nalc599.com>

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