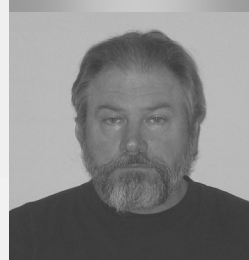


# Tampa Letter Carrier

## From the Desk of the President

Well, it has finally arrived – that most wonderful time of the year. Elves on shelves, trees covered with tinsel, packages wrapped waiting for Christmas Day, soon to be followed by New Year’s Eve and Day. This is a joyous time of year full of family, friends, and guests. Gifts, holiday extravaganzas of food and drink, and lots of football games throughout the season. This is the time of year that we all wait for with some trepidation, but always filled with joy for the season and the end of another year.



Brian Obst  
President  
Branch 599

It is time now to look forward to the coming new year and the preparation for the changes that accompany the arrival of each new year. 2024 will be the year of our next Biannual National Convention and this year we will be travelling to Boston MA, August 5-9, to begin addressing issues of our National Union’s direction for the future. Hopefully we will have a new National Agreement in place prior to this time, but who knows, stranger things have happened.

### Committee of Presidents

Since I have broached the issue of negotiations of the National Agreement, I would like to point out some basic information that was brought up at the Committee of Presidents meeting in Las Vegas, October 14 & 15. National President Renfro provided basic information on some of the areas they are negotiating. First, mandatory mediation ended in July and the parties are now moving toward interest arbitration and they are meeting to determine the neutral arbitrator to hear the case. This however does not mean that the parties have ceased negotiating, no, they still meet regularly and will continue to do so in an attempt to hammer out a negotiated National Agreement even while arbitration is ongoing, right up until either a negotiated agreement is reached, or an arbitration decision is reached. Issues like pay raises and pay scales, COLAs, and steps for pay increases, starting pay and retroactive active pay are all being discussed along with numerous other issues that affect letter carriers’ daily issues on the job.

President Renfro also discussed the National Union’s position on the ever-increasing danger to letter carriers from armed robberies throughout the nation. They are working diligently with the Postal Service to find the best ways to protect carriers on the street. Some information that was brought up was the Postal Service putting aside funds to replace and revamp the entire arrow key system throughout the country as well as an increased law enforcement presence in an effort to prevent robberies before they happen.

It was also pointed out that the annual dues increase, effective with the first pay period of 2024, will set National Dues at \$30.97 plus any state and local dues required. The Vice President and I are grateful that our Branch was able to send us to this meeting, as the information is always good and it allows us to return it to the membership, keeping

*(Continued on page 3)*

Branch 599  
*servicing*  
Brandon  
Plant City  
Sun City  
Tampa

### Branch 599 Meeting

Thursday  
December 7  
7:30 PM

**Our new Hall**  
315 W Busch Blvd  
Suite C  
Tampa FL 33612

Additional parking is  
available in the lot  
before our building.

## Branch 599 Office

315 W Busch Boulevard, Suite C  
Tampa FL 33612

813.875.0599

Fax 813.870.0599

www.nalc599.com

Brian Obst  
President  
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7:30 am – 4 pm

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## Tampa Letter Carrier

Brian Obst  
Publisher

Phyllis R. Thomas  
Editor  
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Branch 599 Office  
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Please submit any and all articles to be published in the Tampa Letter Carrier to the Editor via email at editor.nalc599@gmail.com and also to the Branch Office at nalc599@verizon.net no later than the 5th of each month in order for us to meet our time limits to the publisher.

## Officers

<i>Position</i>	<i>Officer</i>	<i>Phone</i>	<i>Email</i>
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<b>Recording Secretary</b>	Matt Fernandez	786.247.4185	
<b>Financial Secretary</b>	Alan Robinson	813.843.9762	
<b>Treasurer</b>	Tony Diaz	813.598.9635	
<b>Sergeant-at-Arms</b>	Luis Cruz	813.431.3223	
<b>MBA/NSBA</b>			
<b>Health Benefit Rep</b>	Detlev Aepfel	813.505.7914	
<b>Director of Retirees</b>	John Gebo	813.503.1256	
<b>Trustees</b>			
	Lori Mcmillion, Ch.	813.263.7101	
	Alan Peacock	813.892.9378	
	Milly Minsal	813.446.2572	
<b>Labor Management</b>	J.D. Lewers	813.528.5519	
	Clement Cheung	813.758.5910	
<b>Presidents Emeritus</b>	Garland Tickle · Orbe Andux · Donald Thomas Michael Anderson · James Good · Alan Peacock · Tony Diaz		

## Shop Stewards

<i>Station</i>	<i>ZIP</i>	<i>Steward</i>	<i>Station No.</i>	<i>Steward's No.</i>
<b>Tampa Stations/Branches Chief Steward, Mike Smith</b>				
Brandon	33510/11	David Rivadeneira	813.661.1636	813.326.0717
Brandon	33510/11	Osceola Williams Sr.	813.661.1636	813.403.9525
Carrollwood	33618	Tina Bausch	813.961.2963	210.445.1369
Commerce	33602	Cynthia Williams	813.247.2416	813.892.2282
Forest Hills	33612	J.R. Sanchez	813.247.2416	813.778.4373
Forest Hills Annex	33613		813.935.2954	773.849.6229
Hilldale	33614		813.935.2954	
Hilldale Annex	33634		813.879.4309	
Interbay/Port Tampa	33611/16	Mike Dennis	813.879.4309	
Interbay/Peninsula	33629	Marie Brown	813.831.2034	813.361.9103
Palm River Annex	33619	Dianna Todd	813.831.2034	727.331.9907
Plant City	33564	Todd Soulor	813.663.0048	813.505.5647
Produce	33610	Matt Rodkey	813.754.3590	508.615.6517
Ruskin/Sun City Ctr	33570		813.237.4084	813.562.8744
Seminole Heights	33603	Matt Fernandez	813.634.1642	
Sulphur Springs	33604	J.D. Lewers	813.237.4569	813.237.4569
TCA/Hyde Park	33606	Josh Villa	813.237.4569	813.528.5519
TCA/Peninsula	33609		813.873.7189	203.278.6485
TCA/West Tampa	33607		813.873.7189	
Temple Terrace	33617	Mike Cipriano	813.873.7189	
Town & Country	33615/35	Alma Hidalgo	813.988.0152	401-787-1510
Ybor City	33605	Maurice Rice	813.884.0973	718.930.7769
			813.247.2416	813.334.3189

# From the Desk of the President

(Continued from page 1)

all informed as to what is happening at the National level.

## Annual Health Benefits Seminar

While in Las Vegas for the Committee of Presidents meeting, Vice President Smith and I were able to attend the annual Health Benefits Seminar, October 15-18, along with Health Benefits Coordinator Detlev Aepfel. The information put out encompassed numerous concerns for the coming two open seasons of our plan. I know many of you have questions about the change from the NALC Health Benefit Plan to the Postal NALC Health Benefits Plan that is coming in open season next year. Let me tell you to relax, there will be no changes to the plan benefits. This is due to a change in the law that accompanied the removal of the health benefits prefunding mandate. Under the new legislation we are now under, a program of Medicare Integration, which in the long-term will help reduce our premiums for the plan to save us all money. The Postal Plan is the same as the non-Postal Plan except that it is only Postal Employees in the plan. Since our Plan is available to any federal employee, this separates Postal Employees from non-Postal employees assisting with the Medicare integration program for the Postal employees. During the open season this year, I highly recommend that all Postal Letter Carriers closely examine the NALC Health Benefit Plan and compare it to all the other plans out there. I believe you will find that our NALC Plan is head and shoulders above and beyond any of the other plans offered. This year it is important to get as many new members as possible into the plan due to the changes coming next year. All plans are required to maintain liquid capital to ensure their plan under federal guidelines, and since our plan will be split into two separate sections when the change comes, the cash reserves will be allocated to each side of the plan and the more carriers in the plan the

more reserves allocated to that side of the plan, and as with all things, the more people signed up for the plan the better the ability to reduce the premiums for the plan, as costs spread out over all plan members. If you have any questions, please contact our Health Benefits Coordinator Detlev Aepfel, whose number is on page two of this newsletter. I can highly recommend the NALC Health Plan as the best way to go for your healthcare. Remember, this is our Plan run by our Union for the membership, no CEO getting paid 30 million dollars a year to operate this plan! I always like to point this out to those members who like to ask, *What has the Union ever done for me?* My answer is always the same: besides all the overtime, holiday pay for 11 holidays, sick and annual leave, 40-hour work week, retirement community NALCREST, Life Insurance and Disability Insurance Company run by the Union for our Union members (MBA-NSBA) and the NALC Health Plan, a Union Plan run by the Union for Union members, I guess nothing. What do you think?

## Building Concerns

In case you were not at our November Branch meeting, our Building Manager/Maintenance man, Alan Robinson, decided to resign his position, he will still be operating as the Branch Financial Secretary, to spend more time with his family. This means that the Branch is looking for a building manager/maintenance person to help maintain our new property. The construction is almost complete, painting is ongoing, and flooring will be next up on the agenda followed by the installation of all bathroom facilities, water fountain, and janitorial sink. After these items are completed, a thorough industrial cleaning will take place and then we will have a finished hall renovation. It will have taken some time, but it was clearly worth the wait, as this will be our Branch home for years into the future.

## Job Issues

I have been hearing around the city that management is telling carriers to log their arrow keys into the scanner and telling them that there is no need to sign them out in the morning and back in the evening. I am here to tell you that this is wrong, there has been no change to handbooks and manuals, and we have a city-wide grievance settlement on this issue. You are to sign out your key when you get it in the AM hours and someone, either a clerk clearing you or a supervisor clearing you, in the PM hours is required. If you do not sign the keys out and in, management will attempt to blame you if your key should turn up missing, as has happened recently. This is to maintain accountability for the keys and protect you from being improperly accused should a key come up missing. Always sign out and in your arrow key, scan it to your scanner if they want, but still sign it out and in. If management argues with you on this, ask for your steward right away, they will file the grievance and they will let me know and I will call the Postal Inspection Service about it right away.

• ***In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: It goes on.*** — Robert Frost

Until we next meet, I leave you with this wish: I wish you happiness this holiday season, all the best going into the new year, and you have my thanks for allowing me to be your President for the past year. Until next month as always....**Knowledge is the Key.**

Brian Obst  
President

## Calendar

Meetings are subject to change due to any upsurges of COVID.

### Shop Stewards

Tuesday

**December 5 7:00 PM**  
315 W Busch Blvd, Suite C

### Executive Board

Thursday

**December 7 6:30 PM**  
315 W Busch Blvd, Suite C

### Branch 599

Thursday

**December 7 7:30 PM**  
315 W Busch Blvd, Suite C

### Retirees' Breakfasts

#### Tampa

*Temporarily Postponed  
until further notice*

Mama's Kitchen  
9312 N Florida Avenue 33612

#### Temple Terrace

Tuesday

**December 12 10:00 AM**  
Bob Evans Restaurant  
off Fletcher near I-75  
12272 Morris Bridge Road

## Just for the Health of It

This year the FEHB Open Season runs from November 13 through December 11, 2023. Open season is the time when you are allowed to make changes to your health benefit coverage. If you are not currently enrolled in the NALC Health Benefit Plan (NALC HBP) now is your chance to do so.

This plan was designed by Letter Carriers for Letter Carriers. As such, this plan covers every stage of your life.

1. Virtual Care: you will have 24-hour access to a doctor no matter where you are or when you need to see a doctor. Minor doctor's visits can be handled virtually without missing work or waiting for the morning.
2. Competitive Rates: NALC HBP rates are very competitive. But you can see for yourself. Just go online to OPM.GOV where you will find a Health Plan cost comparison tool. This tool lets you compare apples to apples.
3. Chiropractic Care: Our work is very physical. If you need to see a chiropractor to treat your aches and pains, you are covered.
4. Preventive Benefits: The Plan offers many preventive programs to address health issues before they become a problem.
5. Inpatient Hospital Coverage: If you become ill or injured and require hospitalization, you are covered.
6. Wellness Programs: These programs are designed to keep you healthy. Smoking cessation, weight loss,

diabetes management, and stress management are just a few of the wellness options available to enhance quality of life.

7. Excellent Customer Service: Specialists are available to help solve problems that may occur.
8. Maternity Coverage: Most maternity costs are covered.
9. Mental Health Benefits: You and your family have access to numerous mental health programs treating a variety of conditions, including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.
10. Prescription Coverage: Most drugs are covered and are reasonably priced or free. Most exotic drugs are covered as well at reasonable prices.
11. Union Owned: The NALC HBP is owned by us. The plan is not for profit. All your premiums go towards health care, not executive compensation.

Sign up for the best! Sign up for the NALC Health Benefit Plan. High Option Self Only (Code 321) is \$102.98 for active carriers and \$223.12 for annuitants. High Option Self and Family (Code 322) is \$211.30 for active carriers and \$457.82 for annuitants.

Here's to your health.....

*Detlev*



Detlev Aeppel  
Health Benefit Rep.  
Branch 599



Merry Christmas &  
Happy Holidays!

From your Officers, Stewards, and Staff

# From the Vice President's Desk

## Happy Holidays to All!

As I reflect on the year, I must give gratitude to the Branch Stewards who have worked tirelessly over the past year enforcing the contract. Your work hasn't gone unnoticed (maybe by the carriers), and I truly appreciate everything you have done to make my job easier. I may not be the easiest person to work with, but the steadfast dedication of all stewards is commendable. Letter carriers don't understand what the complete job of a steward entails or the sacrifice they go through day by day. Thank you for your time, diligence, and commitment to helping all letter carriers. For those not returning next year, I wish you well and thank you sincerely. My door is always open.

## Penalty Overtime Exclusion Period

Now let's look at the last month of this year. The month of December is also known as the penalty overtime exclusion period. The language in Article 8 of the JCAM is clear on penalty overtime in December. A few important sections are noted below:

Article 8.5.G provides that employees on the ODL may be required to work up to 12 hours per day and 60 hours per week. It further provides that the 12-hour and 60-hour restrictions do not apply to employees on the ODL during the penalty overtime exclusion period (December). Accordingly, management may, but is not required to, assign ODL Letter Carriers to work in excess of the Article 8.5.G limits during the penalty overtime exclusion period (December).

Maximum Hours—60 Hour Limit. National Arbitrator Mittenhal ruled in H4N-NA-C 21 "Fourth Issue," June 9, 1986 (C-06238) that the 12-hour and 60-hour limits are absolutes—a full-time employee may neither volunteer nor be required to work beyond those limits. This rule applies to all full-time employees on the ODL or Work

Assignment List except during the Penalty Overtime Exclusion Period (December).

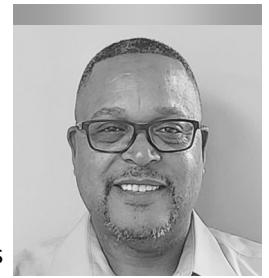
Limitations regarding full-time employees not on the ODL or Work Assignment List, PTFs, and CCAs are governed by ELM Section 432.32. ELM Section 432.32 rules apply during the penalty overtime exclusion period (December).

Maximum Hours—12 Hour Limit. The overtime limits in Article 8.5.G apply only to full-time regular and full-time flexible employees. However, ELM Section 432.32 provides the following rule that applies to all employees:

*Except as designated in labor agreements for bargaining unit employees or in emergency situations as determined by the PMG (or designee), employees may not be required to work more than 12 hours in 1 service day. In addition, the total hours of daily service, including scheduled work hours, overtime, and mealtime, may not be extended over a period longer than 12 consecutive hours. Postmasters, Postal Inspectors, and exempt employees are excluded from these provisions. (Emphasis added)*

*Because this language limits total daily service hours, including work and mealtime, to 12 hours, all letter carriers not on the ODL or Work Assignment List (including PTFs and CCAs) are effectively limited to 11½ hours per service day. This is true whether or not a meal break is taken. This rule also applies during the penalty overtime exclusion period (December).*

Management will take this month and attempt to use it to their advantage. Understanding what applies to the penalty overtime exclusion period and what doesn't will assist in the equal treatment of all carriers. Remember that management's only thought is to



Mike Smith  
Vice President  
Chief Steward  
Branch 599

get the mail delivered at whatever cost. Working carriers beyond restrictions is a violation of the JCAM. Enforce the contract and challenge management when needed.

## The New Year

will bring in another set of stewards, some seasoned who have been in the position for years, and some new. I would like to take this moment to thank the new stewards who have taken the step to be a part of the solution. Your position will be challenging at times and underappreciated at other times. Trust your training and don't be afraid to ask questions. I will be there to assist in any way possible, but more to guide you toward success.

To get there we must work together!

Mike



at [nalc.org](http://nalc.org)

Get involved!

Your future depends on it!

## Sharing Our Members' Joys and Sorrows

**Our deepest sympathy** and prayerful support is extended to the family and friends of **Barry Griffiths** [retiree], whose passing was July 24; to **LaShawn Conner** [Town & Country] at the passing of her mother, Joyce Singletary Price, October 23; and to **Phyllis** [newsletter editor] and **President Emeritus Don Thomas** and family at the homegoing of her brother, Benjamin B. Risinger III, October 31.

### Employee Assistance Program

info is at [nalc.org](http://nalc.org)

Choose Workplace Issues, hover over Safety & Health, and choose Employee Assistance Program.

*It's confidential for you and your loved ones.*

## From the Treasurer's Desk - 10th Edition

Brothers and Sisters,

### Customer Connect

Letter carriers are the best and most efficient way to acquire new revenue for the Postal Service. We deliver to every residence and every business, nationwide. Who better to engage customers, to sell our products? No one! This process is a positive for customer service. In saying that, letter carriers are met with obstacles.

1. After providing a possible lead, there is no follow-up at the preliminary stage.
2. This leaves the letter carrier to answer questions as to why no one has contacted them, and is their business important.
3. Communication between the Customer Connect Agents and the letter carrier does not exist.

When letter carriers initiate contact with their customers without follow-up from the Postal Service there is a feeling of frustration and even embarrassment when we cannot deliver on the product. Revenue is paramount to the future of the USPS, and the Postal Service would be best served to make Customer Connect a priority. Many carriers will not make the effort for Customer Connect because of the history of a failed process. The Postal Service needs to prove the process and communication has

changed, this will allow our letter carriers to sell our products. I have ideas on how to assist with the Customer Connect process. One idea, is having a representative from Branch 599 to work with the USPS agents to help oversee that the process is what its purpose is for. Visiting all our offices and really being involved. This would mean creating a budget to release the representative from their office to perform such duties.

### Quick Hits:

#### Information you should know NALCREST update

The process of installing water meters has begun. We have selected several buildings to begin the process. During the initial install, the utilities company will have a better idea of the challenges they face, what is involved and what NALCREST needs to be aware of to complete the job. With 500 garden-style buildings located throughout the property, this is a huge undertaking. We are working with the utilities company to limit the disruption to our residents. Stay tuned!

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



Tony Diaz  
Treasurer  
President Emeritus  
Branch 599  
Nalcrest Trustee

## Birdseye View

During the recent Branch process for transforming our building has given me questions if we are to be a true union. We as officers have certain levels of important areas as addressed in our bylaws. The Executive Branch as President and Vice President are full-time positions and expected to oversee and assist in all positions from finance areas to shop stewards. And all members are an asset with your dues and attending meetings to make it the best of the best Branches in the National Association of All Letter Carriers.

If we truly want to work in unity for the

better good of all members and especially one where new members can participate, we need to consider that it is hard for people to get to our meetings with their work schedules being so late. And maybe we need to have a smaller quorum.

A good union is united for each other.

Fraternally and in Solidarity, *Alan*



Alan Peacock  
Trustee  
President Emeritus  
Branch 599

# Matt Speaks: An Outline of a Year on Planet Earth

**2023 A.D.**

## **What Happened?**

While figuring out what to write for this last monthly newsletter of the year, it suddenly hit me that while we're delivering mail and restricting our attention to our immediate surroundings and responsibilities (note: scan! scan! scan! wear your seat belts! drink plenty of water!) I asked: What's going on around the world? And so I figured I would try to write a balanced and hopefully useful outline of the world situation. Any unfortunate omissions are the faults of the author.

The year 2023 saw the second year unfold of an armed conflict being waged between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine is fighting to maintain its own independence and territorial integrity and chart its own course for the future, citing it as the inalienable right to any sovereign nation. Russia however has maintained its position that inalienable rights also come with responsibilities and thus, as nations chart their own courses, they must not endanger the security of their neighbors.

After a long stagnation which followed Ukraine expelling Russian forces from lands that Russia had occupied in the initial stages of the war, Ukraine launched a counteroffensive in June that many people optimistically hoped would be the turning point of a bloody struggle that had already cost thousands of lives, but according to the guardian:

*The first casualty of the Ukrainian counteroffensive was wishful thinking. Any hope that Russian troops would abandon their trenches and flee has now been left far behind on the battlefield. The occupying forces held firm and have mostly kept their discipline in the first seven weeks, absorbing one attack after another, often counter-attacking to recover lost ground, and mounting offensives of their own in Luhansk and other spots on the*

*frontline where they sensed weakness.*

Ukraine does not release casualty figures, but according to Russia it's up to the tens of thousands. President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said: *Every day, we need results for Ukraine – to withstand Russian assaults, to eliminate occupiers, and to move forward. Whether it's by a kilometer or 500 meters, but forward every day, to improve Ukrainian positions, to press the occupiers.*

With bodies piling up, with no end in sight, the same sentiment of millions reverberates around the world that some sort of peace must be established to stop the fighting. And that a war for as long as it takes is not helpful so long as civilians bear the brunt of violence.

In the east, Artsakh, a name given to a largely Armenian enclave also called Nagorno-Karabakh located in the Republic of Azerbaijan was dissolved after 30 years, following *counterterrorist operations of a local nature* launched by Azerbaijan to reclaim the territory that was contested by its neighbor to the west in Armenia. The New Humanitarian reports:

*Within a few days, it was all over: Nearly the entire population of the territory, which operated as a de facto autonomous republic for over three decades, had fled, leaving everything they could not carry behind. Of the more than 100,000 refugees, about 30,000 are children.*

In an interview with a young man named Marat, he said:

*They starved us, terrorized us, shelled us. They want to force us to take their citizenship, which we don't want, because, honestly, given how they treat their own people, and our decades of war, who would want that?*

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, the Serbian state that comprises one half of the federation has floated the idea of secession. Politico reports:

*In December 2021, the Republika Srpska regional parliament voted in favor of provisions that would see the entity opt out of national institutions such as the tax authority, the judiciary and the armed forces. The measures will come into force within a six-month period needed to draft new laws and possibly change the entity's constitution. If [Republika Srpska President] Dodik succeeds in entirely pulling Bosnian Serbs out of state-level institutions, the whole system would fall apart.*

The system in question refers to the 1996 Dayton accords that established peace in Bosnia after the wars in the 90s brought a death toll of 100,000 people in the Balkans. This coupled with ongoing Serbian Kosovo tensions relating to the status of the aftermath of the war that saw NATO expel Serbia from its historic province of Kosovo and ensured the province' security, threatens to plunge the former Yugoslavia into another bloody conflict.

Kosovo declared independence in 2008 which Serbia has refused to acknowledge. Tensions escalated in September when according to Al Jazeera: *About 30 heavily armed Serbs stormed the village of Banjska [September 24, 2023] fought Kosovo police in a gun battle, and barricaded themselves into a Serbian Orthodox monastery. A Kosovo policeman and three Serb attackers were killed.*

After being accused of somehow planning the standoff, Serbian President Alexander Vucic replied that Kosovo's refusal to give Serbs in its north more autonomy is what fueled tensions leading to violence in Banjska.



Matt Fernandez  
Recording Secretary  
Branch 599

*(Continued on page 8)*

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# Proposed Bylaw Change

## Standing Rules

### Currently reads:

The regular meeting of A. R. Tony Huerta Branch 599 shall be held at the Tampa Letter Carriers Hall, 3003 W. Cypress Street, Tampa, Florida, on the first Thursday night of each month and shall start promptly at 7:30 pm.

### Proposed to read:

The regular meeting of National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 599 shall be held at the Tampa Letter Carriers Hall, 315 W. Busch Blvd. Suite C, Tampa, Florida, on the first Thursday night of each month and shall start promptly at 7:30 pm.

### Proposal signed by members in good standing:

Tony Diaz, Alan Robinson, Brian Obst, Matthew Fernandez, and Michael Smith.

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## Matt Speaks: A Call to Organize

*(Continued from page 7)*

In West Africa, a military coup overthrew the government of Niger thus bringing more instability in an already volatile region prone to military coups and civil strife. Niger, according to the World Nuclear Association:

*Has two significant uranium mines providing about 5% of world mining output from Africa's highest-grade uranium ores.*

Naturally this has put the world on high notice and as of this writing, it is still not clear whether ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) will send a collective military force to restore civil order to the country. The coup leaders have vowed resistance and see their movement as an anti-colonial one against western interference in the region.

In the Pacific, tensions are high, as China continues to make threats against Taiwan which it considers a renegade province with Defense Ministry spokesperson Wu Qian saying, according to the Global Times:

*The Chinese People's Liberation Army has the confidence and ability to thwart any external interference and 'Taiwan independence' secessionist scheme, and achieve the complete reunification of the country.*

This refers to the perception that Taiwan, a receiver of U.S. aid since the days of the Korean War, is slowly setting up the place and time for declaring formal independence.

China has never renounced the use of force to bring about Chinese Unification, splintered since the closing days of the Chinese Civil War which brought the Communists to power.

And in the Middle East, an ancient land that transcends time and space itself is once again in another war which threatens to split the whole region apart.

Following surprise attacks by HAMAS terrorists which brutally murdered 1,400 Israeli civilians. Israel invoked its sovereign right to self-defense and counterattacked, and as of this writing has amassed over 100,000 troops to invade Gaza which now has seen millions in the exclave struggling to survive and fearing what's to come. The rest of humanity holding its breath while at the same time letting out a high pitch that manages to slip by before the closing of the lips: *Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.* (Galatians 2:10)

What will be the outline of 2024? Let's pledge ourselves stubbornly to establish love, justice, and peace in spite of our flesh, and cross that vast land of history and it begins on our routes both at home and at the Post Office.

*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.* (Acts 14:22)

Matt



# Mail Call

Brothers and Sisters, every year in the month of December, two important events happen that involve our union. First is Choice Leave, and second is the elections for Shop Stewards. I would like to talk with you about the latter.

Stewards are NALC members (*Regular, PTF, and CCA*) elected or appointed to represent letter carriers. These union activists give their time and effort to help letter carriers in many ways. More than any other officer, they have the responsibility of interacting with the membership on a daily basis. It's through the steward that the lines of communications flow. They listen to complaints, help to recruit new members, solve problems, and most importantly...enforce the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Overtime, officers and stewards either age out or burn out, so we need YOU to participate to fill those vacancies.

*Sarge, I don't wanna be a Steward, they are too buddy buddy with management.*

Enforcement of the Collective Bargaining Agreement requires Stewards to interact with Management. Incidentally, they spend more time with management than any other carrier. But

they do not work for management. They do not relay information between managers, they do not present management policy at any time (*i.e., during stand-up talks*) and they do not police carriers on management's behalf.

*I'm not sure I can do the job, Sarge.*

Stewards meet once a month to discuss issues, train, and receive information to either disseminate to carriers and/or help stewards fulfill their commitments. Additional information and tools are provided to stewards, and in a pinch and a quick call to the Chief Steward, Vice President, and/or President might be necessary to guide stewards. Stewards have a plethora of resources to include, a computer lab at our Branch Hall, located at 315 W Busch Boulevard, Suite C, Tampa FL 33612. Stewards will receive all the help they may need or ask for. For most carriers, being a steward will be the only job they do for our union, subsequently it is the most important job we have.

*Ok Sarge, but you expect us to do this work for free?*

*Jeremiah 22:13 Woe to him, ..., who makes his neighbor serve him for noth-*

*ing and does not give him his wages.*

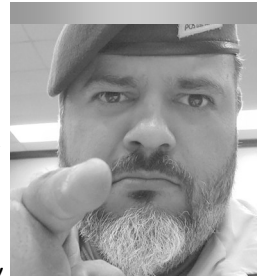
*Romans 4:4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.*

The answer is NO. Shop Steward is a paid position and is serious work. The position takes dedication, patience, and follow-through. Learning how to protect themselves in the workplace is the reason most cited by stewards I have spoken with, as to why to do the job. That was my reason as well for being a steward.

*English isn't my first language, Sarge.*

That doesn't matter. We will work with you to overcome any difficulties you may have if you are willing and committed to providing this service for your fellow carriers. In short, WE NEED YOU! Come help us keep our local strong, create a bench of competent replacements for departing officers and stewards, and protect the rights that our union has worked so hard, since its inception, to attain for us.

*Sarge*



Luis Cruz  
Sergeant-at-Arms  
Branch 599

# Veterans Buzz



The holiday season was always the hardest for me as a military member. Being away from home or away from loved ones during the holiday season is hard. I recall being on the

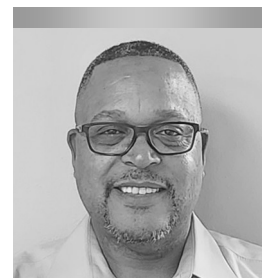
Mediterranean Sea during Christmas looking at nothing but water. My Staff Sergeant used a quote that fit the situation: *U Suckers Missed Christmas* (USMC). That stuck with me for years, especially when I was deployed during Christmas. This was just the beginning of many to come.

Today we should look at the military members who are not able to be home or away from their loved ones this holiday

season. The sacrifice made by so many doesn't begin to dry the tears when that member is not home. Let's not forget that once upon a time we were in their position, away from home being missed.

Being a military member involves sacrificing so much, yet outside of the military, many don't understand. Take the time this holiday season to give a helping hand to a fellow veteran. It doesn't take much. Sometimes just a sincere thank you for sacrificing time away from your family for my freedom.

Semper Fi!



Mike Smith  
Vice President  
Branch 599

## Retired...but not Tired

I want to take this time to wish all of you a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year, and Happy Holidays. As we head into the 2024 year, I will look to reestablish retiree functions. We will try again to begin the monthly breakfast, quarterly lunches, or maybe just a meeting at our newly renovated Branch 599 hall. It is important for us retirees to keep in touch, catch up with one another, and have some fun together.

Any of you who have any ideas, please contact me, I believe once we get something started, it will take off!

### **Retirees, please save the date:**

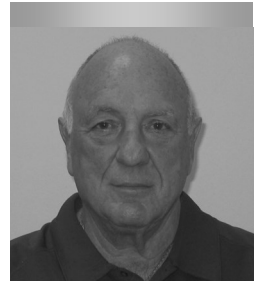
The Branch 599 Retirees Dinner will be held on Sunday, January 14, 2024. The venue for the event is at Maggiano's Italian Restaurant at Westshore Plaza. Doors will open at 5 PM, with dinner served at 5:30. The room is reserved from 5 to 9 PM. Please call the Branch office at 813-875-0599 to reserve your spot.

I would like to thank Branch 599 for the opportunity to attend the Region 9 RAP session in Orlando on October 6

and 7. I really enjoyed the information our National President, Brian Renfro, brought to the membership. This is a great way to stay updated with all the latest news from our organization. He discussed contract updates, where we are in negotiations, important legislation Issues we need to pay attention to, and future USPS plans. The classes offered were very well done. Region 9 NBA Eddie Davidson and his staff were very involved. They look like they are really focusing on educating our union leaders and members. I wish more of our stewards and officers had attended, there was a lot of good information and teaching. At 86 years old, I still enjoy being in-the-know with the USPS and NALC.

So, as Roy Rogers and Dale Evans said, *Happy Trails to you until we meet again.*

*John*



John Gebo  
Director of Retirees  
Branch 599

## The Financial Guy

It has been a few months since letters were sent out regarding members that are in a no deduction status with their union dues. These letters were sent out reminding members of their obligation to pay union dues directly to the Branch if this pertains to them, per Branch 599 Bylaws. The no deduction means that union dues are not being deducted from the member's pay, but they are still being taken out at the national level. Every pay period a deposit is transferred from national into our account. If you are a member, national is taking their part before they make deposit. This is the reason the dues are to be paid directly to Branch 599 because your dues have been deducted at the national level.

If you are on OWCP and are being paid, you are required to pay dues to the Branch.

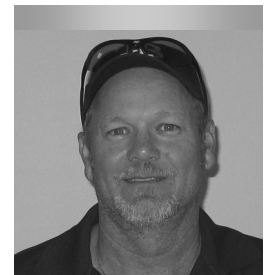
If you're in a LWOP status, you are not required to pay until you are receiving pay, but you will be required to pay back dues when you begin getting paid.

This is all reflected in Branch 599 Bylaws. If you received a letter, there was a total of dues owed through pay period

16. The next letters or second notice will reflect a total through pay period 22. The second notices that will be mailed out is your chance to contact the Branch about making a payment or setup a payment plan, which we will gladly do.

The last thing Branch 599 wants to do is remove someone from our union. With that being said, that is exactly what can happen if no payments or arrangements are made. Please be aware that if you do receive a letter, it is no way a form of harassment or intimidation. Everything that is being done is under guidance from National. If you have NALC health insurance and are removed from the union, you are putting yourself and family in jeopardy of losing your health benefits. You have to be a member in good standing to be on our health plan. PLEASE contact the office to discuss your situation, as there is always a solution.

Sincerely,  
*Alan*



Alan Robinson  
Financial Secretary  
Branch 599

NALC Branch 599  
**Retirees Dinner**

Sunday, January 14, 2024  
5-9 PM ♦ *Dinner at 5:30*



**Maggiano's Italian Restaurant**

203 Westshore Plaza, Tampa FL 33609

*Menu*

Stuffed Mushrooms ♦ Balsamic Tomato Bruschetta  
Italian Tossed Salad ♦ Maggiano's Salad  
Shrimp Fettuccine Alfredo ♦ Chicken & Spinach Manicotti  
Oven-Roasted Pork Loin w/Balsamic Cream Sauce ♦ Parmesan-Crusted Cod  
Fresh Grilled Asparagus ♦ Gigi's Butter Cake ♦ Chocolate Layer Cake  
♦ Each guest will receive 1 Free Alcoholic Drink per guest ♦

Call our Branch Office to Reserve a Spot

813-875-0599

No Later than January 4.

Retiree Member + 1 – paid by Branch.  
Extra people or Active Members – \$45 per person.

*If you called in a reservation and are unable to attend,  
please contact our Branch office to **cancel no later than January 4;**  
this will save the Branch from paying for your meal.*



Florida State Region 2 Legislative Representative, Gerald Lonergan, addressing Branch members at our meeting on November 2.

## **DISASTER RELIEF CHALLENGE**

### **BRANCH 599**

*Donations up to \$500 will be matched by the Branch President and Vice President.*

**The Branch has issued a 30-DAY CHALLENGE to all members:  
Donate any amount to the Disaster Relief Fund by December 7, 2023.**

All donations will help support a family in need during a disaster and will go to the NALC Disaster Relief Fund. Give all Donations to your Steward or you can go online at: [nalc.org](http://nalc.org) and choose Community Service, then NALC Disaster Relief Foundation; click one of the spots for donating by credit card.

If you make a donation online, please provide a dated receipt to our Branch office for tabulation. The station with the most donations will be recognized at our December Branch Meeting.



**NALC  
Disaster  
Relief  
Foundation**

# Flexible Spending Accounts

First of all, it is open season for health benefits again. If you would like to compare health insurance providers, you can visit [OPM.gov](https://www.opm.gov) and click the little down arrow next to Insurance v, then in the left column click on Healthcare, now scroll down a little and under The Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program, the second paragraph starts with *Use this site*, click those words. Answer the questions and you should be able to see all the health insurance providers in your area with the current year and next year's price and benefits.

Second, I would like to talk about Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA). FSA is an employer-sponsored benefit that enables employees to contribute a portion of their pre-tax salary into an account designated for specific expenses. There are two primary types of FSAs: Healthcare FSAs and Dependent Care FSAs.

Open season is from November 13 to December 11, 2023.

## Healthcare FSA

This account is tailored for medical expenses not covered by insurance, such as deductibles, co-pays, prescription medications, and some over-the-counter items. It can also include expenses like dental and vision care. For example, sunscreen, reading glasses, cold and flu medicine, pain relief drugs, and menstrual pads and tampons. The

maximum amount you can allot to Healthcare FSA is \$3,050 (per individual) for a benefit period and the minimum is \$100.

## Dependent care FSA

This FSA is designed to help cover the costs of childcare or adult dependent care while the account holder works. Eligible expenses may include daycare, after-school programs, and home care for an aging parent or disabled dependent. The maximum amount you can allot to Dependent Care FSA is \$5,000.

While FSAs offer substantial advantages, they do have certain limitations:

1. Use-it-or-lose-it Rule: the most notable limitation is the *use-it-or-lose-it* rule, which typically requires account holders to spend all of their FSA funds within the plan year or carry over a limited amount to the next plan year. (2023 to the 2024 plan year carryover amount is \$610)
2. Eligible Expenses: FSAs have strict guidelines regarding eligible expenses. It's essential to familiarize yourself with these rules to ensure compliance.
3. Limited Contribution amount: There is an annual limit on how much an individual can contribute to an FSA. In 2024, the maximum contribution for Healthcare FSA is

\$3,050, while the Dependent Care FSA has a separate limit of \$5,000.



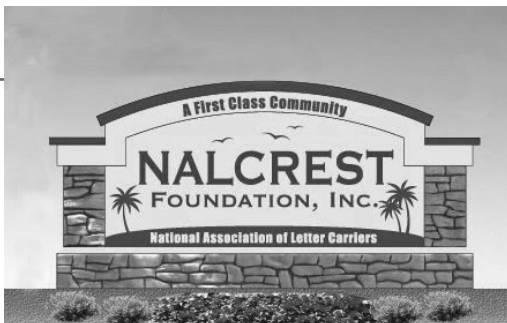
Clement Cheung  
Labor Management Rep.  
Branch 599

To make the most of an FSA, consider the following strategies:

1. Careful Planning: Estimate your annual healthcare or dependent care expenses accurately to determine your contribution amount. Overestimating can result in forfeited funds, while underestimating can lead to out-of-pocket expenses.
2. Keep Records: Maintain meticulous records of FSA expenses to ensure compliance with IRS guidelines and facilitate reimbursements.
3. Take Advantage of Over-the-counter Medications: In recent years, the IRS has relaxed restrictions on using FSA funds for over-the-counter medications, making it easier to use FSA for everyday health needs.

For more details about Flexible Spending Accounts, please visit [fsafeds.com](https://fsafeds.com) for more information.

*Clement*



NALCREST – your NALC Retirement Community in Central Florida. Check it out at [NALC.org](https://NALC.org) under the Member Benefits tab.



# FED-HURT

(833) 433-3487

Injury Care For ALL Federal Workers

## What Do I Do If I Get Hurt On The Job?

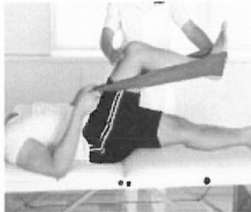
**If you are injured, here are some very simple steps to follow.**

1. Notify Your Supervisor Immediately. (The Supervisor has up to 10 days to file your claim with OWCP).
2. File a CA-1 and CA-16 for a Traumatic Injury.
3. File a CA-2 for an Occupational Disease.
4. Write your Personal Statement describing the injury. Be specific.
5. Call 833-433-3487 to speak with a FED-HURT OWCP Specialist.



### Our Doctors Specialize in:

- Physical Medicine
- Physical Therapy
- Chiropractic Care
- Interventional Pain Management
- Functional Capacity Evaluation (FCE)



### Services Include:

- ✓ Expert Claims Assistance
- ✓ Medical Exams Detailing Causation of Injury



Our team of Physicians and Physical Therapists work for you, not OWCP. We will see you without an approved claim and provide OWCP with all the necessary documentation to get your claim approved the first time.

## Locations Throughout Florida

### North Florida

- 📍 Pensacola
- 📍 Daytona / Ormond Beach

### Central Florida

- 📍 Orlando / Airport
- 📍 Orlando / Sanford
- 📍 Orlando / Altamonte Springs
- 📍 Tampa / Palm Harbor
- 📍 Tampa / Temple Terrace Bush Gardens

### South Florida

- 📍 Fort Meyers / Cape Coral
- 📍 Fort Meyers / Cape Coral
- 📍 Port Saint Lucie
- 📍 Lake Worth / Palm Springs
- 📍 Fort Lauderdale / Davie
- 📍 Miami / Hialeah

Are you a federal employee injured while on the job?

Call our office (833) 433-3487



WWW.4FEDHURT.COM

# Addressing OWCP issues...let's get it right

There have been many articles in our newsletter over the years regarding on-the-job injuries. These are regularly asked questions you need to know:

1. What do I do first?
2. Who do I notify?
3. What paperwork do I need?
4. Who will help me through this?

Correcting OWCP issues are time consuming, frustrating, and if not corrected can delay medical treatment that could cause more severe prolonged injuries. So how do you avoid these issues? How do you get it right?

The **answers** to the above questions should help the process.

1. Report the accident immediately, explain exactly what happened, with a time and place (address).
2. Your supervisor or manager, and if you cannot reach anyone, your steward or our Branch office. It is important to notify someone.
3. Register an account on ECOMP at [ecomp.dol.gov](http://ecomp.dol.gov). The forms needed are, CA-1, CA-16, and CA-17, know your forms, ask questions, and do not rely on management to submit your forms without verification.
4. Your supervisor and/or manager should assist you, however, this is not always the case. Do not allow management to delay you going to [ecomp.dol.gov](http://ecomp.dol.gov); this is critical to your case.

## *Other tips:*

1. Your online account at [ecomp.dol.gov](http://ecomp.dol.gov) will be available to download should you need a paper copy of any of your forms.
2. Write a detailed, thorough, complete, and legible statement. Some important information to consider, if applicable: the time, the place, the conditions, the surface(s), any contributing factors, possible witnesses, and any hazards.

## **On the Job Injury – Forms needed, simple math,**

$$CA-1 + CA-16 = CA-17$$

CA-16 must be signed by management,

Authorization for Examination and/or treatment.

Any questions...call the Branch office; ask for Brian Obst, 813.875.0599.



National Association of Letter Carriers  
 599 Tampa Florida Inc.  
 315 W Busch Boulevard, Suite C  
 Tampa FL 33612  
 813.875.0599 Fax 813.870.0599  
 www.nalc599.com  
 Tampa Letter Carrier  
 Volume 23 · Issue 12 · December 2023

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