



# ***WAKE UP!***

President/ Editor  
Dave Barbuzzi

Publisher  
Chris Bruno

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Acton , Amesbury , Andover , Bedford , Beverly, Billerica , Burlington , Chelmsford , Concord , Danvers, Dracut , Gloucester, Haverhill, Holliston, Ipswich, Lowell, Lynnfield, Manchester, Marblehead, Maynard, Merrimac, Newburyport, North Chelmsford, North Reading , Peabody, Reading, Rockport, Salem , South Hamilton, Sudbury , Tewksbury , Topsfield, Wakefield , Wayland , Wilmington , Winchester



*Active and retired Beverly Letter Carriers and family members march in the Beverly Christmas parade. The carriers passed out candy along the parade route and collected the children's letters to Santa. I have it on good authority that all the letters made it to the North Pole on time and that Santa was able to answer each letter!*

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## President's Message

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Happy New Year! I hope that everyone made it through peak season unscathed. There didn't seem to be any shipping horror stories this year, nothing in the news about packages going in the opposite direction of their intended destinations. Give yourselves a hand for coming through in spite of the adverse conditions that you're working under.

Well, here we are, on the eve of 2022. I'm not one for making resolutions, but I'm going to ask that everyone reading this makes one. Learn more about your contractual rights and benefits! The National Agreement and the JCAM are available online. You can find both of them in the resources section of the Branch 25 website ([nalcbbranch25.com](http://nalcbbranch25.com)) Read five pages of the JCAM each day and before long you'll know a lot more than you presently do.

Don't want to read? Fine. Resolve to call the Union office when you have a question instead of talking to another carrier that may or may not know the contract. Don't get me wrong, veteran carriers are great resources for job advice, but not too many people are trained in the contract and all the nuances contained therein. Pick up the phone and put us to work.

With a little more than a week left in the year, the grievance count for the branch stands at 285. That is neither good nor bad. When a grievance is necessary, it is filed. Of course, we'd like to have management always follow the contract and letter carriers always follow the rules, but we deal with reality and stuff happens. Each year my goal is for that number to decrease, but with 36 stations and twelve months in a year, I can live with less than 1 grievance per station per month.

This past year I put an emphasis on trying to educate letter carriers about the workers' compensation process. If you are a Union member, the branch can assist you with every step of the process. In the last few months, we have been able to help several carriers obtain favorable decisions on appeal of initial claim denials. As I've said many times in the past, it is much easier if you contact us BEFORE you submit your CA-1 or CA-2. We can often spot potential problems at this stage so you can correct them. Submitting a proper claim and getting your case approved from the beginning is always easier than having to overturn a decision on appeal.

In this month's issue of the Wake-Up!, Branch Secretary Tony Bossi writes about Weingarten Rights. I strongly encourage you to read the article closely. Weingarten Rights are near and dear to me as I have witnessed far too letter carriers over the years who have not exercised their rights.

Specifically, unsavory Postal Inspectors and even more unsavory (read scumbag) Office of Inspector General (OIG) Agents deceive letter carriers into thinking they don't need representation. Following are a couple examples of their deceitful behavior.

In one instance, a letter carrier was called off the road by his Postmaster and told he had to return to the office to complete some "training". When he walked into the conference room for "training", two OIG Agents were waiting for him and proceeded to interrogate him. Caught off guard and relatively new, he didn't think to assert his right to representation.

In another instance, management scheduled a pdi between a grievant and myself. When I showed up early to meet with the grievant, I asked management where he was. I was informed that he was "up front with the OIG". Do you think it was a coincidence that the OIG was there at the precise time that the pdi was scheduled? I don't think so.

Don't get me wrong, the truth is the truth and we deal in the truth. We as a Union don't want our members breaking the law. However, the OIG doesn't only get involved when a law is broken. They manufacture problems that don't exist. You can take that to the bank.

With Christmas having fallen on a Saturday this year came a bonus for letter carriers. There were no parcel drops from Amazon or UPS so therefore no parcel delivery on Sunday, December 26. There was still Express Mail delivery. This past Sunday was the first time in quite some time that almost all carriers were able to rest, and a much-needed rest it was! Speaking of rest, I hope that those that attended the December branch meeting enjoyed being served by your branch officers. It truly was a feast, and it was fitting that we had the opportunity to serve you in that way. I personally want to thank all my fellow officers for "working the line" and dishing out the delicious spread.

I hope everyone has a healthy and happy new year! I hope to see new faces at the Branch meetings, and I hope to see more members get involved in YOUR UNION!

Stay informed!

Dave Barbuzzi

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## Executive Vice-President's Report

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Thanks to everyone that showed up at the December branch meeting, at which we recognized our stewards and installed the newly elected branch officers. I hope everyone enjoyed the food and I was glad we were able to give the stewards in attendance a gift for all they have done during the last steward election cycle. The stewards of this branch are working hard to enforce the contract, at the same time they are also working long hours 6-7 days a week, like most carriers. It is not an easy position to be in and we appreciate the difficult work they do. We are told there is a good number of newly hired carriers in the system awaiting to be trained, but unless we are able to retain them, it won't make much of a difference. The recent increase in pay and benefits should help. Please treat these new hires the way you would want to be treated, they are the future of the Postal Service. If they have questions about their rights and responsibilities, especially when it comes to safety, tell them to consult with their stewards or call the branch office. Tell them there is a branch meeting the first Tuesday of every month. There is a very high percentage of carriers eligible to retire and when they start to go, we want to be able to replace them with well informed, safe carriers. If you are planning on retiring this year, plan ahead and request your "blue book" as far as 6 months prior. I still haven't met any retirees that said they wished they were still working.

We have seen a dramatic increase in the number of covid-19 cases within the District over the last couple of weeks and it is anticipated to keep rising through the holidays. We went for a couple months in the good weather that we barely had any carriers out with Covid. The latest variant, Omicron, is highly transmissible so please take the use of masks in the office or out in the public seriously. An example of how transmissible this can be is the professional athletic leagues. Look at all the games that have shut down. The NHL has shut down the entire league for a week. The NFL and NBA are postponing and delaying games, and some stadiums have no fans when the games are being played. Every day there are more reports that athletes will not be available for football games on the weekend. Even if the virus doesn't have a negative effect on you, you may give it to someone that is highly vulnerable. The good news is that the evidence is currently showing that the percentages of hospitalizations and deaths from this variant, are lower than the previous variants. Possibly the vaccines and boosters have an effect on this. That doesn't mean that it can't have a long-term effect on you, we don't know yet. Be safe.

Now that we are about to begin a new year what can we expect to be different next year? I don't think anyone knows. We have a contract through May of 2023, so that is good but 2023 will come quick. We still maintain an enviable benefit and retirement package that most employers can't match. I have a lot of carriers ask me if

the Postal Service is going to be offering an Early Retirement to carriers. This has been the subject of rumors for many years but has only come to fruition once during my career, probably because we need all the carriers we can get. The last time it was offered, more carriers took advantage of this than was expected, and it only included a small financial incentive. But if the PS does offer an Early Voluntary Retirement, everyone eligible will be notified, along with any details.

By the time most carriers get this edition of the Wakeup, it will be January or very close to it. So far, we have been lucky with the weather, but that could change in an instant. Make sure the lights on your LLV work and the windshield wipers and defroster are good. There is nothing worse than getting stuck in the middle of a snow storm with lousy wipers. Many times carriers are told to take a truck on the road that isn't fully functional. Let us know if this happens. Safety is supposed to come before making a number.

I hope everyone has a safe New Year, this year it falls on a weekend so that is a bonus. Stay healthy and stay safe!

Keep your head up!

Paul Desmond

### Calendar of Events

January 1	New Year's Day
January 4	Regular Monthly Meeting K of C Wilmington 8:00PM Food served at 7:00Pm
January 4	National Spaghetti Day
January 13	National Rubber Duckie Day
January 17	MLK Day
January 21	National Hugging Day
January 25	Opposite Day
January 26	Spouse's Day
January 27	Punch the Clock Day
January 31	Backward Day

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***Your "Wake-Up!" is produced in-house at the Branch 25 Union office each and every month.***

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## **Just For The Health Of It**

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I think it's fair to say that at times in our lives many of us have been considered to be a "smart aleck". A case in point for me is when I thought someone's outlook was absurd. My comment would be something like "That person must have "Alzheimer's". I've come to realize that Alzheimer's is nothing to be sarcastic or joke about. Rather, it is a relentless pervasive disease affecting the lives of many and their loved ones and friends. Thanks to information provided by the NALC Health Benefits plan here are some facts to consider and signs and symptoms to be aware of:

- Alzheimer's is the 6th leading cause of death in the US
- Every 65 seconds someone in the US is diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Today more than 6 million Americans are living with the disease. That number is projected to reach 12.7 million by 2050.
- The signs and symptoms
  - Memory loss that disrupts daily life that include solving problems or planning
  - Difficulty understanding visual images as well as problems with words in speaking or writing
  - Changes in mood and personality; poor judgement. Withdrawal from work and social activity

Many of us have heard stories of the demands placed on caregivers for the suffers of Alzheimer's. Next month some thoughts and suggestions for caregivers.

Keep on Truckin'

Rich Donlon

### ***"Mask Up Buttercup"***

At the beginning of November a friend of mine contracted COVID-19 at his office. His boss, who is vaccinated, came to work not feeling well and ended up spreading the virus. My friend's wife also got sick. Thankfully both have fully recovered since then.

One week before Thanksgiving my two year old daughter's daycare classroom was closed because one of her classmates, also two years old, tested positive for COVID-19. Her classmate, who happens to be her cousin, was hospitalized but thankfully has since recovered.

Also a week before Thanksgiving my sister-in-law was in close contact with someone infected with COVID-19. Her two daughters weren't feeling well either. With all these close contacts over half of the family had to be tested for COVID-19 before we sat down at the table.

As of December 8th WCVB reported a one week positive test rate of 4.99 percent. Three times the rate from one month before. Hospitalization rates have also doubled from the beginning of November to the beginning of December. Also from the December 8th WCVB report there have been almost 90,000 breakthrough cases in Massachusetts. A breakthrough case is when an individual, who is fully vaccinated, tests positive for COVID-19.

All of this doom and gloom is to say that COVID-19 is still around and is coming back with record numbers for the holiday season. What can we do to protect ourselves from COVID-19? How can we help prevent spreading it to our coworkers? What can we do to protect our families? Masks.

The CDC 'Guide to Masks' states that everyone who is two years and older and is not fully vaccinated should wear a mask when indoors in a public setting. The guide also states that you should wear a mask if you are fully vaccinated and in an area with a high transmission rate. Middlesex and Essex counties (every single station in Branch 25) are both areas with a high transmission rate.

Masks or face coverings are required by the Postal Service. A message dated August 27, 2021 from Deputy Postmaster General Doug Tulino states that ALL EMPLOYEES are required to wear face coverings regardless of vaccination status when:

-There is a local, state, or tribal face covering order or directive in place

-An employee not dealing with the general public cannot maintain social distancing (six feet) in the workplace.

That's all employees. Postmasters, supervisors, carriers, clerks, and custodians. Everybody.

Be aware that your case may not have six feet of distancing. I have pages of pictures that show the required spacing of cases to achieve six feet. One of the pages even has a diagram that uses trigonometry to illustrate the spacing. The takeaway is that distancing between cases is measured center to center and your Postmaster has this information. He or she is obligated to give you a safe working environment. If you don't know if your case has adequate spacing, ASK.

For a mask to be effective it must have at least two layers of fabric, completely cover your nose and mouth, fit snugly against the sides of your face, and have a nose wire to prevent air from leaking out of the top of the mask.

If you choose to wear a gaiter it must be two layers or must be folded over to achieve two layers. Face shields are not recommended.

By the time you read this the holidays will be coming to a close. Everyone will have gone places they don't regularly go and seen people they don't regularly see. Since the vaccine hasn't helped prevent the spread as much as everyone had hoped, and the CDC has very little information about the new Omicron variant, cases will surely be spiking. Now it is more important than ever to be wearing a mask at work.

If masks are not being worn in your office, be part of the solution. Wear a mask. Give a service talk to your fellow craft employees. Management is obligated to give you a safe work environment so pressure them to enforce the mandate. Tell them how to do their jobs for a change.

I gave a service talk at my office and it seemed to work really well. After my talk a carrier approached me and thanked me. The carrier thought that they were the only one who felt that everyone should be wearing masks. A carrier trying to make a living, just like you, was going to work everyday afraid that they might bring COVID-19 home to their family. In fear just because their coworkers refuse to wear a mask. For one hour a day. Think about that.

Information for this article was obtained from cdc.gov, wcvb.com, and the USPS Revised Policy on Wearing of Face coverings.

Thanks for reading,

Jeremy Provost

to discipline. Stewards cannot exercise your Weingarten rights, and management does not have to inform a carrier about their right to representation. Management typically conducts a pre-disciplinary investigation (PDI), or an investigative interview (II), but regardless of where, when, or how a question is asked, carriers are entitled to this right. This right also provides for a pre-interview consultation with your steward.

If a member of management asks you a question that you reasonably believe may lead to discipline, inform them you would like to invoke your Weingarten rights. Slick managers, postal inspectors, or members of the OIG may tell you that under the Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM), you are required to cooperate with postal investigations. This is true but keep your cool and inform them you will cooperate once you have a steward present. If management is speaking with you one on one and after they ask a series of questions you reasonably believe the current question could result in discipline, you still have the right to request representation. The Weingarten rule does not apply during official discussions or when a member of management brings a carrier in for the purpose of issuing discipline. Leura Collins actions back in 1972 provided us with this Federal Labor Law decided on by the Supreme Court, it is one of our most valuable rights, be sure to use it!

On the Secretary front, please make sure to update the branch of changes to your address, phone number, or workstation. Be sure to start the new year off on the right foot and attend the branch meeting!

If called to a meeting with management, U.S. postal inspectors or an Office of Inspector General (OIG) agent, read the following statement to the person you are meeting with before the meeting starts:

"If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working conditions, I respectfully request that my union representative, officer or steward be present at this meeting. Without my union representative present, I respectfully choose not to answer any questions or participate in this discussion."

Happy New Year,


Tony Bossi

**Secretary Report**

**"WEINGARTEN RIGHTS"**

In 1972, salesperson Leura Collins was working at a grocery store operated by J. Weingarten Inc. A co-worker notified local management that Collins was taking money from the cash register, and management requested Collins report to an interview. Collins was represented by the Retail Clerks Union and requested representation during the interview multiple times. These requests were denied, and ultimately Collins was found to be innocent of the charges against her. Management asked Collins to keep the inquiry private, but she refused. Collins contacted her union, and an unfair labor practice charge was brought before the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The NLRB found Weingarten had engaged in an unfair labor practice and issued a cease-and-desist order. Weingarten appealed the decision to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, which sided with Weingarten and refused to enforce the NLRB order. The NLRB then appealed the Circuit's ruling to the Supreme Court, which issued a decision in 1975 establishing what are known as Weingarten rights.

A fundamental right of letter carriers is the right to have a steward present when being questioned by management, postal inspectors, or the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), if the employee is asked a question they *reasonably believe* may lead

 **BRANCH 25 RETIREE GRATUITY VOUCHER**


Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(as it will appear on plaque)

P.O. Retiring from: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Retirement date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please note: Retiree must be a member in good standing at date of retirement. Retiree has 4 months from retirement date to remit this voucher to the branch office. Please mail to: NALC Branch 25  
2500 Main St, Suite 201, Tewksbury Ma, 01876



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## Vice President's Report

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This month's article starts with some more non-postal union news. The labor movement has seen big declines in this country over the last few decades but 2021 has shown some positive signs that things may be looking up. In the July *Wake Up!* I wrote about the efforts of Amazon employees to unionize in the Bessemer Alabama facility. That effort had fallen short but there was a lot of evidence of interference in the vote by Amazon. In November, the National Labor Relations Board ruled there was enough reason to hold another vote. No date has been set for the new vote. I am sure Amazon will still do what they can to suppress the pro-union vote but hopefully the second vote will net fairer results.

The second piece of union news this month is the recent vote by Starbucks employees at the Elmwood Village location in Buffalo NY to unionize. This is the first vote to unionize at any of the coffee giant's 9000 US locations. There were votes in 3 separate locations in Buffalo. The Elmwood Village vote passed while a vote in a second location failed. A third vote had contested votes and has yet to be determined either way yet. A vote to organize in 1 Starbucks out of 9000, with less than 30 employees, may not seem like much but perhaps this becomes the proverbial "foot in the door" that leads to others following their lead. Time will tell....

It is no secret that postal management often has a "flavor of the month" vibe to it. Initiatives and focus points come and go. One day employees receive a stand-up talk stating how they are focusing on some important issue and then over time, and sometimes almost immediately, that issue fades away and they are on to the next big issue of the moment. No early start times, no OT without district approval, go back and deliver every missorted letter from your DPS, miss your hot case scan and you must come back to the office and scan it. These are just a few of the things that we have been told must be adhered to, only to fade away eventually. One flavor of the month that is sticking around however is scanning. It is no secret the Postal Service is hot on scanning. It makes sense; customers on both ends want to know when their deliveries are made. The Postal Service was behind UPS and FedEx in tracking systems for years but have finally caught up. When barcodes first appeared on our parcels, I can remember being told by management to scan them as delivered in the office in the morning so we would not forget later. No one was actually tracking them online anyway. That is crazy to think of now in 2022.

Postal management, in my opinion, has become a little obsessed with scanning. We deliver around 130 billion pieces of mail per year; the vast majority of those which are not scannable. I 100% agree that we should be


scanning everything properly. The customers are paying for this, and our jobs pay us to do it. In my opinion, many managers are, sometimes, focused on scannable items at the detriment of other mail. A rural carrier I know in another office told me that another carrier called the office recently to report she would be late returning. The supervisor told her "I don't care what you do with the other mail, just deliver your scannable parcels and come back." I do not think this supervisor meant to discard the mail or anything like that but this kind of shows us where management's thinking is. We get paid to deliver all the mail. It is true that management has the right to manage, and in many cases mis-manage. Letter carriers should not lose focus that our job is more than just parcels. I would hate to see this attitude that scannable items are important, and the rest of the mail is not important filtered down to the carriers, especially the newer CCAs.

It seems like we are potentially headed to some type of new route adjustment process, one that may involve information from letter carrier's scanners. Since the pandemic hit, route adjustments have been few and far between. I am sure the Postal Service is itching to get going with adjustments again, whether actual inspections or some mutual process. If you do the job the right way every day then you will not have to worry as much when it comes time for route adjustments, traditional inspection, or some other new process.

I wish all Branch 25 members and their families a Happy and Healthy New Year!

In Solidarity,

Dan Wheeler



# Suicide Risk During COVID-19

The mental health effects of the current global pandemic present additional risk factors that may affect the suicide crisis. These unprecedented times cause distress and leave many vulnerable to mental health problems. Mental health consequences are likely to be present for much longer than the COVID-19 pandemic because of economic stress, elevated levels of loneliness and lower access to support. Public health interventions and restrictions may act as barriers to treatment accessibility, especially in overwhelmed emergency departments.

For people with preexisting depressive or anxiety disorders, around-the-clock news coverage and an atmosphere of “national anxiety” can function as sources of stress. The exhaustion and burnout among essential workers and health care providers will also raise stress levels in part because of concerns about shortages of protective equipment, overwhelmed facilities and workplace stress.

It is important for those struggling with mental health issues, as well as for those who support them to seek assistance opportunities. These may include telemedicine services, maintaining physical distancing but remaining socially connected, and using telephone-based and written outreach to individuals at risk for suicide.

## Signs someone may be struggling:

- Discussing or fixating on suicide
- Giving away valued possessions
- Behaving recklessly
- Increasing use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Experiencing changes in sleep
- Neglecting basic care of self
- Putting personal business in order
- Neglecting doctor’s orders
- Exhibiting an increase in mood swings
- Withdrawing from others

## If you, yourself are struggling:

- **Reach out.** If you are having a difficult time, seek help.
- **Start the conversation.** Find a way to ask for help.
- **Be honest and direct.** It is important for others to know the severity of the situation. It takes courage to speak up.
- **Accept support.** Give others the opportunity to help.
- **Don’t isolate yourself.** You may have a desire to disconnect from others. Don’t. Many resources are available to intervene, assess and treat the problem.
- **Know your resources.** Crisis lines, counselors, intervention programs and more are available to you along with your EAP.

If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of harming themselves, call your EAP and speak with a counselor. We can offer immediate comfort and support and are here to provide you with ongoing professional help. If you are in immediate danger, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 800-273-8255 (800-273-TALK)

This information was adapted from an article by Benjamin Williams for *Psychiatry Advisor*.

# **WAKE UP**

2500 Main Street  
Suite # 201  
Tewksbury, MA 01876  
Phone: (978) 658-5820  
Fax: (978) 658-0888  
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*at the next meeting*  
**January 4**  
**K of C Wilmington**  
**8:00 PM**



*Holliston Letter Carrier Jeremy Boucher makes his way through the buffet line at the December meeting. Branch 25 officers served the members. This "shift" consisted of Dave Barbuzzi, Ken Dusombre, Rich Donlon and Bruce Johnson.*