



WAKE UP!

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Volume 45 Issue 12

December 2021

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



Branch 25's newest retiree out of the Chelmsford delivery unit, Mary Tournas is all smiles with only two more work days to go when this photo was taken. Wishing Mary many happy, healthy years of retirement!

President's Message

Some things bear repeating. Some things need to be shouted from the rooftops. This article bears repeating from the rooftops.

Back in August there was a letter published in the Wake-Up! that was co-authored by President Rolando and Anthony Rios, Director Federal Employees' OWCP. This letter urged ALL letter carriers who have tested positive for COVID 19 to file a form CA-1, notice of traumatic injury. There was also an educational flier attached with the letters.

I can not emphasize enough how important it is to file a CA-1, EVEN IF YOU HAVE COMPLETELY RECOVERED AND USED EFEL OR CCA LEAVE when you had Covid. We do not know the potential long-term effects of this disease. If you file a CA-1, your case will be approved. Even if there is no benefit needed to this date, there could be a future benefit required if a long-term effect is discovered down the line. If you have a claim timely filed now, you will be protected in the future. Please, if you are a letter carrier who had Covid, file a CA-1.

Moving forward, the same reasons apply to filing a CA-1 if you are infected with Covid in the future. There is also another reason. The Emergency Federal Employee Leave has expired. It expired at the end of September 2021. There is no more leave benefit. This is particularly worrisome for CCA's who don't earn sick leave and may not have enough annual leave on the books to cover a Covid-related absence.

If you are infected with Covid, you can file a CA-1 and select continuation of pay. You will be paid continuation of pay for your absence. (The first three days of absence you will have to use leave, but if your absence extends beyond 14 days that leave will be restored).

I have received calls recently asking about the "9-day rule" or "10-day rule". Apparently, the postal service has initiated a unilateral policy whereby they are not allowing letter carriers to work more than 9 or 10 days in a row. To be clear, 9 or 10 days is NOT mentioned in the National Agreement. PTF'S, CCA'S, and regular carriers on the overtime desired list can work every day of the year. What has always puzzled me when I hear about this imaginary 9 or 10 day limit is that the service completely ignores Article 8.5.F of the National Agreement. Article 8.5.F reads: "Excluding December, no full-time regular employee will be required to work overtime on more than four (4) of the employee's five (5) scheduled days in a service week or work over ten (10) hours on a regularly scheduled day, over eight (8) hours on a non-scheduled day, or over six (6) days in a service week." The above language does not apply to full-time carriers on the ODL and it does not apply during the December exclusion period. So riddle me this...where does 9 or 10 days come from?

The service arbitrarily violates the contract and because some members aren't aware of their rights, the service goes unchallenged and we are injured as a result. One such instance is with the latest early parcel delivery initiative. In theory, it's a good idea to deliver parcels in the morning as opposed to in the evening. In many instances, customers will be able to retrieve their parcels from their porches before they leave for work in the morning. Early delivery also should lessen the number of parcels that may sit unattended on a customer's porch and fall prey to "porch pirates" who drive around (especially at this time of year) and steal packages.

The problem with this program is that management is not tracking where the credit for these parcels belongs. Instead of punching to the route that the parcel belongs to, management is having carriers punch to a code that will never be credited properly to the route where the parcel belongs. So what you ask? Well, let's say your route is overburdened and your considering putting in for a special inspection. If you don't meet the 30 minute overtime requirement on a particular day, and someone delivered parcels that belong to your route, you have been injured. That is only one problem with the program. There are others.

I was also shocked to hear from one of our offices that their CCA's were not being compensated mileage when they are sent to other offices to work. To be clear, if you report to work at an office other than your own, you are most likely entitled to compensation. I say most likely as you are entitled to be paid mileage for the difference between your commute to your home office and the commute to the office you are temporarily assigned. If the commute is shorter, there is no compensation. If you punch in at your office and go elsewhere, you are entitled to mileage for the entire round trip. Don't sleep on your rights. If you are not being compensated for mileage, notify your shop steward or the branch office immediately so we can address the issue.

Finally, the shop stewards that just finished their 3-year terms (many continued on to the current term) will be recognized at the December regular branch meeting. I hope that you can find the time to attend the branch meeting to show support for your stewards. Their job is never easy.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and a joyous whatever you may celebrate!

Stay informed!

Dave Barbuzzi

Executive Vice-President's Report

For anyone looking to make changes to their health benefits the time is now. Open Season ends Dec. 13 and that is the only time to make changes, unless you have a life changing event, or you are newly converted to career status. You can go on the NALC website to see the Health Plan brochure with all the benefits and bi-weekly rates for 2022. Keep in mind you will need to have been enrolled in a FEHB plan for at least 5 years prior to retirement in order to carry the health plan into retirement. If you have been on a spouse's health plan but want to carry a plan into retirement, make sure you carry at least a single plan for 5 years, you can change to family plan at retirement. Don't wait until the last minute.

We will soon be in the penalty time exclusion period, that happens every year. For 4 consecutive weeks the obligation for the Postal Service to pay penalty time is suspended, but that doesn't mean the provisions of Article 8 do not exist. OT desired list carriers still should be working to the maximum hours prior to using non-OT desired list carriers for OT off their assignments. Management can use the OT list carriers beyond the 12 hour and 60 hour limits during this period, which would happen if you work 6 days a week for over 10 hours a day. The OT list carriers will probably be brought in early to deliver parcels in most offices, and this will probably bring these carriers near the maximum hours. But being in the exclusion period does not automatically give the Postal Service the right to work anyone not on the OT desired list for OT off their assignments. Any questions please see your steward or call the branch office.

We get a lot of calls in regard to FMLA certification for certain conditions that keep carriers out of work or for caring for a family member. If you have a chronic condition or need to care for a family member with a chronic condition, there are forms on the branch website that are accepted by the Postal Service for certification of FMLA leave. These forms are probably easier to fill out for medical providers to fill out and you don't have to wait for the Postal Service to mail theirs to you. The forms come with instructions of how to fill them out. This can be helpful especially if you know in advance of a need for leave. We can provide you with an address to mail the forms to in Greensboro NC if necessary. Some carriers are under the impression that FMLA is a separate leave category in addition to their AL and SL, but it is not. Under FMLA you can use AL, SL or LWOP. The FMLA is there to protect you and should be used if leave is needed for a qualifying condition.

I know there are many CCAs waiting to be converted in the near future. One of the benefits you will receive is the matching funds for what you contribute to the Thrift Savings Plan. The Postal Service automatically deducts 3% of your base pay towards your TSP funds, but we always suggest that you contribute at least 5% of your base pay. Without getting into the fine details, the Postal Service matches up to 5% of your contributions.

This is a benefit that you do not want to leave behind. The amount that these funds increase over the years is substantial, and is compounded by the Postal Service's contribution. If you can contribute more than 5% that is even better. This is one of the biggest parts of our retirement system.

I hope to see many of you at the December meeting, but if not have a great Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa.

Keep your head up!

Paul Desmond

Calendar of Events

December 5	Repeal Day (Prohibition Ends)
December 7	Regular Monthly Meeting K of C Wilmington 8:00PM Food served at 7:00PM (<i>Catered by Spinelli's</i>)
December 7	Pearl Harbor Day
December 10	Human Rights Day
December 13	Ice Cream Day
December 14	UK National Postal Worker Day
December 15	Bill of Rights Day
December 21	Winter Solstice
December 23	Festivus
December 25	Christmas
December 26	Kwanzaa
December 31	New Year's Eve

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

Check It Out

There has been a lot of finger pointing concerning the tragic shooting on the movie set of Rust. For those who don't know, one person was killed and another injured when they were shot with a gun that was loaded with live bullets. There is a series of checks that a gun normally goes through before it makes it into an actor's hands. Obviously, this process did not happen or did not happen properly. Does Alec Baldwin carry the ultimate responsibility because he should have checked the gun himself?

Double checking is most often a good idea. If you are given an LLV that you don't normally drive, do you assume it's good to go? Of course not. Does it need gas and does the gas gauge work is the first check. Does it start up? Which becomes a little less likely the colder the weather becomes. Does the dome light work? This is great to check now because it will be dark when you're delivering early mornings and evenings. Another good check is the cargo light which is handy when it's dark and you're working out of the back of the truck. Check that the heat works too!


Gun safety and LLV safety could both potentially save lives. The operator's life as well as the potential victim's life. Joshua Thallas, whose daughter was a victim of gun violence shared some advice. "Unfortunately I don't see an end to this (gun) epidemic. Encouraging responsible gun ownership would be more realistic", Thallas said. "It's our family that pays the life sentence with Isabella's death. Don't doubt this couldn't be you. Be proactive, not reactive."

Stay Safe,

Jim Salvati

Lyrics Trivia

I'm goin' down south
Way down to Mexico way
Alright
I'm goin' way down south
Way down where I can be free

 **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



Thrift Savings Plan Basics

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), along with your FERS annuity and Social Security is an integral part of the Federal Retirement System. The savings in your TSP account may determine your quality of life in retirement. It is important to start saving early in your career to ensure that you meet your retirement goals.

When you retire, your income will be lower, and many assume their annuity will be enough, however the cost of living expenses, food, goods and services will continue to rise. Your annuity is based on your average high three salary as shown in the following example.

- If your average salary is \$60,000 and you have 30 years of service, then your annuity will be \$18,000 annually. That is \$1,500 per month and is taxable.

Remember that overtime pay is not included in your high three average salary. Your health insurance premium, life insurance premium and any applicable state and local taxes must be deducted as well. Depending on your reoccurring monthly expenses like rent or mortgage, car payment and household bills, you will need to supplement your income.

What does retirement look like for you? Ask yourself:

- Do you want to travel?
- Will you move to a state that has lower taxes?
- Is there a possibility that you will move in with your children?

Now that you know what your retirement looks like, you must determine now how long you will need to invest. You can do this by determining how long you will work. For FERS employees, the minimum retirement age is between 55-57, depending upon your date of birth, with at least 30 years of creditable service for an immediate annuity without a reduction due to age.

You can easily invest by:

- Visiting www.liteblue.usps.gov, then select the link for PostalEASE.
- Calling the PostalEASE self-service phone 1-877-477-3273, option 1

The United States Postal Service matches your TSP contribution up to 5 percent. You do not want to miss out on free money but investing in TSP is not enough. You will also need to select an investment fund that is ideally suited for your time horizon. To find out which investment options work best for you, visit www.tsp.gov. You can also allocate your funds on tsp.gov. if you need help call TSP at 1-888-967-3778.

TSP offers 10 lifecycle (L funds), which are a diversified mix of the five core funds (G,F,C,S and I). The funds were designed to let you invest your entire portfolio into a single L Fund and get the best expected return for expected risk that is appropriate for you.

Finding the proper Lifecycle (L) Fund is as simple as determining when you would like to retire or when you would start withdrawing from your TSP account. You can request an annuity estimate on LiteBlue if you are within 5 years of retirement. The annuity estimate will give you a realistic idea of what your annuity will be so that you can properly determine how much TSP funds are required to supplement your income.

For more information on TSP and investing:

- Listen to the TSP podcast. You can access these podcasts on demand by visiting YouTube and searching TSP4gov
- Contact TSP at 1-977-968-3778

For general questions and help navigating through LiteBlue, contact the HRSSC at 1-877-477-3273.

Vice President's Report

By the time you are reading this month's article the calendar will have probably already turned to December. Letter carriers are already feeling the holiday crunch that will continue for the next month, or more. We all know what a disaster last year was. The uptick in volume, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, among other issues, made for a rough holiday season. There were news stories of trailers backed up waiting to get into processing facilities to unload. There were containers of packages piled up inside sorting facilities as well. I followed the journey of a Christmas gift I had ordered in November of 2020. I watched the tracking as it sat in one location for almost 3 weeks and when it finally started moving it went in the opposite direction twice before heading back up to me. It was finally delivered to my home on January 7, 2021, almost 6 weeks after being shipped from Pennsylvania. I am not sure what this holiday season will bring but if I had to guess I would say it may be a mess again. The country is dealing with major disruptions in the supply-chain. Cargo ships are piled up at ports across the country. As recently as October, there were 100+ ships waiting to get into the Port of Los Angeles alone. Some ships were heading to the Port of Houston, almost 5000 additional nautical miles, to save time overall.

The Postal Service has anticipated the need to adjust to the issues that delivery services faced last year for 2021. They announced they would be hiring an additional 40,000 employees for the holiday season, adding 138 new package sorting machines and opening 45 additional annex facilities to help alleviate the projected congestion in the system. I have no idea if they will meet any of those goals for hiring or adding new infrastructure. Businesses are having a challenging time filling open positions in the current job market and, additionally, the Postal Service is struggling to get the people who they do hire to start working in an expeditious manner. For 2021, the Postal Service has moved up the recommended ship-by-dates by 1 day from last year. They are recommending First-Class-Mail be mailed by December 17 and Priority Mail by December 18 to arrive by Christmas. That would be great if we are moving the mail that quickly this year, but I would definitely not be waiting that long myself.

Last December I wrote about 2 overtime provisions covered in Article 8 of the National Agreement that are worth mentioning again this year. During the month of December there is a penalty overtime exclusion. This year's penalty exclusion period starts with pay period 26-1 on December 4 and ends with pay period 1-2 of 2022 on December 31. During this time, there is no overtime paid at the penalty rate. All overtime worked between these dates is paid at the regular overtime rate of time and a half. The other Article 8 provision, covered under Article 8.5.G, is the temporary lifting of the 12 hour per day and 60 hour per week work limits for carriers on the overtime desired list (ODL) or work assignment list (WAL). Management may, but is not required to, assign ODL carriers to work in excess of the 12- and 60-hour limitations during the penalty overtime exclusionary period.

Letter carriers filling out PS Form 3996 routinely get push-back from management as to why they need the requested time and how much time they need to complete their route on any given day. For the month of December one of those struggles can be made easier. Line J of the 3996 is Reason for Use of Auxiliary. If you look at the instructions on the reverse of the form under Line J you will see that it says you may omit reason during the Christmas period. This does not release you from letting management know how long it will take you to deliver your route. You are still obligated to give your best estimate as to what time you will need but at least for the month of December you do not need to say why. The fact that it is the Christmas season is enough. For any regular carrier who may be working on Christmas Day itself Article 11.4 explains Christmas is different from other holidays in that carriers are paid at the time and a half rate plus the holiday pay instead of the normal straight time rate plus holiday pay on the other holidays. I hope all Branch 25 members have the Merriest of Christmases and the Happiest of Holidays!

In Solidarity,

Dan Wheeler



Warm Winter Wishes

For a Healthy Holiday

The holiday season comes with a host of exhausting activities—from gift shopping and setting up the tree to cooking and connecting with relatives—that can evoke stress and anxiety. Amid all the hustle and bustle, it's easy to put your own needs on the back burner while taking care of everyone else. When we are being pulled in so many different directions, it's important to note that taking care of yourself is crucial for your mental and emotional wellbeing. The following are impactful ways to take care of yourself over the holidays.

- **Check in with yourself.** Carve out time for yourself regularly. Self-care is vital for your wellbeing.
- **Practice gratitude.** Feeling grateful for something reminds us that there are positive things going on in our lives. Gratitude is not just about big things that happen, but also about the small, seemingly ordinary things.
- **Be intentional.** Setting intentions for the holidays to keep unnecessary stress at bay. Intentions help guide you by allowing you to prioritize tasks and live in the moment.
- **Practice self-compassion.** Being kind to yourself enhances your mental wellbeing. Self-compassion helps you remain calm, lowers stress and increases productivity. Speaking kindly about yourself, learning to say no, avoiding comparisons with others, walking away from toxic relationships, accepting and forgiving your mistakes and starting a gratitude journal are a few effective ways to cultivate self-compassion.
- **Manage stress.** Invest in activities and rituals that lower stress. Mindful meditation, daily exercise and spending time in nature are all helpful in relieving stress.
- **Steer difficult conversations in a positive direction.** Be mindful of when a discussion escalates and becomes unproductive. To navigate sensitive topics, listen actively, avoid polarizing language, accept that you may not be able to change someone's perspective and end conversations as peacefully as you can.

Remember that you're not alone. Your EAP is here to listen and provide you with resources and coping skills to make the holiday season healthier and challenges more manageable. Reach out today!

WAKE UP

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at the next meeting
December 7
K of C Wilmington
8:00 PM

