

# CHARTER MEMBER MHA's

Local 316 Mail Handler Assistants **ROYALE VANCE** and **COURTNEY RETTER** offer their reflection and perspective on the inaugural year as a MHA. Reprinted with the permission of Local 316

As many MHA's phase into our 2nd terms, a bit of reflection might be warranted. For me personally, looking back at the year as a whole, I can't help but remember a certain phrase. Many times over the last year I was referred to as "MHA Version 1.0." For a long time I cringed at such a label, but in hindsight I realize that there isn't a more accurate

metaphor than this. There are several ways to view this number, and many of us gave it a negative connotation. Being labeled as a number is especially ironic in a place that puts a priority on numbers and often in this last year it felt as if those numbers we produced were the only thing that mattered. Furthermore, as the first version of MHA's, the vagueness with which our contract addresses our issues allows for many abnormalities that we may not have been prepared for. I can say that reapplying for a direct deposit this week wasn't something I expected.

However, I have come to finally understand that my views lacked perspective. If we only view ourselves as a flawed project, we will hold back our potential. The greatest achievements in human history were not done right the first time. "MHA Version 1.0" truly means that we are the first of our kind, and the foundation for something integral to the future of the

Postal Service. Mistakes can be learned from, and through our adversity, we can pave a way for the MHA's that will follow us. Instead of feeling anger toward the lack of clear rules and protections, we should feel hopeful that perhaps we will have a voice when it comes time to adjust the contract. Instead of rivaling against one another based on our tours, we should work together to become the best MHA's that we can be. Many of us are still young and have long lives ahead of us; we should make the most of what we have here. We should enjoy the friends we make and the experiences we gain each day. Be proud to be an "MHA Version 1.0," for that means it can only get better from here.

ROYALE VANCE  
*MHA, Seattle NDC*

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**YOUR RIGHTS TO KNOW**

Hello all. My name is Courtney Retter and I'm an MHA at the Seattle NDC. Being an MHA has been an eye opening experience for me. I've met so many people; some great, some infuriating, some downright crazy...but I love working with them. They all make life more interesting. I've learned a little more about how the Postal Service runs and just how complex it really is. That's something most Americans have little idea about. Now I'd like to take the time to share with everyone some things I've learned the hard way, since becoming an MHA. Some are just little things I've noticed along the way, but some are pretty important.

I know most of the other MHAs at the NDC have just completed, or are coming up on, their breaks in service. I wanted to remind all MHAs that while your Union dues continue to be paid when you are reappointed, your direct deposit and PAC contributions will have to be re-setup. You may not be able to set direct deposit again until after your first paycheck from your new appointment.

Probationary period. It's 90 days, just 3 short months but I know I was counting down those days the whole time, waiting for it to be over, and I'm sure some of you were too. Well I'm sorry to say that you'll have to go through the same thing during your second year.

Unless you want to have the full day's pay when you take annual leave, you only need to take the number of hours equal to your guaranteed (2 or 4) annual per day. As an MHA you are only guaranteed a certain number of hours per work a day; why take more annual leave than you might earn if you worked? Believe me, you will want to save as much of your annual leave as possible. When it comes time for your Break In Service, and your accrued annual is cashed out, you will want that extra boost in your paycheck to help make up for the week's worth of work you will be missing.

Some Tips and Tricks to being an MHA

- Know your rights. Read your Contract.
- Watch out for yourself and your fellow MHAs.
- Just because you aren't yet a regular doesn't mean you aren't still a human being. Don't accept being treated like pond scum.
- Don't be afraid to speak up. Be respectful whenever possible but stand up for yourself.
- Don't confront supervisors (or co-workers), that's the Union's job.
- Save your annual leave as much as possible. It will be a nice little cushion to cover for your break in service.
- Don't work in an area you haven't been trained. It will only bite you in the butt if something goes wrong.
- Grievances are always filed against management, for not following the contract. They are not against an MHA, any more than they are against a regular Mail Handler.
- Attend Union meetings whenever you can do so. They give you the opportunity to meet other members, and also to learn what's going on and what's coming up.
- If you have questions, see your Union Rep. They are there to help. Let them.
- I know I've said it already, but it's the most important tip I can think of, so I'll end with it too: Know your rights! Read your contract!

COURTNEY RETTER  
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