

LABOR

NPMHU & LIUNA A BRIEF HISTORY

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You may or may not know that the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) is officially a division of the Laborers' International Union of North America (LiUNA). Have you ever wondered what the relationship between the NPMHU and LiUNA is or why it exists?

The NPMHU first became a Union on August 7, 1912, decades after the first unions representing postal clerks were established. The work we did then was heavier and dirtier than work done by postal clerks, just as it is today.

By 1961, the various clerk unions began to merge and become the predecessor of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU). In the midst of this merger activity, the NPMHU sought affiliation with LiUNA in 1968 to protect ourselves from raiding by the clerks' union.

During most of my time as a Mail Handler, Terry O'Sullivan served as General President, and I began attending their conventions in 2006, and later began attending LiUNA's annual Leadership Conferences as a member of our National Executive Board. I can tell you that Terry was a great friend to the Mail Handlers Union and was

also one hell of a speaker who frequently brought crowds to their feet with his impassioned and often salty oratory. While it can often feel like there is a disconnect between the work of LiUNA members and the NPMHU, GP O'Sullivan fought for the jobs of Laborers and Mail Handlers alike. At

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In 2023, O'Sullivan retired and GP Brent Booker took the reins. Without missing a beat, GP Booker built on the solid foundation left to him by GP O'Sullivan. At the first LiUNA leadership meeting led by Booker, I was blown away. Building on infrastructure initiatives, GP Booker announced an "all of the above" policy to seek work for laborers not only on oil and gas, but also wind, solar, and other green energy projects. The goal of this policy was to expand access to union jobs across the country.

General President Booker announced, "Laborers Rising", a project with the goal of doubling LiUNA's membership from 500,000 to one million members. LiUNA's ranks include many skilled workers, as well as Mail Handlers, but also a core of construction jobs that can be hard to fill. This project is incredibly important, because it is LiUNA that provides laborers to contractors on projects they negotiate.

Clearly LiUNA understands they cannot meet the goal of doubling their membership by hiring through traditional sources. At GP Booker's first Leadership Conference, he highlighted individuals whose lives were changed after becoming LiUNA members.

This included a woman on welfare who saw a flyer at the unemployment office for a LiUNA apprenticeship program, where she could get paid to learn a trade. Even though she thought it was too good to be true, she realized she had nothing to lose and called the number. She was able to get off of public assistance, buy a home, and is now a labor leader.

Another story followed the story of a formerly incarcerated Native American who was able to get a job despite his history, and he was able change his life.



A third case highlighted the journey of the child of immigrants who, even at 2 years old, knew that the coffee can under his parents' bed contained cash and telephone numbers to call if he came home and his parents had been deported. He was able to move up in the Union and eventually to become the mayor of Pasadena, California.

Each of these individuals had their lives changed, and they were able to join the middle class by becoming LiUNA members. The message was clear: LiUNA membership changes lives. I have to say, I don't think I've ever been prouder of being a union member, nor happier with the NPMHU's affiliation with LiUNA. They not only have your back and mine, but they are making life better for folks in America at a time we so badly need it.

In Solidarity,

Don J. Sneesby,
Western Region VP