

THE POWER OF THE LOCAL AND THE POWER OF YOU

BY DON SNEESBY, WESTERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT,
LOCAL 316 PRESIDENT



In my many years of experience, one of the things about our Union that is the least fully understood is the governing structure of the Union found in our Constitution. I find that members often assume there is a strict hierarchy with the National having direct authority over Local Unions. Reading our Constitution, however, you will see that the Constitution is divided into two parts. The first part is the Constitution of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union. This document assigns the duties of negotiating and executing collective bargaining agreements, promotion of legislation, securing benefits to our members, and day to day governance of the National Union and staff to the National Officers.

The second part is the Uniform Local Union Constitution (ULUC) of the NPMHU. What you will not see is any language making a direct connection or nexus between the two for the running of a Local Union. Our governing documents treat Local Unions as largely independent entities and give each local and their members the right and responsibility to govern their local, to attend meetings, and to elect and oversee their own Local Officers. It is the Local Union that is responsible for selecting and appointing members to serve as Union Stewards. These are the individuals who will file grievances and fight to hold management accountable in their facilities.

We are all facing potential changes ahead with Postmaster DeJoy's 10-year plan that is currently being rolled out in many parts of the country and with others yet to be affected. Our National Office is working with Local Unions as they are impacted to eliminate or at least mitigate disruption to our members. To date, we have had some solid success at beating back management's initial projections of the impact on our craft. Even so, we are even stronger when we are all pulling together. It is now more important than ever that we work together and have all hands-on deck to protect our jobs.

The 10-year plan changes seem likely to have a much more negative impact on the APWU than it will have on the NPMHU. As a result, in many locations the APWU and idle clerks may try to encroach on Mail Handlers' jobs wherever and however they can. Supervisors and managers may feel

the need to get their hands on our mail to cut hours and get our work done, and possibly justify fewer duty assignments for our members. We must be prepared to fight back to protect our jobs and you can help.

You use your body and your muscles every day to move the mail. I'm asking you to use your brain too. Be vigilant, take notes of who is doing our work, which of our jobs they are doing, and from what time to what time. Then, take the time to give your body a break. Ask to see your Steward, sit down, and then report to them these cross-craft violations whenever you see a clerk, supervisor, or any other non-Mail Handler doing our work.

The Postal Service will pay you to talk to your Steward on the clock, and they'll pay your Steward to talk to you. Let your supervisor know you need to see a Steward or ask your Steward to ask for time with you. The mere act of you and your Steward spending time on the clock to report these incidents makes management's allowing cross craft violations that much more costly to them in time and money. This is an additional deterrent on top of the results of these grievances, and it is needed pressure to stop management from permitting these violations to occur in the first place. These grievances may also give your local union the ability to argue for more jobs.

In addition, I urge you to become an even more active member of your local and that you get involved and develop working relationships with your Stewards and Officers. Ask how you might help them help our craft. Attending meetings of your local Union, organize non-members, assist your Union Stewards however you can or volunteer to be one yourself, and seek other opportunities in your Local Union. Offer your assistance and ask questions if you don't understand something.

Working together and with a little effort we can meet the challenges we face, limit harm to our craft and members, and come out on the other end of this 10-year plan even stronger and more united than before.

In Solidarity,
Don J. Sneesby