

## A YEAR IN THE PANDEMIC, BY THE NUMBERS

Michael J. Hora, National Secretary-Treasurer



One year ago, on March 10, 2020, I was attending the annual briefing with Aetna, regarding their administration of the Mail Handler Benefit Plan. Several NPMHU staff employees were in attendance in addition to a dozen or so Aetna personnel. This was my first exposure to the concept of social distancing, as relaxed as it was. Most of us in attendance had no inkling of what was about to occur. We had a spacious setting with what seemed like a ridiculous gap between each attendee. As we left the meeting, we fist-bumped and avoided hugs. The Union was told that if the meeting had run one day longer, it would have been cancelled. The NPMHU was the last client to meet with Aetna pre-pandemic. Our health plan administrator was going into lock-down, no travel, no visitors, and no guests after March 11, 2020. I left the meeting questioning what felt like an overreaction; little did I know... I am sure that everyone had their own epiphany when they began to realize the magnitude of the Coronavirus.

There are a lot of ways to measure the impact of the pandemic, but the obvious common denominator is human lives. Sadly, the United States recently surpassed the grim milestone of 500,000 COVID-19 related deaths. Nearly 10 percent of all postal employees have tested positive over the last year, and more than one hundred have died, including at least eighteen Mail Handlers. During this pandemic, the NPMHU negotiated and extended countless COVID related memoranda that address various aspects of one's experience while working in a pandemic, including: staffing, absences, leave, transfers, MHA peak hiring exception periods, expanded sick leave for dependents, additional leave for MHAs, liberal use of leave and schedule changes, emergency paid sick leave, Annual Leave Carryover, the Annual Leave Exchange Option, late enrollment exceptions for MHAs health, not to mention the Congressional support shown by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and CARES Act. Mail Handlers and other postal workers are

on the front line performing essential services for all. We will continue to champion prioritized access to the vaccine for our members and all postal employees. We will continue to fight for the safety, health, and wellbeing of mail handlers.

During the year of this pandemic, we also implemented the terms of a new 2019 National Agreement that brought about our first peak mailing season without casuals. In contrast to prior years, the USPS hired more than 16,000 MHAs between November 7 and December 27. For the first time in decades, every single Mail Handler that was hired for the holiday surge was eligible for immediate union membership as they began their journey towards a career appointment. Most orientations were conducted in a virtual setting and, frankly, this left a lot to be desired. With NPMHU pressure, the USPS came to appreciate the need for a significant increase in Mail Handler complement. It is one thing to hire in anticipation of increased holiday volume, but when coupled with ongoing pandemic-related increases in parcel volume, the need for additional staffing was clear and reduced to a Memorandum of Understanding, signed by President Hogrogian on December 24, 2020. In prior years, before the elimination of casuals, the USPS would be releasing holiday employees in late December. This year, we secured nearly 5,300 conversions to full-time career regular to be processed by no later than March 13, 2021. Historically, we average 100 conversions to FTR each Pay Period. This MOU will convert to FTR, the equivalent of that which normally occurs over two years. I would like to welcome the newest FTRs to the ranks of career Mail Handler and encourage you to join the National Postal Mail Handlers Union.

The pandemic was not a reason to cancel scheduled elections. Whether describing Local Union elections, National Union elections, or federal elections for the House and Senate or President of the United States, the pandemic did not provide reason to forgo the required elections. Despite the

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pandemic, the NPMHU put forth grassroots support in key races that flipped control of the Senate and White House. On a Local level, twenty-four Local Unions held an election of local officers in 2020. President Hogrogian administered the Oath of Office in a virtual setting for all 2020 elections that were effective after March 14<sup>th</sup> of last year. The pandemic forced everyone to be creative. Most face-to-face meetings were cancelled, including the 2020 Committee on the Future and the 2021 Legislative Conference. Moreover, the previous two SAMLU meetings went virtual, and the 2020 Convention was postponed, twice. The National Office is functioning at 25% capacity in the office, with most staff working remotely. We meet, discuss, and work to resolve grievances in a virtual setting. The need for Local and National level arbitrations, or RDRC & NDRC meetings, has not stopped; we meet with our postal and union counterparts remotely, usually on ZOOM®. We have adapted and continue to achieve the mission of the organization.

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With a two-year postponement of the 2020 Convention, the Board made the decision to conduct the NPMHU 2024 Convention site selection nomination and vote by mail. As provided in Article XII, Section 1 of the National Constitution, *the location of the next Mail Handler National Convention shall be determined by the delegates at each National Convention.* Given the logistics and extended planning required to facilitate a successful convention in 2024, it has become necessary to conduct the site selection process for that Convention by mail referendum. Each delegate was provided with an opportunity to nominate his or her preferred city and state to host the 2024 NPMHU Convention. The tabulation of nominations is now complete, and the three cities garnering the most votes are Orlando, Las Vegas, and Chicago. These three cities are now being presented to the delegates for a final site selection vote, by mail ballot. The actual ballots were mailed to delegates on March 1. Ballots should be returned in the pre-addressed, postage paid envelope that was included, and must be received by 9AM on April 15, 2021 to be counted, consistent with the voter instructions sent to each delegate. The vote to determine the location of the 2024 Convention will be

weighted as if conducted on the floor of the 2020 Convention. The weighted vote value for each of the 340 delegates was previously determined in accordance with Article XII, Sections 2 and 5 of the Constitution and will be applied accordingly.

With an eye on finances, I will be voting for Las Vegas. The entertainment capital of the world has a wide assortment of union hotels capable of hosting our 2024 Convention within most budgetary restraints. Las Vegas is home to more than 50 union hotels, excellent convention services, and convenient proximity to a major airport. The winning city will be announced on or about April 16, 2021.

Finally, I would like to welcome all new Mail Handlers that joined our ranks during the recent holiday surge. On top of hiring more than 16,000 MHAs in November and December, by the time this magazine arrives in your hands nearly, 5,300 MHAs will convert to career fulltime regular (FTR). For our newly converted FTRs, please remember that the clock is ticking on access to your newly acquired health benefits. You have 60 days from the date of your career appointment to make your selection and enroll in a FEHB insurance plan. If you miss the deadline, you are considered to have declined coverage and must wait until open season or a qualifying life event to acquire health coverage. I would encourage you to take a look at your union sponsored plan at [MHBP.COM](http://MHBP.COM).

The NPMHU also negotiated new health benefits in the 2019 contract that affect MHAs and become available to them upon their appointment to a second term. These benefits are distinctly different from those which are afforded FTR mail handlers.

For MHAs, upon your appointment to a second term, you will receive newly acquired government matching contributions with enrollment in the Mail Handler Benefit Plan's **Value Plan** and **Consumer Option** only. To be clear, MHAs SHOULD NOT enroll in the MHBP Standard Option Plan, because you will not receive government matching contributions and an MHA will be responsible for the entire premium. To secure employer matching contributions, second term MHAs should only consider MHBP's Value Plan or Consumer Option. To address questions about these benefits, the NPMHU has created and distributed a brochure to local unions. Questions also may be directed to the National Office. Thank you for your continued support.

In Unity,



**Michael J. Hora**  
National Secretary-Treasurer