

## MAIL HANDLERS PREPARE FOR HOLIDAY MAILING SEASON

Michael J. Hora, National Secretary-Treasurer



**T**he Postal Service is preparing for the upcoming peak mailing season by hiring at least 100,000 employees, 16,000 of whom are expected to be Mail Handler Assistants (MHAs). Last year, the Postal Service was caught off guard by vast increases in parcel volume, an insufficient workforce, and a network that included transportation and processing capacity limitations. The coronavirus pandemic dramatically changed the way consumers shop and Postmaster General DeJoy believes this is an opportunity to expand USPS services. But if we are going to compete with FedEx, UPS, and Amazon, changes must be made. The NPMHU is supportive of many of the changes proposed by PMG DeJoy, but we will continue to oppose unnecessary closures and consolidations, while championing efforts that minimize the negative impact on mail handlers.

The USPS is making modifications to the processing and distribution network that will greatly improve parcel capacity. This also means that some letter and flat processing will be consolidated, relocated, or in some cases eliminated. In addition to the network redesign, the USPS will establish forty-six Package Support Annexes (PSA). We are told that the PSAs will be operational for up to two years while other network modifications occur. Most PSAs will be located in proximity to existing NDCs. This topic is covered in greater detail throughout the magazine, including President Hogrogian's report, CAD Manager Teresa Harmon's article, and in the SAMLU article.

Additional network infrastructure will help with the forthcoming holiday surge, but this problem also requires adequate staffing. Managing the holiday peak cannot be solved solely with extra buildings, docks, sorting equipment, and trucks; someone must actually DO the work. The NPMHU is working with the USPS to improve employee complement as shown by the 12,370 MHA conversions to Fulltime Regular (FTR) this year, to date. We continue to push for additional staffing. The constant employee turnover is not helpful to the USPS or the

mail handler craft. We continue to argue for additional conversions to FTR, demonstrating the commitment to a career workforce and a path to financial stability for the company and its employees.

Unfortunately, the USPS is embracing virtual new-hire orientations again in 2021. Therefore, the NPMHU will not have the opportunity to meet with these new employees in person at their initial orientation. The USPS has stated that all 100,000 new hires will occur by way of a virtual orientation. We will continue to participate in the virtual sessions without prejudice to our position and pending an ongoing National dispute. Please take the time to welcome our new MHAs as they enter the workforce in the coming months. Befriend them, show them around, and encourage them to enroll into the NPMHU; we need their membership.

For those MHAs that were recently converted to fulltime regular, and for those that will convert to career in the future, please remember that newly converted mail handlers have 60 days from the effective date of their career appointment to enroll in the Federal Employee Health Benefit (FEHB) program. If you do not make an election by that time, you are considered to have declined coverage, and you must wait until the next Open Season to enroll. Qualifying Life Events may permit additional opportunities to make a change outside of Open Season. To help with your selection, Mail Handler Benefit Plan representatives are hosting informational webinars that provide an overview and discuss the features of the union sponsored health plan (MHBP®). Each webinar will run about 30 minutes and will include time for live questions and answers. Newly converted FTRs are encouraged to visit [www.npmhu.org](http://www.npmhu.org) and [www.mhbp.com](http://www.mhbp.com) for additional details. The MHBP® webinars will also have value to all mail handlers during the upcoming FEHB open season.

The impact of the coronavirus and pandemic-related guidelines will certainly result in a reduced number of FEHB Health Fairs. OPM recently issued a Benefits Administration Letter

**Additional network infrastructure will help with the forthcoming holiday surge, but this problem also requires adequate staffing.**

that read in part, "Consider other ways to provide information to employees such as virtual events, webcasts, or webinars. Many health plans host virtual events to provide information about Open Season to their enrollees and others." Federal employees may again be forced to acquire benefits information through less traditional methods. Mail handlers are encouraged to take advantage of the MHBP webinars.

The coming months provide an opportunity for all mail handlers to make certain changes during the upcoming open season. The 2022 FEHB Open Season runs from Monday, November 8<sup>th</sup> through December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021. First, the Federal Health Benefits Open Season provides an opportunity for career mail handlers to make any necessary changes to their health insurance coverage through the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP). During this open season, employees may make any one, or a combination, of the following changes to their health insurance: change plans; enroll if not enrolled; cancel enrollment; or select and change to one of the coverage options (that is, Self only, Self and Family, or Self Plus One). All of these open season adjustments may be made using PostalEASE, which can be accessed online at <https://liteblue.usps.gov> or by calling 1-877-477-3273, option 1. For most benefits programs, as already noted Open Season begins on November 8<sup>th</sup> and ends on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

## **The USPS has made Consumers' Checkbook® Guide to Health Plans available to all postal employees and retirees at no charge.**

**You may access the Consumers' Checkbook FEHB Plan comparison tool through LiteBlue and at the LiteBlue Open Season page.**

The USPS has made Consumers' Checkbook® Guide to Health Plans available to all postal employees and retirees at no charge. You may access the Consumers' Checkbook FEHB Plan comparison tool through LiteBlue and at the LiteBlue Open Season page.

Mail Handler Assistants are also eligible for health insurance; initial coverage is available under the USPS Non-Career

Health Benefits Plan. Coverage is subsidized by the Postal Service through an employer contribution of \$125 per pay period. Rates for the 2022 plan year will be shared widely and posted on Liteblue in the coming weeks.

An MHA reappointed to a second 360-day term is alternatively eligible for some coverage under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, including immediate enrollment into the MHBP® Consumer Option and Value Plan with contributions towards premiums to be made by the Postal Service. Conversion to FTR career mail handler triggers eligibility for all MHBP Plans (Standard Option, Consumer Option and Value Plan) with full contractual matching contributions. The 2022 rates for all categories will be released by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and shared in the coming weeks.

Second, Flexible Spending Accounts allow employees to set aside a portion of their pre-tax earnings for certain types of out-of-pocket health care expenses and dependent care expenses that may be incurred during the next year. FSAs are an excellent opportunity for mail handlers to save money for health care and dependent care, and all members are urged to investigate this program if you expect to have eligible expenses in these areas.

The National Postal Mail Handlers Union will distribute additional details about Open Season opportunities in the coming months to include an update on Flexible Spending Account (FSA) regulations and new carryover limitations, and Annual Leave Exchange Options and opportunities.

Finally, I want to call your attention to national contract negotiations scheduled for 2022. We are currently preparing for national bargaining and need your input. On page 30 of this publication, you will find President Hogrogian's Official Call for Bargaining Proposals. At one time or another, every mail handler has thought of something that belongs in the contract but is not. Maybe you have a recommendation to change or improve language. Now is the time to act; if you have any proposals that you would like to have considered for the upcoming round of bargaining, please use the form on page 31 to submit your proposal to the National Office. Every proposal submitted will be fully analyzed by the NPMHU's Field Negotiating Committee and the National Negotiations Team while the Union develops its opening bargaining proposals. You can also download a blank form on the national website at [npmhu.org](http://npmhu.org) if that is more convenient.

In Unity,



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