

NPMHU BEGINS NEW CHAPTER AFTER SPRING RELOCATION

Michael J. Hora, National Secretary-Treasurer



On May 18, 2019, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union closed one chapter of the organization's history and launched a fresh start two days later. Over a very hectic weekend in May, the NPMHU relocated and on May 20, 2019, the National Office officially opened at its new location in the headquarters of the AFL-CIO. We are now located at **815 16th St NW, Suite 5100, Washington DC 20006-4101**. Anything mailed to the old address will now churn through the USPS Computerized Forwarding System, adding days, if not weeks to the normal delivery timeline. Please update all records, files, correspondences, and future mailings accordingly.

The process formally began on June 27, 2018 when (then) National Secretary-Treasurer Tim Dwyer signed the NPMHU's ten-year lease with the AFL-CIO; 325 days later we moved into the new space. We originally planned the move in two phases but moving everyone at once eliminated the need to maintain multiple physical locations and networks during the transition and it saved significantly on move costs and labor. Once we confirmed we could move everyone at once without interfering with National Bargaining preparations, the decision was easy.

We are honored to be in a 100% Union environment. While the costs associated with the buildout and move were significant, we expect to recoup those expenses within the first two years of the lease. By signing a 10-year lease, we will save money on office space costs in the short and long term—providing some financial stability in the District of Columbia's unapologetic dog-eat-dog real estate market. Additionally, we will reduce copier and printing costs by running many jobs through the AFL-CIO print shop, located on the second floor of our new location. We will also capture other savings on direct and incidental expenses when utilizing the purchasing power of the AFL-CIO.

Moving into the new location afforded us an opportunity to make necessary improvements on the layout of the office, departmental workflow, phone, Internet and related technologies, and security. We are still working out a few bugs here and there, but for the most part the move was seamless. Please join me in thanking the entire National staff for their hard work during this transition. Everyone truly

came together and stepped up at every opportunity. If you have the chance to visit the National Office, we are confident that you will appreciate your new National headquarters. The NPMHU will be hosting an Open House during the next SAMLU later this year. Details about the Open House will be shared as they become available.

During the first quarter of 2019, the NPMHU surpassed the milestone of 12,000 conversions from Mail Handler Assistants (MHA) to career fulltime regular (FTR). The Residual Vacancy Memorandum signed in February 2016 greatly increased the pace of conversions to FTR by creating a pecking order and clear direction on how residual vacancies must be filled, including the conversion of MHAs to FTR.

There is a misunderstanding about MHAs eligibility for Union membership that I would like to clarify. MHAs are immediately eligible to join the NPMHU. There is no waiting period to enroll; eligibility for enrollment is not tied to or limited by a probationary period; and there is no requirement to wait until one is converted to FTR. MHAs are the path to career employment and should join the NPMHU at the first opportunity. Every new employee passes through the ranks of MHA. Each MHA is entitled to Union representation and, in return, the NPMHU asks that you join the labor organization that is fighting for you day in and day out.

We recently mailed 5,000 postcards to our non-members asking them to Join the Union, Join the Fight. The postcard outlined many of the benefits enjoyed by collectively organized career mail handlers such as Health Benefits, Salary, Night Shift Differential, Sunday Premium, Annual Leave up to 5 weeks per year, and Sick Leave at 13 days per year. Not to mention Job bidding, Local and National Work Rules Protections, Cost of Living increases, No Layoff clauses, and a Defined Pension Plan.

By contract, the Union is entitled to meet with newly hired employees during their orientation and again upon conversion to FTR. Each NPMHU representative is encouraged to make the most of these opportunities and MHAs are encouraged to request these meetings. Please reach out to our new MHAs, meet with them during orientation, talk about the job, the career opportunity, available benefits, contractual rights and enforcement thereof. Talk about the mission of

the Union. Encourage every new employee and non-member to Join the NPMHU.

To help in the recruitment of new employees and non-members, the NPMHU has created a short video entitled, *Join the Union, Join the Fight!* The video details the work and operations of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union. It describes the constitutional documents that control this labor organization and describes the rights and benefits of Union membership. When a new employee asks, "Why should I join the Union," encourage the employee to watch the video to learn a little bit about the NPMHU. If you know a non-member or have the occasion to meet a newly-hired MHA, introduce yourself and encourage them to join the Union. As we enter National bargaining, we need a strong united front. We need every single mail handler on the NPMHU team. We cannot afford to have non-members riding on the coattails of dues paying members.

Health insurance is another topic that raises many questions for MHAs and newly converted FTRs. Mail Handler Assistants are immediately eligible for health insurance; coverage is available under the USPS Non-Career Health Benefits Plan and coverage is subsidized by the Postal Service through

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an employer contribution of \$125 per pay period. Thus, for the 2019 Plan Year, self-only coverage for an MHA will require an employee contribution of \$60 per pay period. The additional costs for family coverage are charged to the MHA.

Conversion to full-time career triggers certain strictly enforced timelines. Converted mail handlers have 60 days from the date of their career appointment to enroll in a health insurance plan offered through the Federal Employee Health Benefit (FEHB) program. If a newly converted mail

handler does not make an election in the allotted time period, that employee will be considered to have declined coverage, and the employee must wait until the next Open Season to enroll, except for certain qualifying life events.

Although new career mail handlers have 60 days to enroll in the FEHB, it is to the employee's advantage to make this election as soon as possible. Coverage will begin on the first day of the first pay period that begins after the employing office receives each enrollment request. If an employee previously elected coverage in the USPS Non-Career Employee Health Benefits Plan as an MHA, coverage in that Non-Career Plan will be automatically terminated 28 days (or two pay periods) after conversion to career mail handler. The employee should make every effort to elect an FEHB plan by the end of the pay period prior to coverage termination to avoid having a gap in health benefits coverage. All new mail handlers, as well as all other career postal employees, are encouraged to investigate the Union's sponsored health plan—the MHBP®.

Finally, let me end this column with news about wage increases. In accordance with Article 9.7 of the 2016 National Agreement, all Mail Handler Assistants have received a wage increase of \$0.21 per hour effective on Saturday, May 25, 2019. This is the sixth MHA wage increase occurring during the 2016 National Agreement.

The 21 cent per hour increase raises the Level 4 MHA hourly rate to \$16.21 and the Level 5 MHA hourly rate to \$17.07, which is an increase of approximately 1.3% and 1.2% respectively. These additional increases were included in the 2016 National Agreement to help close the current gap between MHAs and career employees and to reduce attrition amongst MHAs.

Also, this coming September, prior to the expiration of the 2016 National Agreement at midnight on September 20, 2019, there will be another cost-of-living adjustment for career mail handlers. Although it is too early at this writing to predict inflation through the end of July 2019, it is probable that the COLA will be in positive territory.

The continued improvement of mail handler wages and benefits is a primary objective in the upcoming NPMHU's national negotiations, which start toward the end of June. If you know a non-member or meet a new employee, please ask them to Join the Union, Join the Fight.

In Unity,



Michael J. Hora
National Secretary-Treasurer