

We deliver



**Mack I.
Julion**

Our annual food drive has become a rite of passage every spring for city letter carriers. For more than 30 years now, our national union has spearheaded the largest one-day food drive in the world. In that time, we have collected more than 1.9 billion pounds of food. Obviously, that amount of food feeds many families who need a little help for one reason or another.

The fact that our drive occurs in the spring is the optimal time for food pantries. Generally, they take in a lot of donations toward the end of the calendar year, when people are in a more charitable mood. By springtime, most

of the pantries' supplies start to get a little low, so the boost they receive from us is very timely.

As we head into summer, most schools are about to let out for summer break. This will leave many of the kids who benefit from the schools' breakfast and lunch programs lacking if they are in food-insecure homes. According to Feeding America, more than 44 million Americans, including 13 million children, face "food insecurity" annually. The term "food insecurity" is used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for those who don't have enough to eat and don't know where their next meal is coming from.

For letter carriers to be part of the solution to this problem should be something that we take great pride in. Literally giving back to the communities that we serve by connecting those who are willing to give with those who are in need. Now, having stated that, I am aware that all do not share these sentiments.

When I was in the Leadership Academy back in 2006, my local branch was not a participant in the national food drive. So, when others shared their experience about the national drive, I was intrigued. The fact that customers were so willing to give was astounding to me.

In my branch, we had our own food drive, but it was not on the same level as the national drive despite having preceded it by 10 years. In my local, the carriers in each of our offices/units would take up a collection and we would then purchase nonperishable items and deliver them to three pantries in Chicago. With 60-plus of-

fices in the greater Chicago area, we did pretty well, and our members were proud of our efforts. I mentioned to those in my class that the members in my branch would love to be able to gather more food from our customers and give it to more pantries.

I was cautioned by a few in my group that not everyone was as excited or willing to participate. I was told, "Some carriers won't even come in on Food Drive Day." I was shocked. Why would someone not be willing to help others when it doesn't cost you anything, and you're getting paid to do it? That's like a double win to me.

I accused those who didn't participate of being non-members, but I was told that some are NALC members. These members maintain that it's not their job and they don't want to do it. I didn't believe it until I became local president and we began participating in the national food drive. We still took up a collection during the week while soliciting from our customers, and on the day of the drive we would collect what was given.

One year we collected nearly a million pounds, and our members were elated! They were in awe of all the food that we collected; it was so ironic that we collected more from the communities that had the least. People closest to the need tend to give more. I guess they know that "but for the grace of God, it could be them."

Now, not every carrier was as willing to participate. Some wouldn't even deliver the cards and others said that collecting food was not their job. I was so frustrated with that attitude one year that I told the members at our general meeting there must be a "special place in hell for those who were unwilling to participate!" In hindsight, I know that may have been a bit harsh, but I read somewhere that for "those who are given much, much is required."

As letter carriers we are very blessed, and as such we should be willing to be a blessing to others. To me, it just seems so natural that we would have the most successful food drive in the world. Every day across this country, we deliver letters and packages to our customers, and on the second Saturday in May, we deliver hope to those in need. It's just what we do; it's in our DNA. We deliver!