

# NALC archive open



## Some Sombrotto papers head to Reuther Library

**T**he NALC archives housed at Wayne State University's Walter P. Reuther Library are now available to the public for research. But the official opening last December 1 was far from the end of a process that began when the first boxes of NALC papers were shipped to Detroit back in 2001 after the Executive Council voted to make the library the official repository of the union's records. The collection continues to grow.

On February 8, another important step was taken when the bulk of President Emeritus Vincent R. Sombrotto's extensive papers were loaded onto a truck in Washington for the trip to Detroit, where they will be prepared for public use.

Getting records ready for researchers is a painstaking process—it involves much more than merely arranging boxes of files on a shelf. Professional archivists have been working for several years processing the NALC materials, leading up to the December opening. More than 300 boxes of documents had to be sorted, then stored in acid-free folders and boxes for safekeeping. In general, the documents are organized by the officer or department

which produced them. The final step in the process is the creation of "finding aids," which help researchers plan their work. Every series of records is described and each file is listed. Historically important correspondents are noted.

The records of former Presidents James H. Rademacher and J. Joseph Vacca, Executive Vice Presidents Tony Huerta and Francis Conners, and the NALC Auxiliary from 1905 are just some of the records now waiting to be explored by anyone with an interest in the NALC and its past. The material is more than simply files of papers—letters, memos or reports. The collection also includes videos, photographs and historical memorabilia. The overall aim is to document in as many ways as possible the proud history of the NALC—one of America's oldest unions—and the letter carrier craft.

But these records, important though they are, pale in significance beside the 250-plus boxes of Sombrotto records which Reuther Director Mike Smith personally escorted to Detroit in February. Smith, who recently completed an oral history with Sombrotto, has expressed great pride

about having these records at the Reuther Library, given the NALC leader's stature in the American labor movement. The files reach from the beginning of Sombrotto's presidency in 1979 through 1999. They document the union's activities during a crucial part of its history in the years following the 1970 postal strike and the Postal Reorganization Act. (The files of Sombrotto's final few years in office are still regularly used for NALC business, and so have remained in Washington for the time being.)

The Sombrotto papers will virtually double the amount of NALC material at Reuther, which holds collections of several other major unions. Given the amount of work involved in processing such an immense quantity of documentation, it will be some time before they will be open to the public. Until then, the records opened on December 1 will provide researchers with ample material for study. ☒



Director of NALC's Information Center Nancy Dysart (in red) prepares the records for transport with the help of two porters and Wayne State University's Walter P. Reuther Library Director Mike Smith (l).

## PERF's top officials reaffirm aid system

**T**he Grantors who oversee the Postal Employees' Relief Fund have reaffirmed the charitable organization's historic role in providing supplemental benefits to active and retired postal employees who are victims of natural disasters or fires.

At a January 30 meeting at Postal Service Headquarters, the group directed the fund's Executive Committee to continue the policy of basing grants on out-of-pocket losses as calculated after insurance payments, state aid and funds from other relief organizations are taken into consideration.

Since its inception, the fund has provided this kind of "back end" relief, helping recipients recoup what is not covered by insurance or other assistance.

The eight-member Grantors group is comprised of the Postmaster General; the presidents of the four major postal unions—the NALC, National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, National Postal Mail Handlers Union, and American Postal Workers Union; and three management associations—the National Association of Postal Supervisors, National Association of Postmasters of the United States, and National League of Postmasters of the United States.

NALC President William H. Young strongly supported continuation of the payment policy that has been in effect since the fund began in 1990.

Although the Executive Committee, which handles day-to-day operations, reported that nearly \$1 million in grants have been made to ▶

**The PERF Grantors meet with the fund's Executive Committee at Postal Service Headquarters.**

Photos courtesy of USPS





The eight-member Grantors group (seated from l): John Hegarty, President of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union; Donnie Pitts, President of the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association; Bill Burrus, President of the American Postal Workers Union; (standing from l) O. Dale Goff, President of the National Association of Postmasters of the United States; Charles Mapa, President of the National League of Postmasters of the United States; Ted Keating, President of the National Association of Postal Supervisors; NALC President Young; and Postmaster General Jack Potter.

victims of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, a lengthy discussion was held over the frustration of many hurricane victims who are yet to receive assistance of any magnitude.

In December 2005, shortly after the devastating storms struck the Gulf Coast and Florida, the Grantors directed the Executive Committee to “stay the course” and to require that proper documentation of both losses and other assistance sources be provided before any grants were issued. That policy was overwhelmingly reaffirmed at the January 30 meeting.

PERF Executive Secretary William J. Molloy provided statistics that showed the Executive Committee has already acted on 298 of 1,224 applications received related to the three hurricanes, almost 25 percent of the total. Of those, 228 grants were issued totaling \$923,000.

Drew Von Bergen, Executive Committee chairman and NALC’s PERF representative, explained in his “State of the Fund” report that the \$923,000 paid out was lower than typical for the number of applications since virtually all were from renters, not homeowners. The total also reflected a reduction in maximum grant amount from \$35,000 to \$14,000—an action taken in response to the unparalleled number of applications arising from these hurricanes.

Von Bergen said extensive delays by the state governments in Mississippi and Louisiana in distributing the billions of dollars appropriated by Congress has slowed the PERF documentation process to a crawl.

“Only within the last couple months have state grants started to be issued and then only at a trickle,” Von Bergen said. “When it became apparent that no relief would go to individuals that rented their homes, we immediately started processing their applications.”

He provided figures from Louisiana’s “Road Home” program as of January 22 which showed the daunting task ahead for PERF.



President Young listens to a proposal during the meeting.

Final action had occurred on only 258 of the 101,657 applications to the state-run Road Home program. That program calls for grants of up to \$150,000 per homeowner.

“We’ve received a lot of e-mails and a lot of phone calls from postal employees, many of them angry—all of them frustrated—over the lack of relief assistance,” Von Bergen said, adding that a number of applicants had mistakenly thought PERF was an “emergency” relief fund.

It is critical that victims of these hurricanes, as well as other disasters, provide PERF with all the documentation required. They should immediately send to PERF information regarding their applications for assistance to state programs—acceptance or denial—which will allow the PERF Executive Committee to then act on their application. Everyone who has a pending application should also keep PERF up-to-date on any changes in their mailing address or phone number.

Additional information on PERF, as well as forms for applying for a grant, are available on the Fund’s website, [www.postalrelief.com](http://www.postalrelief.com). ✉