

Postal relief fund nearly tapped out



Photo by Patsy Lynch/FEMA

With the annual Combined Federal Campaign underway across the country, letter carriers are being encouraged to consider making a donation to the Postal Employees' Relief Fund, the only CFC charity designed exclusively to help the active and retired postal community.

Over the past four years, much of the aid from PERF has gone to assistance for the thousands of postal employees whose lives were battered by Hurricanes Katrina, Wilma and Rita along the Gulf Coast in 2005. But the Fund also has helped letter carriers and other postal employees victimized by natural disasters and fires in dozens of states and U.S. jurisdictions.

The Fund's assets have been nearly wiped out by more than \$8 million in grants mailed by the Postal Employees' Relief Fund to victims of the Gulf hurricanes, according to Drew Von Bergen, NALC's representative on the PERF Executive Committee. The Fund received more than 1,700 applications for assistance for the Gulf Coast hurricanes.

Still, the Fund receives new requests every week for aid in recovering from tornadoes, floods, wildfires and other disasters, as well as home fires.

Already this year, grants totaling \$917,000 have gone to postal employees and retirees in 24 states—Alabama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

The Postal Employees' Relief Fund is a 501(c) 3 charitable organization, meaning donations are tax deductible.

Set up after back-to-back devastating natural disasters in 1990—the California earthquakes and Hurricane Hugo on the East Coast—the Fund is overseen by eight grantors, including NALC President Fredric V. Rolando, the postmaster general, and the heads of the other three unions and three management associations. Together, they are the trustees of the Fund and have ultimate authority. They meet annually, with their next session scheduled for November 3.

Day-to-day operations are handled by the PERF Executive Committee, which has one representative appointed by each grantor. The committee is now chaired by Louis Atkins, executive vice president of the National Association of Postal Supervisors, who was elected to the position in February after NALC's Von Bergen stepped down after serving eight years as chairman.

Contributions encouraged

In a letter endorsing this year's CFC campaign (*opposite page*), which runs through December 15, President Rolando invited NALC members to "consider a contribution to the Postal Employees' Relief Fund, another charity of your choice, or the local United Way in your community."

"Whatever choices you make for yourself and your family, I encourage members of the NALC who can to participate in the 2009 Combined Federal Campaign in support of worthy charities in your community," Rolando wrote, adding, "Thank you for your generosity."

According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), federal and postal employees provided a record-



FEMA photo by Win Hendersen

setting level of charitable giving through the CFC in last fall's drive. At a White House ceremony on June 26 honoring exemplary performance by volunteers, OPM Director John Berry said the 2008 campaign raised nearly \$276 million in pledges to non-profit programs. (NALC member Lory Waechter of Clearwater, Florida Branch 2008 was among those honored at the ceremony; story, page 8.)

In addition to his endorsement of the CFC campaign and PERF, President Rolando is also sending a letter to the presidents of NALC's largest branches, asking them to distribute newly designed brochures about PERF as the CFC campaign kicks off in their respective areas, and encouraging active and retired members to pledge donations through payroll deduction in the CFC campaign to PERF and other charities.

"The thousands of grants that were made over the past few years for damage from Hurricane Katrina and the other Gulf Coast hurricanes have nearly depleted the assets of PERF," Rolando said. "We now need to replenish the Fund so that it is prepared to help out when future disasters occur."

More than 90 percent of PERF's grant money comes from pledges during the annual CFC campaign. It has one of the lowest administrative cost percentages in the CFC campaign—5.5 percent—due to the fact the Fund has only one full-time employee. That means nearly all of the donated money goes directly for grants to fellow postal employees.

PERF's CFC number is 10268.

The Fund issues outright grants of between \$1,000 and \$14,000 to active and retired postal employees, union-represented and management alike. The amount of each grant depends on the final out-of-pocket

loss remaining after insurance and other relief assistance.

Some requests for assistance are denied, usually because they are below the minimum threshold of out-of-pocket loss under PERF's criteria, they lacked sufficient documentation, or

President Fred Rolando's letter to NALC members asking that they donate to the Combined Federal Campaign.

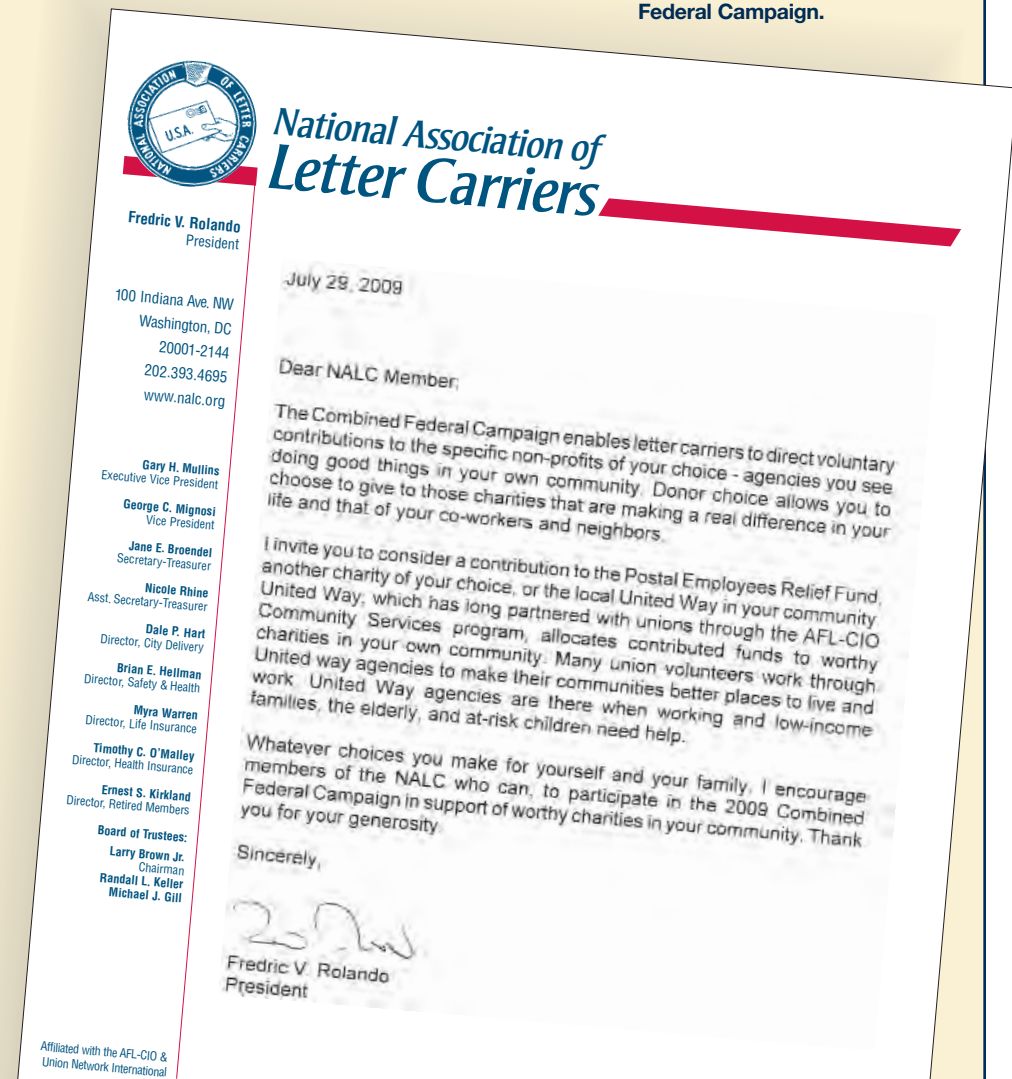




Photo by Rob Melendez/FEMA

the damaged structure was not the primary residence.

The vast majority of grants have gone to active and retired members of the NALC and the American Postal Workers Union—the Postal Service’s two largest unions—with mail handlers, rural carriers, supervisors, postmasters, and other employees receiving the remainder.

Like all charitable organizations, PERF is feeling the effects of the economic downturn, with the number and amount of donations reduced. That makes

pledges to CFC #10268 during this year’s campaign all the more important. Retired carriers and others can also mail their donations to the Fund.

Additional information about the Postal Employees’ Relief Fund, as well as information on applying for grants and making donations, is available on the Fund’s website, postalrelief.com, or NALC members can contact Drew Von Bergen, NALC’s representative on the Executive Committee, at NALC Headquarters—call 202-662-2489, or e-mail vonbergen@nalc.org. ☒

CFC honors for Florida carrier

Lory Waechter of Clearwater, Florida Branch 2008, was honored at a special White House event with a Hero Award in recognition of her volunteer achievements on behalf of the Combined Federal Campaign.

Waechter was selected from among 250 nominees from federal offices worldwide for the CFC award, which was presented June 26 at a special White House event. Director John Berry of the Office of Personnel Management cited the letter carrier for her spare-time efforts to raise money for the Suncoast CFC, which covers nearly 30,000 employees across 42 federal agencies in 10 west-central Florida counties.

In 2008, Waechter organized several special CFC events, including a sell-out golf tournament at MacDill Air Force Base, a number of fund-raising chili cook-offs, and a 5K fun run on the Veterans Administration’s Bay Pines campus. Also, as part of a three-person team, she trained volunteer workers, collected pledge

forms and conducted employee meetings.

In Pinellas County in particular, Waechter was credited for a record increase in CFC participation, which jumped from 32 percent to 91 percent. Largely due to Waechter’s efforts, the Suncoast CFC raised more than \$167,000 in individual pledges in 2008, plus another \$31,000 through participation in the special events.

“Lory’s outstanding attitude, charisma and commitment could turn Scrooge into a generous donor,” wrote Suncoast CFC local coordinating committee chair Kay Greene and director Tony McKenna.

The money raised by local CFCs supports numerous charities and non-profit agencies. ☒



Clearwater, Florida Branch 2008 member Lory Waechter received a CFC Hero Award award at the White House. Presenting the plaque were OPM Director John Berry (l) and Postmaster General Jack Potter.