



Nalcrest

A look back at the birth of

By working hard every day on their routes, keeping a watchful eye on their patrons' safety and spreading good cheer, letter carriers play an important role in their communities. Some go on to retire in a special place where letter carriers are the community—Nalcrest.

The residents of this central Florida retirement community created for letter carriers celebrated its 50th anniversary in January with a weekend filled with social gatherings, parades, speeches and memorials, and even a softball game.

"The residents of Nalcrest really showed off their spirit and their love for the community they've built at the 50th anniversary celebration," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "We can look forward to at least another 50 years of good times."

A dream becomes a community

The idea of a retirement community just for letter carriers first emerged in the 1950s. NALC President William C. Doherty had traveled to post-war Europe, where he was inspired by similar retirement communities sponsored by labor unions, religious groups and fraternal organizations. Doherty proposed at the NALC's 1954 biennial convention in Cleveland that NALC start its own affordable non-profit retirement community for letter carriers.

NALC members nationwide loved the idea, and NALC created the Nalcrest Foundation (Nalcrest is an acronym for NALC Retirement, Education, Security and Training) to buy land, build the homes and manage the property. When Congress passed a law providing loans to help build housing for seniors in 1959, a perfect source of low-risk financing for Nalcrest became available.

The union found a lovely location on the shore of 15-square-mile Lake Weohyakapka in Polk County, FL, midway between Tampa and Vero Beach. (NALC considered building a second community in the Southwest, but that idea did not come to fruition.) On July 1, 1962, President Doherty turned the first shovel of earth in a groundbreaking ceremony at the Florida site.

"The dream of many years is quickly approaching realization," Doherty wrote in the July 1962 *Postal Record*.

Below: The NALC Executive Council celebrated Nalcrest's 50th anniversary on Jan. 19. Bottom: Nalcrest was formally dedicated on Jan. 20, 1964.



turns 50

NALC's retirement paradise

"Nalcrest is on the way, and future generations of letter carriers will bless the wisdom and perseverance of those who made this dream possible."

Though only the first phase of construction was ready, Nalcrest's first residents arrived late in 1963. The community officially opened its doors on Jan. 20, 1964, with a dedication ceremony that attracted 2,000 residents and guests. The Miami letter carrier band and The Singing Mailmen, a singing group composed of real letter carriers, entertained the crowd, along with a local high school band and an all-female water ski team, the Aquamaids, who gave a special show on the lake.

With NALC President Jerome J. Keating presiding, Postmaster General John A. Gronouski joined members of Congress and union leaders in giving speeches congratulating NALC for the achievement. President Lyndon B. Johnson sent a congratulatory telegram. Former NALC President Doherty, who by then had been named a special ambassador to Jamaica by President John F. Kennedy, also attended. Doherty would later join his fellow retired carriers as a Nalcrest resident, living there until his death in 1987.

Using the same federal financing source, a similar retirement community called Fedhaven, intended for other federal retirees, was built next to Nalcrest by a postal union that later merged with other unions to become the American Postal Workers Union (APWU). Fedhaven never got off the ground, though, and was sold to private owners and renamed Lakeshore.

The use of a federal loan for Nalcrest came with one important condition—Nalcrest could not actually restrict its residents to letter carriers. However, renting apartments to others helped

keep Nalcrest financially stable in its early years. Nalcrest paid off the loan in 2002.

Just the beginning

Though they had established a new place for retirees, letter carriers didn't stop building. The residents have built both new facilities and the bonds of their community.

Spread over 150 acres, Nalcrest has grown into a town unto itself, with nearly 750 residents living in 500 garden-style, single-level apartments and a town center as well as a 500-seat auditorium named for Doherty. At the sports complex completed in 1987 and named for NALC President Emeritus Vincent R. Sombrotto, residents enjoy a heated, Olympic-size swimming pool and hot tub year-round, as well as shuffleboard, horseshoes, basketball, bocce, miniature golf and tennis. The development is clustered around two peaceful lagoons connected to the lake. An additional 150 acres has been left undeveloped.

Nalcrest never gets boring. Want to sail, canoe or fish? The lake awaits. A walk along the shores of Lake Weohyakapka, whose name is Seminole for "walk on the water," may reveal sandhill cranes with their chicks, eagles, wild turkeys and of course an alligator or two among oaks dripping with Spanish moss.

Residents have formed a variety of clubs to bring people with similar interests together, whether to pursue hobbies, learn new skills, serve the community or just socialize. The Nalcrest Ladies Club, for instance, organizes newspaper recycling, greets newcomers and celebrates major birthdays and anniversaries. Creative residents find self-



Top: NALC President William Doherty, whose dream it was to create Nalcrest, turned the first shovel of Earth on July 1, 1962.

Above: As part of the 1964 dedication, the water ski team, the Aquamaids, put on a show on Lake Weohyakapka.

Below: The plaque presented by NALC President Rolando in January.



Nalcrest photos courtesy of Chris Wittenburg, Linda Ferrari-Kirkland, and Roz and Barry Browne



During the weekend celebration in January, the NALC Executive Council and Nalcrest residents launched paper sky lanterns (top), had a parade (below), held a softball game between the Council and the Nalcrest Eagles (opposite page), had a special ceremony to honor our veterans (opposite page) and even hosted an Obama impersonator (above).

expression with the Palette Pals, a club that meets Monday afternoon and with free art classes on Wednesday morning, led by a local artist.

Nalcrest's travel club arranges trips of various lengths at rock-bottom prices. Excursions range from several days in Las Vegas or Biloxi for gambling to half-days at a dog track or dinner theater.

Conveniences are close at hand, too. Along with Nalcrest's management office, the town center sports a fitness center, laundromat, restaurant and chapel. Residents maintain a small library of books and videos. If you still can't find what you need, the town of Lake Wales is only a few miles away.

A seven-foot bronze statue of Richard F. Quinn, NALC president from 1895 to 1896, stands on the grounds as an icon of the community's origins. The statue was moved from a post office in Quinn's hometown, Philadelphia, when the facility was renovated in 1963.

This unique community has attracted press coverage from news outlets around the world, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *National Geographic* and Swedish television.

Some residents spend the warmer months traveling or living closer to their hometowns, Matty Rose, president of the Nalcrest trustees and former Region 9 NBA, said. "There are many residents who use Nalcrest as a base to travel and return to a warm place to snuggle in while most of the country is freezing its butt off. It's very affordable and there isn't a retirement community in the nation that provides as much for so little."

The convenience and camaraderie has only grown through Nalcrest's five decades. Listen to what some residents have said about Nalcrest over the years.

"I have everything that I had at home in West Virginia," a new resident, Loren Hoffman, told *The Postal Record* in 1964. "I couldn't possibly be any happier. There are planned programs of recreation every day. One just can't find time to be lonesome. We love Nalcrest."

"This is paradise—it's beautiful and quiet and comfortable, and there's so much to do, a person can't keep up with it all," Long Island Merged Branch 6000 member Fred Taeger said in 1999. "But what makes Nalcrest so great is the people," he added. "We look out for each other. I guess that comes from being part of the union."

"We moved here and I told my husband I would give it a try. But soon, I never wanted to leave," Annette Alversa, wife of Flushing, NY Branch 294 member John Alversa, said in the mid-2000s. "We woke up one morning in a world filled with people just like us—filled with enthusiasm and ready to start a new life. We were 25-year-olds in 60-year-old bodies."

'More than a celebration'

As with the opening ceremony 50 years ago, Nalcrest residents





pulled out all the stops in January to celebrate the golden anniversary of their community.

The NALC Executive Council held its regular meeting at Nalcrest the week leading up to the festivities, and NALC's national officers stayed on to participate in the weekend celebration and get a taste of life at Nalcrest. They started by playing a game of softball with Nalcrest's resident softball team, the Eagles. (The Eagles won.) Then it was on to a closest-to-the-pin golf contest at the driving range.

President Rolando laid a plaque honoring Nalcrest residents who are military veterans, including three World War II vets who attended the ceremony. The launch of paper sky lanterns along the lagoon, filling the night with lights, and a dance party wrapped up the evening.

On Sunday, a Polk County honor guard, fire and sheriff's vehicles joined Nalcrest residents, NALC President Fredric Rolando and other NALC officers on decorated cars, golf carts and bicycles in a parade on the road that circles the lagoon.

"We went around the perimeter twice," Rose said, "and everybody was cheering and waving flags. It was really a nice tribute."

The festivities also included the rededication of a repaired and expanded building near the outdoor

pool and lakeshore used for social gatherings.

An official ceremony with speeches and proclamations followed, including an official Polk County declaration of Jan. 19 as "Nalcrest Day." (Even President Obama—rather, an impersonator who resembled him—made a surprise appearance at the ceremony.)

The weekend marking the 50th jubilee of Nalcrest, Rose said, was "more than a celebration—it was a testimony to former NALC President William Doherty, who had the foresight to plan and build a community based on the strong ideals of unionism. Nalcrest has endured hurricanes, recessions and near financial ruin and has emerged to provide a low-cost living facility for retired letter carriers."

Efficiencies, one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments are available for rent at Nalcrest. To apply, simply fill out and mail the application and questionnaire found on the inside front cover of this magazine. NALC members who are interested can visit Nalcrest and even rent one of the guest apartments reserved for short stays (call 863-696-1121 for more information). You can visit nalc.org/nalcrest for a brochure and to print the application. **PR**

Images of Nalcrest as seen by air and by walking along the footpath surrounding the community's lagoon.

