

A day in your honor



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As of the reading of this article, the nation will have recently celebrated Labor Day, one of the 10 federally recognized holidays. This holiday carries special meaning to NALC and organized labor, as it serves as recognition of the monumental importance and invaluable contributions of unions to the American landscape. For it is organized labor that unifies workers with the mission of improving economic status and working conditions of workers through collective bargaining and legislation.

Labor Day weekend means many things to many people. It is the time to gather with family and friends for a backyard barbecue, to celebrate the

traditional end of summer and to mark the start of another academic year. For some, it involves out-of-town travel, community events such as parades, shopping for school clothes or a simple day at the beach. For most, it represents a long weekend of well-deserved rest and relaxation. But with all of the different ways that Americans spend the first Monday in September each year, it is easy to forget the real reason why this day is celebrated. And as is the case with most tributes, this federal holiday designation would not have happened had it not been for hard work, tenacity and dedication.

Labor Day was first celebrated by New York's Central Labor Union on Tuesday, Sept. 5, 1882, to showcase the spirit and solidarity of the trade and labor organizations. More than 10,000 union workers took unpaid time off work to march through New York City that day. In its third year (1884), the Labor Day observance was changed to the first Monday in September, and other unions and trade organizations joined in on the celebration.

By 1885, Labor Day observances were being held in industrial centers nationwide. Oregon, Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York became the first states to legally adopt the holiday in 1887. In 1894, almost 4,000 factory employees of the Pullman railway company went on strike to protest reduced wages. This then sparked a series of nationwide boycotts and riots. Soon after, President Grover Cleveland declared Labor Day a national holiday as conciliation.

While this national holiday was founded more than a century ago, and its origins are sometimes lost, its meaning is especially relevant today. In 2020, it is hard to miss the contributions that workers have provided the country during the COVID-19 crisis. The list of dedicated workers is long—



teachers, first responders, police officers, distribution center workers, truck drivers, grocery store clerks, and letter carriers, to name a few. Some folks call these workers “essential.” We know them as “heroes.” Their bravery is unquestionable and their contributions undeniable. And many have at least one thing in common—labor union membership.

These union members go to work knowing that their union stands firmly behind them every shift. This link is vital in each of these essential workers' roles. Like we have done throughout our existence, labor unions continue today to

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protect worker rights, working conditions, and most importantly in these uncertain times, worker safety. This truth is just as important and relevant today as it was when Labor Day was first declared a national holiday way back when.

For these reasons, and many more over the course of America's history, workers deserve this day of honor! I hope everyone had a safe and healthy Labor Day holiday.