

Branches across the country give a helping hand to new members

Bad weather, physical exhaustion and pressure to work long hours can make for a difficult start to being a letter carrier. To make the transition to being a city carrier assistant (CCA) go more smoothly, some branches have recently created new member—or CCA-specific—programs, and many branches have had them for years.

At Branch 351 in Olympia, WA, CCAs said they are being intimidated by management to skip breaks and work 60 to 70 hours a week and 12-plus hours a day; **Jade McBride**, vice president of the branch and shop steward, said she had filed more than 403 grievances between March and December 2023.

“You don’t really get too much of a decision on whether or not you’re going to work over 12 hours,” McBride said. “If management tells you that

you have to, you just have to and then we file.”

McBride said that the branch had experienced several retirements over the past couple of months and four resignations in the past three weeks, making it difficult to complete all of the routes the station serves. At any given time, the office is typically down by six or seven routes.

McBride said that the branch has CCA meetings simultaneously over Zoom and in person so CCAs can seek help. The meetings typically don’t have a specific agenda; they are mostly used to answer any questions the new carriers may have. Despite the intimidation that CCAs are facing, McBride said that meeting attendance is low due to the extended hours, with only one to four CCAs attending each month.

She said that she understands; while they can help the carriers receive monetary compensation, there is no way to get back the time missed with their families.

Other than its monthly meetings, Branch 351 has free uniforms available to help CCAs until they receive their uniform allowance. They also have a CCA barbecue outside of the station once a year to help create a sense of camaraderie among CCAs who work at the station.

South Jersey, NJ Branch 908 developed a separate training—with a classroom approach—and had its first CCA training in 2023. CCA Coordinator **Ozzie Lecky** initially thought of the idea in November 2022 and presented it to the branch executive board, which approved it. The CCA training was held on a Tuesday in April 2023.

Lecky wanted to make sure that attendance was high, so he personally called every CCA on the list to talk to them about what the program would be like and why they should attend. This method worked well, and 42 CCAs attended, “so it was terrific for us,” he said.

At the start of the event, food and drinks were provided, which allowed the CCAs and other carriers to talk before business got started. During the event, union rights, safety, union programs and political action committee contributions were discussed. Speakers included the vice president, executive vice president and the health benefits coordinator, with Lecky as the master of ceremonies.

“Being part of this event was truly inspiring,” Lecky said. “Everyone’s enthusiasm was a testament to the passion we all shared.”

Lecky hasn’t yet held the event in 2024 as he was at leadership training



Above and below: The South Jersey Branch 908 CCA/PTF Night in April 2023



in April; however, he hopes to have another CCA event after the summer.

In Flushing, NY, CCA trainings have been held quarterly since May 2013. There typically are 75 to 80 carriers in attendance, the majority of whom are from Branch 294, but letter carriers from surrounding branches also can attend. While the majority of attendees are CCAs, career carriers also are encouraged to attend. For about three and a half hours, attendees learn about the union, rights and procedures, local benefits, safety and conduct, and resources that are available to them.

“It shows them, No. 1, that we care,” Branch 294 President **Tony Paolillo** said. “You know, I always say actions speak louder than words.”

Paolillo makes sure to bring in former CCAs who have gone through the training to talk to current CCAs. Among them is **Kareem Hunter**, a letter carrier since 2016. He began working at the Flushing station in 2018 and attended training about one month after he started. He said that he had learned a lot of information that the station managers hadn’t told him about, such as what forms were available to CCAs and how to fill them out.

Since his initial attendance in 2018, Hunter has returned several times. He said that every time he goes, he learns something new. He spoke at one of the meetings in 2023, where he shared his positive experience with the training and talked to CCAs and answered their questions.

“They teach us how to do our job the correct way, and it just makes every carrier’s job easier,” Hunter said. “It’s very informative. They give you crucial information that most of the time people remember for the rest of their postal career.”



“I have 21 stations in Flushing, and we have about 12 of our stations [where] the shop steward is a former CCA. They got involved because they first came to CCA workshops,” Paolillo said.

Each executive board member covers various training segments, along with legislative and political organizers who discuss current legislative issues. They also provide free uniforms and dinner, which gives CCAs and other carriers the chance to socialize.

“We try to give them as many tools in their tool kit as we can to defend themselves and to maximize the benefits that they do have,” Paolillo said.

“As we all know, so much is thrown at CCAs in such a short time,” NALC President Brian L. Renfroe said.

“Whatever we can do to bring them up to speed and give them the tools to succeed, the better it is for all of us. That’s one of our fundamental missions—from the branches to NALC Headquarters—as union leaders.” **PR**



Olympia, WA Branch 351 holds a CCA barbecue (top) in the parking lot of the post office on a Sunday when CCAs are working. Additionally, they provide uniform items (above).