

Part 1

AUTHORIZATION AND ELECTIONS

By ED EMMERT

VA RLCA State Steward

The National Agreement provides for a steward system. The purpose of the steward system shall be to provide representation to employees in the rural carrier craft in all matters of labor-management relations with the U.S. Postal Service.

Under the National Agreement, the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, as the exclusive organization representing the rural carrier craft, is the only organization authorized to represent rural carriers. The NRLCA is responsible for the steward program nationwide.

The state association, under the direction of the national executive committeeman, shall be responsible for the implementation and operation of the steward system within each state. The state steward shall supervise and administer the steward system within the state.

The selection of a local steward should be in accordance with democratic procedures. To become a steward, a rural carrier must be a member in good standing of the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association.

Mandatory local steward elections will be conducted in the month of July of every fourth year beginning in 2004. The term of office will be for four years. A rural carrier currently serving as a local steward may be re-elected to the position.

Written notification to all NRLCA members shall be given at least 15 days before the date of the election. A majority vote of those NRLCA members voting is required for an election. In the formal election, the ballots may only be cast with the name of a person who has verified their candidacy by placing their signature on the formal announcement prior to the date of the election.

In the event there is only one candidate signature on the formal announcement and that candidate is the only carrier to cast a vote, that carrier will be the duly elected steward.

In the unlikely event of a tie vote for local steward, the state association, upon recommendation of the state steward, shall select a steward to serve in that office until a new local steward has been elected and certified. The same procedure will be used to break a tie for chief steward.

When there is more than one local steward at an installation, one shall be selected by the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association members of said office as chief steward. The selection and appointment of stewards or chief stewards is the sole and exclusive function of the union. The authorized number of stewards shall be in accordance with the following:

- Up to 49 craft employees per post office, station or branch: 1 steward
- 50 or more craft employees per post office, station or branch: 2 stewards

The local steward shall be certified in accordance with policies established by the national office. Every steward must satisfactorily complete the required certification training in order to be duly certified. Every steward is required to complete any scheduled enhancement training to avoid decertification.

There may arise occasions that a local steward may be assigned to represent a rural carrier at another office which does not have a certified steward. This is at the discretion of the state steward. In such assignments, the local steward will be reimbursed by the state association for incurred qualifying expenses which may include payment for any required leave without pay.

The NRLCA shall be empowered through proper procedures to disqualify for eligibility to hold office for a specified period of time, suspend or expel a steward for violation of the National Constitution and Bylaws or policies set forth by the national association.

Part 2

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

One of the primary functions of a steward is the duty of fair representation. The duty of fair representation is an obligation imposed by Federal Labor Law. It means that a steward must provide representation to all craft members without bias, likes or dislikes, prejudice, hostility, discrimination and regardless of union membership or not.

A steward is expected to serve the interests of all craft members by exercising discretion, complete good faith and honesty, and to avoid arbitrary conduct.

Stewards have to make difficult decisions in the course of their duties. In training, stewards are admonished and cautioned of their obligation to represent every craft employee professionally and with fairness. As the NRLCA is the exclusive bargaining agent for rural carriers, and as the steward is an elected agent of the NRLCA, no single function is more important than the duty of fair representation (often referred to as DFR).

Obligations:

- Must meet all requirements of training provided by the NRLCA and the state prior to required certification.
- Enforcement of the terms of the NRLCA/USPS National Agreement.
- Providing leadership.
- Educating the craft at their installation.
- Soliciting membership.
- Comply with federal, state, and local laws.
- Attend required meetings.
- Attend required training.

Responsibilities:

- Comply with Constitution and Bylaws and board policies.
- Responsible to state steward. Subject to the oversight of the state board in conjunction with the state steward.
- Serve as representative of the rural craft in your installation, branch, or office as certified.
- The local steward shall assist any rural craft employee who feels aggrieved. If the employee desires, the local steward may accompany the grievant during any discussion with the immediate supervisor.
- Meet with the installation head to develop facts and the joint Step 1 grievance file.
- In the event of an adverse decision at Step 1, submit a Step 2 appeal letter to the Step 2 designee.

- Forward the original file, including the Step 2 appeal letter and the summary statements of the local steward and grievant to the state steward or his designee (usually an assistant state steward).
- Keep a copy of the complete joint grievance file, Step 2 appeal letter, and the summary statements of the local steward and grievant.
- Be knowledgeable of legal procedures as much as possible.
- Keep carriers informed.
- Promote membership in the NRLCA.
- Maintain a union bulletin board or see that one is available for use.
- Be involved in the QWL/EI process as much as possible.
- Transfer all grievance files, records, and union property to your successor, the state steward, or his designee.

Additional Information:

On occasion and at the discretion of the state steward, a local steward may be assigned to represent a rural carrier at a nearby office which does not have a certified steward. In such cases, incurred expenses will be reimbursed by the state association including any required Leave Without Pay (LWOP) required.

In fulfilling the Duty of Fair Representation, the local steward must exercise and demonstrate a non-discriminate work ethic regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, religion or union loyalty of his peers.

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Part 3

RIGHTS OF STEWARDS

By ED EMMERT

VA RLCA State Steward

The local steward is the elected representative of the rural carriers at the specified office where certified. By virtue of their position, the local steward is guaranteed certain rights and privileges in the performance of their duties. The authority of the National Constitution and Bylaws and the NRLCA/USPS National Agreement give a basis for operations at the local office.

Every local steward may expect the following rights:

- The right to investigate a complaint to determine if a grievable situation actually exists. Whenever it is necessary to leave the work area to investigate and adjust complaints or grievances, the steward shall request permission from the immediate supervisor. Such request shall not be unreasonably denied.
- In the event the duties require the steward to leave the work area and enter another area within the post office, the steward must also receive permission from the supervisor from the other area the steward wishes to enter. Such request shall not be unreasonably denied.
- The right to interview the grievant, employees, supervisors and witnesses during work hours. Such request shall not be unreasonably denied.
- The right of access, through the appropriate supervisor, to review files, documents and other records necessary for processing a grievance or to determine if a grievance exists.

- The right to be present at an interrogation by the Inspection Service of an employee if requested by that employee.

Federal Labor Law grants certain rights to stewards in the performance of their duties.

- The right to meet as an equal with management without fear of reprisal for union activity or what is said while in "protected status."
- The right to bargain and/or negotiate with management in good faith on issues.
- Management cannot assign extraordinary duties or impose extraordinary requirements on a steward because of being a union representative or as reprisal for union activity.
- The rights of the local steward often extend beyond the written guidelines. Working closely with management to resolve complaints, grievances and problems often aids in establishing a professional atmosphere that produces professional results. In those locations where a more hostile work environment is present, the local steward should wisely demonstrate a more professional attitude thereby assuring quality due process for any grievant and a greater probability of success.

Part 4

BENEFITS OF BEING A LOCAL STEWARD

YOU can be the most important person in the steward system!

Of all the union persons who may have title to some position or other function, none has more duty, responsibility and importance than the local steward.

The elected local steward can gain the benefits of:

- The opportunity to interact effectively with all craft employees at the office where certified as a representative of the NRLCA.
- The challenge and the privilege of working with management to resolve issues that may arise from time to time.
- A network of stewards from whom you may interact for assistance, tutoring and guidance.
- Direct access to information, manuals, computer discs and handbooks to assist you in your work as steward.
- The opportunity to gain experience which may lay the basis for future aspirations of work within the union structure or even officer positions.
- Helping those less informed on union membership and the defined availability of the local steward.
- Gaining a wealth of information and knowledge through training.
- Knowing the satisfaction of having represented a fellow rural carrier successfully in the grievance procedure.
- Building unity among the craft and promoting the NRLCA.
- Helping to establish sound and proven union activity to improve craft recognition and acceptance.

The local steward who continues in his position generally learns that respect, authority, trust and even dependency rest on him/her. The longevity in the position will increase all of these important characteristics of a successful steward.

Part 5

SUMMARY

To become a steward, a rural carrier must be a member of the NRLCA. Mandatory local steward elections will be conducted in the month of July every fourth year beginning in 2004. The term will be for four years. A local steward may be re-elected to the position. An election call will be announced by the NRLCA.

NRLCA Form 10, Application for Steward Certification, will be made available prior to the election.

A majority vote of those NRLCA members voting is required for election. The number of authorized stewards shall be in accordance with the formula as set forth in the National Agreement. When there is more than one local steward at an installation, one shall be selected by the NRLCA members of said office as chief steward.

An election for local steward shall not be held sooner than the four year mandatory election unless the position becomes vacant, the incumbent local steward retires, or a petition requesting replacement of the steward is signed by a majority of the NRLCA members of said office and sent to the state steward for approval.

Each state has a steward structure to help local stewards. This network of local, area, assistant and state stewards combines to offer resources and guidance. The local steward:

- Is the most important person in the system at the office of certification.
- Knows the circumstances, the personalities, the office layout, and the office procedures, past practices, conflicts and most everything work related.
- Is the expert on the scene locally.
- Cannot be replaced with someone from outside the office and get the same results.

Local stewards are provided a wealth of information and tools to do the job. The initial certification training is only the beginning but is very thorough. However, the "nuts and bolts" of hands-on activity is where the steward gets the best training. The servitude of a local steward to his peers can be a stepping stone to greater things in the NRLCA.

The accomplishments are not always measured totally on the win/lose record, but on the faithfulness and dedicated representation given to every grievant. The commitment to be a local steward has its personal rewards. Each and every time the steward represents one rural carrier, that steward is also representing the NRLCA and the state association.

A LOCAL STEWARD IN

EVERY OFFICE

What a dynamic challenge! The association is depending on you to take the necessary steps to fulfill this hope for the future. We solicit your help, your encouragement and your action to present your peers with someone they can depend on at their own office and call them "my local steward." For additional information, contact any steward or a state board member.

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