

The Health Benefit Plan seminar



**Stephanie
Stewart**

More than 60 years ago at the NALC's 43rd national convention in Denver, CO, the position of health benefits representative (HBR) was established for branches. The year was 1962 and the NALC president was Jerome J. Keating from Minneapolis, MN.

Although history can sometimes get blurry, I must assume that our past leaders strategically timed this action with the Plan's entry into the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program in the early '60s. The action positively affected the NALC Health Benefit Plan (HBP) for years afterward and provided a foundation through all levels of the NALC to promote our

HBP—the Plan built by letter carriers for letter carriers.

As written in the NALC's *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches*, Article 4, Sec. 1, the officers of the branch shall include a health benefits representative. The HBR shall be elected for a term of one, two or three years, and is required to perform such duties as the *Constitution* and laws of the HBP outline. In addition, the person elected or appointed to office as the HBR must be a member of the NALC Health Benefit Plan. This can be found in the *Constitution of the National Association of Letter Carriers Health Benefit Plan*, under Article 4, Sec. 3.

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In the years that followed the 1962 convention, enrollment in the Plan soared and a training session for HBRs was first held in 1973 at the Sheraton Inn International Conference Center in Reston, VA. Unfortunately, I don't have a lot of details about that training experience, but I do know that it included a tour of the Reston HBP office and was noted as a success.

Two years later in 1975, the first official HBR seminar was hosted in Chicago at the O'Hare Inn. According to the information that could be found, the O'Hare Inn was located on Mannheim Road just outside of O'Hare airport and boasted guestrooms, a pool, convention facilities and meeting rooms to accommodate the classroom needs. This seminar was the beginning of our national training for HBRs and served as a kick-off to so much more.

Six decades after we created the role of HBR, it's time we revamp the HBR seminar and renew our focus. Together, we need to explore the role of the HBR and recognize the impact HBRs can have. Although we have many struggles and issues to address on the workroom floor, one thing I know that also ranks high on the list of what's important to letter carriers is health care.

In 1950, the NALC established a small health plan for its members. Today, that small health plan has grown into the third largest fee-for-service plan in the FEHB program, thanks in part to the hard work and dedication of the HBRs. Electing committed HBRs is an important first step, but giving them the appropriate training and support is also essential.

From Oct. 15-18, the NALC Health Benefit Plan will host our biennial Health Benefit Plan seminar at the Tropicana Las Vegas. I hope every branch will consider sending a representative, as I believe this will be our best event yet, and I know they will obtain a wealth of information.

On Sunday, the first day of the event, we will kick off with registration and a health fair focusing on “whole health.” Directly afterward, a welcome reception will be held where attendees can mingle with old friends and meet new ones. Beginning early Monday morning, we will have a packed agenda through Wednesday, when we'll close out the seminar with a poolside reception, which represents a special thank-you to our HBRs.

In previous years, the Health Benefit Plan seminar focused on educating HBRs on the Plan's benefits and on what would be new for the coming year. Although we will continue this legacy in a new format, the experience will be very different as we shift the focus of the seminar to the role of the HBR.

It is my hope that this year's seminar will inspire each attendee to take the information back to the local branches and continue the good work of helping letter carriers. Highlights will include a variety of classroom topics, special speakers, panel discussions and a question-and-answer booth to assist attendees.

As stated above, many years ago our union leadership had a vision when they created the elected position of HBR, and that vision had a purpose. This seminar is our opportunity to review the commitment and renew our dedication to that purpose.

So, please join us in Las Vegas for another great seminar experience.