

# WI RLC A NEWS

## SPECIAL CONTRACT EDITION WISCONSIN

### RURAL LETTERS CARRIERS ASSOCIATION



At a special board meeting held on Dec. 29 the board discussed various topics including the proposed contract and some of the issues associated with it if it is ratified. Count training being the most immediate concern. The mail count would run for 24 days starting Feb. 17 - March

17. This would be an opt in count with the opt in period running from Dec. 29, 2006 through Jan. 12, 2007 for all regular rural routes. All auxiliary routes as of Feb. 3 as well as vacant regular routes as of Jan. 12 and any auxiliary routes converted to regular status between Jan 13 and Feb. 3 would be counted. Pre-count conferences must be completed by Feb. 12. In order to complete count training prior to pre-count conference it was necessary to set the schedule of count trainings prior to knowing if the contract was ratified or not. We are also hoping to schedule some joint count training with management to address any differences before the actual count. The board looked at the proposed contract and has some concerns on issues noted in this newsletter. The board strongly encourages all voting members to study the proposed contract and also to attend the ratification meeting Jan. 20 in Madison to get clarification on any issues in question. Once you have looked at the whole contract and weighed the pro's and con's, please cast an informed vote!

The following mail count trainings have been scheduled.

Jan 18<sup>th</sup>

Chippewa Falls  
Fond du Lac  
6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Avalon Hotel & Conf.  
Holiday Inn

Jan 23<sup>rd</sup>

Wausau  
La Crosse  
6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Howard Johnson  
La Crosse Post Office

Jan 25<sup>th</sup>

Milwaukee  
Reedsburg  
6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Tanner Paull  
Voyageur Inn

Jan 28<sup>th</sup>

Hayward  
12:00 noon to 3 p.m.  
Green Bay  
1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Comfort Inn  
Best Western Motel

**Although we have scheduled mail count trainings it is important to remember that the contract has NOT been ratified at this time. How you vote on this contract will have a lasting effect on you and your fellow Rural Carriers.**

## **Can't Make the Jan 20<sup>th</sup> Ratification Meeting?**

The **Minnesota** ratification meeting will be on Jan 21 at the S. St Paul Hotel & Conference Center, 701 Concord St. South, St Paul. Located just off of I-494, take the Concord exit and the hotel can be seen from the exit. The meeting starts at 9:45 a.m. with registration starting at 9:15. Union ID required (pp 26 check stub). The meeting will start with a Q&A from the floor as the MN people have not received a schedule from Jeanette Dwyer yet. Lunch is available at the hotel for \$9.95 plus the dreaded sales and service tax which totals 25.5%. That will include sandwich, chips, apple or orange, cookie and soda. There are a few fast food restaurants around. Call Darlene for meal reservations @ 320-836-2334.

The **Illinois** people are having a meeting on Sunday Jan 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at the Rockford Holiday Inn, I-90 and State Rd 20, 7550 East State St. Rockford IL. Meeting is from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Information given out at this meeting will be based on National Officer Don Cantriel's presentation at the Jan 13<sup>th</sup> meeting in Urbana. IL.

The Wisconsin State Board and State Steward held a special board meeting on December 29, 2006 in Wisconsin Dells. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the tentative contract proposal and how we as a board would react. **We have identified several areas of concern with the proposed contract as presented and urge you to consider these factors when casting your ballot.** We encourage all members to carefully read the proposed contract and to attend the contract information meeting that will be held in Madison on January 20<sup>th</sup> prior to returning their ballot so that they may cast an informed vote.

**1.2% Wage increase**

We have noted that it appears that the 1.2% wage increase that has been offered to the NRLCA amounts to less of an increase than has been offered to both the APWU and the Mail Handlers.

The current annual salaries for employees working 40 hours at top step of wage scale are:

Rural Carrier	\$47,404
APWU Grade 5	\$48,849
Mail Handler Grade 5	\$46,956

The NRLCA has been offered a 1.2% increase each year based on the current salary for the next 4 years. These increases will total \$2,276 for a 40-hour route at step 12 over the next four years.

The APWU has been offered a 1.3% increase effective November 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, a one level upgrade in February of 2008 and a 1.2% increase in November of 2009. The one level upgrade brings the base yearly salary for a top step 40-hour clerk to \$49,900. The 1.3 and 1.2% increases amount to an increase of \$1,247.50. In 2007 and 2008 the APWU would receive no basic salary increase. The total increases over the 4 years of the contract will equal approximately \$2,298.50 for a grade 5 APWU member at the top of the wage scale.

The Mail handlers have been offered a five-year contract with a 1.2% increase each year plus an additional .6% increase in February of 2008. There will be an additional step added to the top of the mail han-

dlers pay chart that adds an additional \$312 to their top salary. The total for all these increases for a level 5 mail handler at the top step of the pay charts for at least 24 weeks will total \$3,431 for 5 years. In the final year of the agreement they receive \$567 so the total increase they will receive during the first 4 years will be \$2,864.

At the end of the 4 years the annual salaries for employees working 40 hours at the top of the wage scale will be:

Rural Carrier	\$49,680
APWU Grade 5	\$51,147.50
Mail Handler Grade 5	\$49,820

You will note that the APWU stays significantly ahead of the NRLCA in wages and that the mailhandlers who are currently paid less than Rural Carriers will be receiving more. All three unions will also

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continue to receive COLA which will increase their annual salaries proportionately. All of the above information was obtained from the unions respective web sites.

- NRLCA [www.nrlca.org](http://www.nrlca.org)
- APWU [www.apwu.org](http://www.apwu.org)
- NPMHU [www.npmhu.org](http://www.npmhu.org)

**Health Insurance Premium Increase**

Due to the various plans available and the differing premiums this is a complex issue. I'll try to simplify it by concentrating on the Rural Carrier Benefit family plan. The maximum that the Postal Service pays for any plan determined by what is referred to as weighted average bi-weekly premium multiplied by 85%. In a nutshell the weighted average bi-weekly premium is the total premiums for all subscribers to all health plans divided by the total number of subscribers. For 2007 the weighted average bi-weekly premium is \$447.07, 85% of that is \$380.01. If the total bi-weekly premium is more than \$447.07 the employee is responsible for 100% of the excess. For 2007 the total rural carrier benefit family plan premium is \$468.29. The postal service pays 85% of \$447.05 or \$380.01, the employee's share is \$88.28. A one percent increase for people covered under this

plan for 2007 would amount to \$4.47/payperiod X 26 pay periods for a total of increase of \$116.22 for the year. If health care premiums were to stay the same for the next 4 years the additional cost to the employee would be \$464.88. As we all know health share costs are increasing. Below are the increases to the rural carrier health family plan and the Postal services share since 2003.

Year	Total Premium	Percent Increase	Employer Paid	Percent Increase
2003	366.60		294.70	
2004	406.82	10.97	327.12	11.00
2005	424.39	4.32	352.08	7.63
2006	459.11	8.18	373.15	5.98
2007	468.29	2.00	380.01	1.84

From the above chart it would appear to be reasonable to assume at least a 5% increase in health care premiums. If we assume a 5% increase in premiums the additional 1% per year would increase the employees share of the Rural Carrier Benefit Family plan by the following amount for each of the years of the proposed contract:

2008	\$122..05	1%
2009	\$256.31	2%
2010	\$403.68	3%
2011	\$565.15	4%

In the last year of our contract, the 1.2% salary increase of \$569 could be very close to what the additional 4% will add to the employees share of health insurance in the proposed contract for that year. Most other plans will show a similar increase. You can find what your current plans total premium is by going to

[www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov).

### Changes in Standards

The tentative contract proposal includes two time standard changes. The first would eliminate individual mark-up credit for items like no mail receptacle and no such number. The second change is a reduction of the change of address credit from 2 minutes to 15 seconds. The postal services position is that with the introduction of PARS we are only required to place a yellow sticker on the 3982. What it appears was not taken into account is duties like verifying the address and correcting mistakes. There is also no al-

lowance for employee generated change of addresses such as “moved left no address.” These two standard changes could have a profound effect on routes that have high percentages of address changes. We realize that the Postal Service could make these changes unilaterally, however by ratifying the proposed contract, we would give up the right of the union to challenge these changes. The WIRLCA State board feels that changes of this type should not be accepted without the parties conducting time-studies to determine what a fair time standard would be.

### EMA

As of January 6th rural carriers will be paid 48 cents/mile for using their vehicle on the route. Any postal employee using their personal vehicle for Postal Service business other than rural carriers on the route will receive 48 1/2 cents/mile reimbursement. To our knowledge this is the first time situation has occurred. Postal employees engaged in “normal” driving will be reimbursed more/mile than a rural carrier using their personal vehicle to deliver mail. If the proposed contract is passed we question whether the increase in EMA will be enough to overcome this imbalance over the course of the next four years. We also note that there is no provision to increase the EMA rural carriers receive after situations such as the rapid increase in fuel prices experienced after the Katrina crisis in 2005. It was noted that the Postal Service did nothing to help individual rural carriers with increased fuel prices after the hurricane, instead holding us to the contract as signed. We do see the inclusion of 15,000 additional Postal Service provided right hand drive vehicles as a positive change.

### Relief Carrier Provisions

The biggest change with relief carriers appears the provision that pays new hires actual time for the first five pay periods. It was noted that this provision does not help relief carriers who are currently on the roles at all. This does appear to be a positive change however it would seem to be at least as much of a benefit for the Postal Service as for any current union member since it should help with the retention of new relief carriers and the corresponding high cost of training new hires.

We felt very few existing relief carriers would benefit from being paid actual time for serving a route they have not served on for 12 months or more.

WI RLCA Lois Graper—Editor  
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**IMPORTANT  
CONTRACT  
INFORMATION  
ENCLOSED**

**Pre-sort  
Non-profit  
First Class  
US Postage Paid  
Permit #4  
Brillion, WI**

**The WIRLCA State board and State Steward have many concerns with this proposed contract.** If we ratify this contract we will be giving a major concession by agreeing to pay an additional 4% towards our health insurance costs. Both the APWU and the NPMHU have this provision in their proposed contracts as well. In the case of the APWU the concession has been offset by gains that they have made in the area of job protection. The Mail-handlers have been offered nearly \$600 more in salary increases than Rural Carriers have in our tentative agreement. The additional 5 ½ cents EMA can hardly be seen as a gain since at best it appears that this will allow rural carriers to stay even with the increased cost of providing a vehicle for their routes. At worst we may still lose ground to increased vehicle costs. The additional EMA will also mean nothing to the rural carriers assigned to the 20,000+ routes that now have Postal Service provided LLV's. It is the opinion of the WIRLCA state board that there is little in the proposed contract to offset the additional insurance costs imposed by it. From what has been presented to this point it is difficult to see how anyone could describe this as an "excellent" contract.

By now you should have received your copy of the tentative contract, please read through it carefully. We strongly suggest that you attend the contract meeting in Madison where National Committeeman Jeanette Dwyer will explain the contract.

Six and one half years ago history was made when the delegates to the National Convention in Madison gave us the right to vote on our contracts through "One Member, One Vote." Your State board and State Steward encourage you to take advantage of the opportunity those delegates have given us to take control of your destiny and cast an informed vote.

**Your WIRLCA State Board and State Steward.**