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March 2026

Queen City Letter Carriers - NALC Branch 43 News & Views

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Ted Thompson
President

From the President's Desk

I took part in a nation-wide Branch President meeting with National President Brian Renfroe in which he called for all branches to rally in a nation-wide day of action calling on the Postal Service to offer a fair contract. February 22nd was chosen as it was the first Sunday prior to the opening of national contract negotiations with the Postal Service. Branch President's had a week to decide whether to hold a rally or not. I selected Branch 43 to participate in case our members wanted to. However, at the February membership meeting, Branch 43 members voted not to hold a local rally and instead join Dayton Branch 182. In light of the cold and snow, on February 22nd, I, and other branch members joined Dayton in their rally for a fair contract (page 4). During this rally, some fair contract details were shared (ad on page 5).

The question remains, what is a fair contract. What is fair to one may not be to another. Our last contract was voted down 63,680 to 26,304. Therefore, beginning last year President Renfroe changed course and created a collective bargaining committee of rank and file members of various subcategories to share their opinions on what a fair contract is and

what their main priorities are. Branch 43 officer and steward Corey Isham (page 8) was thankfully, but rightfully, selected to take part in this national committee. Additionally, during the national RAP session, elements of transparency were shared with all participants on contract proposals. On February 25th, contract negotiations with the NALC and the Postal Service formally opened. President Renfroe's official opening remarks can be found on YouTube or nalc.org. President Renfroe hit on four main points: an all-career workforce, higher wages at all steps of the pay scale, reduction in time to reach top step, and contract compliance.

President Renfroe reiterated that the CCA position no longer serves our craft, as evident here in Cincinnati where we have an all-career model. President Renfroe addressed while starting pay in "undoubtedly low," that pay must be addressed at all steps. Likewise, he stated, "Similarly, the time to reach top step of our pay scale must be reduced." Lastly, President Renfroe stated it was simply disrespectful to our members and our union the manner in which the Postal Service violates our contract with impunity. While I am not part of national negotiations, I will provide updates as I receive them. In April, I will be attending a Committee of Presidents (COP) meeting in which President Renfroe is expected to address the committee and

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NEWS & VIEWS

Volume 137, Number 1
Published Monthly by:
Queen City Letter Carriers
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Cincinnati, Ohio 45240

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& David Utz

EDITOR'S (Ted Thompson) NOTES
Branch 43 members are encouraged to
send articles to the *News & Views*. Items
of interest about your station, current
events, etc. are welcome. The following
guidelines apply:

- (1) We may edit your article for grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.
- (2) If it should prove necessary to edit an article for space or coherence, every effort will be made to preserve the substance and intent of the article.
- (3) Unsigned articles will not be printed. Letters, criticism and suggestions for improving the *News & Views* are also welcome. If your letter is not intended for publication, please state so. Letters held to 150 words are less likely to be edited.
- (4) Articles must arrive at the Branch office by the 15th in order to make the next month's issue. Digital format is preferred. Send items to: thompson@branch43.org

Printed in House



Corey Isham
Formal A Rep

Steward's Corner

From January 12 through January 16, I had the opportunity to serve on the Rank and File Committee for the upcoming national contract. Approximately 30 members from across the country participated, divided into three groups: newer members, contract enforcers, and branch leaders. I served in the contract enforcers group, which also included several branch leaders.

Our group included representatives from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Portland, Oregon, among others. The experience provided a valuable opportunity to compare and contrast the concerns of members from Rochester, New York, with those in Rock Island, Illinois. While many issues were discussed, one topic in particular stood out to me. The ongoing debate surrounding cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), sometimes referred to as the "diet COLA." It is well known that letter carriers below Step P do not receive full COLA adjustments. This has been a consistent concern voiced by members across the country. Comparisons are often made to the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), whose members receive full COLA at every step. On social media, it is not uncommon to see comments suggesting that the APWU offers better compensation as a result. As part of my committee assignment, I was tasked with researching other crafts' national agreements. In do-

ing so, I took the opportunity to review the APWU pay scale more closely. According to the APWU website, under its COLA subsection, the union states that *»it.is.the.only.postal.union.that.has.fought.for.and.won.full.COLA.benefits;* To better understand how this compares in practice, I reviewed the wage structures in detail and applied them to my own career timeline as an example. I was hired in November 2016 as a CCA and converted to career status on February 3, 2018. I am currently a Step J carrier and will advance to Step K in Pay Period 26.

If I were a clerk under the APWU pay scale, I would be approximately two steps away from reaching maximum pay. On the surface, that sounds appealing, most employees understandably want to reach top step as quickly as possible. However, the broader wage structure deserves closer examination. The APWU operates under a true two-tier wage system. Clerks hired prior to May 23, 2011, progress to a higher maximum step than those hired after that date. For example:

A Grade 6 clerk after May 23, 2011 (generally equivalent to a city carrier) at top step earns \$75,078.

A Grade 7 clerk after May 23, 2011 (comparable to a carrier technician) at top step earns \$76,626.

By comparison:

A top-step city carrier (Step P) currently earns \$83,226.

A top-step carrier technician earns \$84,974.

This represents an annual difference of approximately \$8,000 to \$8,300 in favor of letter carriers at top step. Looking at long-term earnings provides even greater context, this was

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Pat Dougherty
Vice President

From the Vice President

Your PDI Is Your Day in Court: Why Every NALC Member Must Take It Seriously.

As letter carriers and proud members of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), we rely on our union to enforce the contract, protect our rights, and defend us when management issues discipline. But there is one critical moment when the strength of your defense begins, and it does not start at arbitration. It starts in the Pre-Disciplinary Interview (PDI). Too often, carriers treat the PDI as a formality. Some believe discipline has already been decided. Others assume, “The union will get me out of it.” And still others respond with statements like: “I don’t remember.” “It doesn’t matter; you’re going to issue discipline anyway.” “The union will fix it.” These responses do not help your case. In fact, they can seriously harm it. The PDI is your day in court. It is your opportunity to tell your side of the story while the facts are fresh and before discipline is issued. What you say, or fail to say, can determine whether the union can successfully defend you at Informal/Formal Step A, Step B, or even in arbitration. This article is not meant to criticize. It is meant to educate and empower. The union can only defend you with the information you provide. A strong defense begins with a strong PDI.

Under our collective bargaining agreement between the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) and the United States Postal Service (USPS), discipline must be issued for just cause. Management is required to conduct a fair and thorough investigation before issuing discipline. The PDI is a key part of that investigation. That interview is not just management gathering information, it is your opportunity to provide context, present mitigating circumstances, correct inaccuracies, preserve your memory of events, and build the foundation for a contractual defense. When cases go to arbitration, arbitrators closely exam-

ine what was said in the original PDI. They look at whether the carrier was given a fair chance to respond and what that response was. If your PDI contains vague, dismissive, or incomplete answers, that record follows you all the way to arbitration.

One of the most common and most damaging responses carriers give is: “I don’t remember.” Sometimes that is honest. Management may ask about an attendance date from six months ago or longer. No one expects you to have perfect recall of every day you worked. But simply stating “I don’t remember” and leaving it at that can hurt your case. Instead, if you genuinely cannot recall details, a better response would be: “I do not recall at this moment, but I can review my notes and provide a detailed written statement explaining why I was absent on that date.” This does several important things. It shows you are not being evasive. It demonstrates willingness to cooperate. It preserves your credibility. It gives the union something to work with. If you later provide documentation, medical notes, personal records, or a detailed explanation, that information becomes part of the record. That can make the difference between discipline being upheld or overturned.

Statements such as: “You’re going to discipline me anyway.” “It doesn’t matter what I say.” “The union will get me out of it.” These responses send the wrong message to management and worse, they create a damaging written record. When those statements appear in the PDI summary, management will argue that the carrier did not dispute the facts, showed no remorse, took no responsibility, and had no explanation. At arbitration, those statements can be portrayed as indifference or insubordination. An arbitrator who reads those words will not see frustration; they will see a carrier who did not take the process seriously. And once that record exists, it cannot be undone.

This is one of the most critical points every member must understand: You cannot go into arbitration and provide a completely different explanation than what you gave during your PDI. If man-

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FAIR CONTRACT RALLY - DAYTON, OHIO





STAND UNITED WITH CINCINNATI BRANCH 43 LETTER CARRIERS

WE DEMAND A FAIR CONTRACT NOW

The 295,000 active and retired members of the National Association of Letter Carriers are calling for a **fair contract now!**

LETTER CARRIERS' WORK IS HARDER THAN EVER, AND WE DESERVE HIGHER PAY:

- We work **long hours in all elements and conditions.**
- There are growing safety concerns on the job, including physical threats and assaults.
- Every year, our jobs become more physical. We **handle more parcels than ever before**, carrying heavy loads to every home and business.
- Our work is **more than delivering the mail.** We know our customers and are often the first to notice something is wrong.

FIRST-CLASS SERVICE DESERVES FIRST-CLASS PAY:

- The Postal Service, and every American, depends on **letter carriers to uphold the agency's universal service obligation.**
- We deliver essential items, like pension checks and prescriptions, to every address nearly every day.
- Without our work, **delivery of 376 million pieces of mail and packages to nearly 169 million delivery points every day nationwide** is not guaranteed.
- Our work is **vital to the economy** as we support small businesses across the country.

STAFFING SHORTAGES AND HIGH TURNOVER RATES THREATEN RELIABLE SERVICE:

- Most carriers start out as non-career, meaning they earn less money and have fewer benefits, even though they do the same work.
- **55 percent of non-career letter carriers leave the job within the first year.**
- High letter carrier retention is important for the consistent, quality and reliable service that Americans count on.

LETTER CARRIERS DESERVE A FAIR CONTRACT. WHAT THIS MEANS:

- **Higher pay**, including higher starting wages.
- Shorter time to reach the top of the pay scale.
- **An all-career workforce**, with full benefits for every letter carrier from the start.
- An increased uniform allowance.
- A fair workroom floor where **postal management holds up its end of the bargain.**

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT MUST STOP IMMEDIATELY

Steward Corner cont.

explained to me by a credible source. If a letter carrier and a clerk were hired on the same day and each worked 30 years, both would spend approximately 17 years at the top step. Over that period, the higher top-step salary for city carriers would result in approximately \$138,516 more in straight-time earnings than a clerk at Grade 6. For carrier technicians, the difference would be approximately \$141,916 compared to a Grade 7 clerk. These figures reflect straight-time hours only and do not account for overtime or other pay differentials. The purpose of sharing this is not to diminish the importance of full COLA adjustments, which are understandably valued by many members. Rather, it is to encourage informed discussion. Before drawing conclusions based on social media commentary, members should review the full pay structures and consider the broader financial picture. A full COLA at every step may sound appealing, but you should ask yourself. Is a full COLA at every step worth approximately \$140,000 (the 2026 estimate) for future members? I only discussed clerks after May 23rd, 2011, because every carrier, minus a mitigating circumstance, hired prior to that date, receives a full COLA. For those carriers hired prior to May 23, 2011, it is important to examine those figures as well. According to the American Postal Workers Union pay chart, a maxed-out clerk hired before that date earns \$77,214 at Grade 6 and \$78,569 at Grade 7. These salaries remain significantly below the top-step earnings of a maxed-out letter carrier. This comparison reinforces an important point in the broader wage discussion, while step progression and COLA structure are important considerations, the value of the top step should not be overlooked. During my time with my committee, Step P was referred to me as a “legacy step.” It represents the point at which the letter carrier’s compensation reflects the highest percentage value of the position. In practical terms, it is where the work of a career letter carrier is compensated at its fullest contractual rate.

For many members, Step P becomes the most financially significant phase of their career. It is typically the longest period spent at any single step and represents the years when retirement

contributions, high-three salary calculations, and overall lifetime earnings are most impacted. When evaluating contract structures, it is essential to consider not only how quickly employees reach the top but also the value of the top itself. The long-term financial implications of top-step compensation should not be taken for granted.

What Is Going On With the Bid Sheet?

I want to briefly address the ongoing issues with the Cincinnati Installation Bid Sheet process. Unfortunately, Cincinnati Management has repeatedly failed to properly administer the bid sheet in accordance with Article 41 and our Local Agreement. While this problem has existed for some time, I will reference a few recent examples to illustrate the pattern and explain how the Branch has responded.

On October 30, 2023, a citywide grievance was assigned to Dave Utz after a bid sheet that was scheduled to be awarded on November 4 was not awarded until November 18. As a result of that violation, 36 successful bidders received a remedy of \$375.00 each.

On May 23, 2025, I was assigned a citywide grievance after multiple routes were omitted from the bid sheet. That grievance resulted in 22 successful bidders receiving \$400.00 each, and the Branch receiving \$250.00 to offset the repeated expenses incurred in filing these grievances. Then, on November 7, 2025, I was again assigned to file a grievance because Management failed to issue a November bid sheet altogether. During the Step A meeting, Management’s representative asked that we reduce our requested remedy.

It is important to understand the purpose of a remedy. A remedy is designed to make letter carriers whole and, equally important, to ensure future contractual compliance. The Cincinnati Installation has demonstrated through repeated violations that we cannot rely on voluntary compliance simply because Article 41 and our Local Agreement require it. As a result, meaningful remedies have been necessary to enforce the contract.

For perspective, the \$375.00 remedy

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Vice President cont.

agement asks, “Why were you absent on March 3rd?” and you say, “I don’t know,” but later at arbitration you testify, “I was at the emergency room with my child,” management will argue that you had the opportunity to provide that information and failed to mention it. They will question your credibility. Arbitrators place heavy weight on consistency. A changed story weakens your case and makes it harder for the union to defend you effectively. Your PDI is the time to provide your explanation—not nine months later in arbitration.

When discipline is issued, your steward or advocate reviews the case file. That file always includes the PDI notes, management questions, your answers, supporting documentation, and the discipline letter of charges. If your answers are detailed, thoughtful, and supported by facts, the union can argue lack of just cause, mitigating circumstances, inconsistent enforcement, procedural violations, and proportionality of discipline. But if your answers are dismissive or incomplete, the union’s hands are tied. We cannot create facts that were never provided. We cannot introduce explanations that were never mentioned. We cannot rewrite the PDI after the fact. A strong defense begins with you. There are important reminders every member should keep in mind when called into a PDI. First, request union representation. You have the right to representation, and your steward can help clarify questions and ensure the process is fair. Second, listen carefully to each question and make sure you understand what is being asked before responding. Third, be honest and accurate. Never lie. Dishonesty will destroy your credibility and can lead to more severe discipline than the original issue. Fourth, avoid emotional or defiant statements. Frustration is natural, but sarcasm, hostility, or defeatist comments can damage your case. Fifth, provide context and mitigation. If you were dealing with illness, family emergencies, workload issues, safety concerns, or prior communication with management, say so. Sixth, if you do not recall something, say so properly: “I do not recall at this moment, but I will review my records and provide a written statement.” Then follow through. Finally, review the PDI summary to ensure it accurately reflects what you said and re-

quest corrections if necessary.

We are seeing more cases go to arbitration, and arbitrators scrutinize the record closely. They expect a fair investigation, a meaningful opportunity for the employee to respond, and consistency between the PDI and later testimony. When carriers treat the PDI casually, management’s case becomes stronger. When carriers treat the PDI seriously, the union’s case becomes stronger. The difference often lies not in what management says, but in what the carrier says.

Being a member of the NALC means we stand together. The union fights for you, but you also have a responsibility to participate in your own defense. Taking your PDI seriously is not just about avoiding discipline. It is about protecting your record, protecting your livelihood, protecting your credibility, and strengthening your union’s ability to enforce the contract. Every case that goes to arbitration affects more than one carrier. Decisions can influence future cases. Strong, well-documented defenses protect the entire membership.

When management calls you into a PDI, remember this: That room is your courtroom. That interview is your testimony. That record is permanent. Do not assume the outcome is predetermined. Do not rely on the union to fix what was never explained. Do not let frustration silence your defense. Be prepared. Be thoughtful. Be honest. Be detailed. The union will stand with you every step of the way. But the strength of your defense begins with the words you choose during your PDI. Your PDI is your day in court. Make it count.

In Solidarity,
Pat Dougherty

President cont.

no doubt, bargaining will be part of the main discussion. Personally, I do not have faith that the NALC and USPS will come to a negotiated agreement and ultimately our contract will head to interest arbitration.

Fraternally,
Ted Thompson

CONTRACT ENFORCERS



Corey Isham - Groesbeck

Secretary Report



Burt Hughes
Secretary

First, I hope that by the time you're reading this, the snow is finally gone! We have an upcoming event for letter carriers — a Cornhole Tournament on June 14th at the Branch Hall. Mark your calendars and plan to join us! The entrance fee is \$25 per team. If you have moved, changed your phone number, or disconnected your home phone line, please make sure to update your information with us. Also, if you

have any questions about your membership, don't hesitate to reach out. Send your updated contact information or questions to branch43@branch43.org, and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

I also need your help locating some of our members. The contact information we currently have on file is not accurate. If you know any of the following individuals and can provide updated contact information so I can reach out to them, it would be greatly appreciated:

James Durham, Donald Clay, Andrew Filusch, John Fields, James Gerke, Thomas Rieskamp, Gary Volz, James Gaylor, Clifford Ritzi, Larry Yung, William Hemmerle, Andrew Camele, John Walker, Noah Mathias Jr., Chester Cox, William Stigler, Gilbert Bird, and George Wagner.

Thank you again for your assistance.

Building Update: We're waiting for warmer weather to complete a few projects. A flagpole has been generously donated to the union, and we also have a new parking lot light ready to be installed once the weather improves. Additionally, we will need volunteers to help with outdoor cleanup during our Spring Cleanup in April or May. We will announce the exact date soon.

Thank you for your time. I hope this information helps keep you informed about what's coming up!

Financial Secretary
Burt Hughes

SAVE THE DATE - DETAILS TBD



Sunday, June 14th

Steward Corner cont.

awarded to 36 grievant's totaled \$13,500.00 for a single bid sheet. With bid sheets projected to be posted nine times this year, Management is fully aware of the financial impact of continued non-compliance. If a \$13,500.00 remedy does not compel compliance, it is difficult to understand how a lesser remedy would accomplish that goal. On 1/16/2026, David Utz was assigned another city-wide grievance, which was settled that each successful bidder from the February bid sheet will receive a remedy of \$400.00, and due to an interpretative issue, payment to the branch again to offset the repeated expenses incurred in filing these grievances will be addressed in a later grievance.

The Branch remains committed to enforcing the contract and ensuring that members receive the bidding opportunities they are contractually entitled to.

AFL-CIO Update

Recently, Taylor Rehmet was elected to represent Texas Senate District 9. This is a significant victory for organized labor. Rehmet is a graduate of the Texas AFL-CIO Leadership Academy and serves as President of the Texas State Council of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM). Having a proven labor leader elected to public office reflects a

growing commitment by the AFL-CIO to support candidates who come directly from the labor movement. Simply put, no one is better positioned to represent working people than working people.

In other labor news, on April 18th, the Cincinnati AFL-CIO will host a tailgate event prior to the FC Cincinnati match against the Chicago Fire FC. The tailgate will take place at Washington Park, and discounted tickets for the match will be available. Additional details will be provided in next month's article.

In Solidarity,
Corey Isham



SAVE THE DATE - APRIL 18TH
AFL-CIO TALGATE FOR FC CINCINNATI

Motions made at the February Membership Meeting

To dispense with the roll call of Officers and reading of the previous months minutes. **Carried**

To send the President to the Committee of President's meeting on April 19th & 20th in Ponce, Puerto Rico to include wages, per diem, transportation, and hotel. **Carried**

That Branch 43 does not hold a Fair Contract Rally in Cincinnati on February 22nd. **Carried**

To pay the bills. **Carried**

To adjourn. **Carried**

Mike	Antone
Loyal	Brock
Paul	Burnhimer
Joseph	Dean
Mark	Dill
Gerald	Giesting
Leroy	Hardman
Greg	King
Curtis	Komala
Rhonda	Kuntz
Joe	Lee
David	McCaffrey
Michael	McGowan
Paul	Meyer
Jerry	Mielke
Dennis	Poe
Gregory	Propes
Karon	Remillard
Lois	Schuerman
Norbert	Schultz
Mark	Singer
David	Taylor
Timothy	Thompson
Mark	Wesseler
John	Westerman III
Timothy	Wiechman

March Retiree Birthdays

**February YOPC
Attendees**

- Deborah Bryant
- Liz Darby
- Sue Egbers
- Diana Enwright
- Art Holt
- Burt Hughes
- Dick Keller
- Ken Pflanz
- Angela Stone
- Robert Wilkinson

Join fellow retirees next month for sharing old times, playing cards and lunch

**Happy
Birthday**

**March
Gold Carders**

Gilbert	Bird
Carl	Bockman
Edward	Brown
Orville	Cupp
Dennis	Halcomb
Thomas	Marckesano
Albert	Matheus
Joseph	McGowan
Altha	McNeil
Kelse	Murphy
Donald	Nagel
Jack	O'Leary
Clifford	Ritzi
Thomas	Rouse
Robert	Stulz
Larry	Yung



- Clifford Brown**
- Harry Crofton II**
- Robert Gabbard**
- Robert Huelsman**
- Richard Newman**
- Charlies Shrack**
- Fred Ware**

**Join fellow retirees
for lunch**

**1:00 pm - 1st Monday
of each month**

April 6th

PeeWee's Place

**2325 Anderson Road
Crescent Springs, KY
41017**

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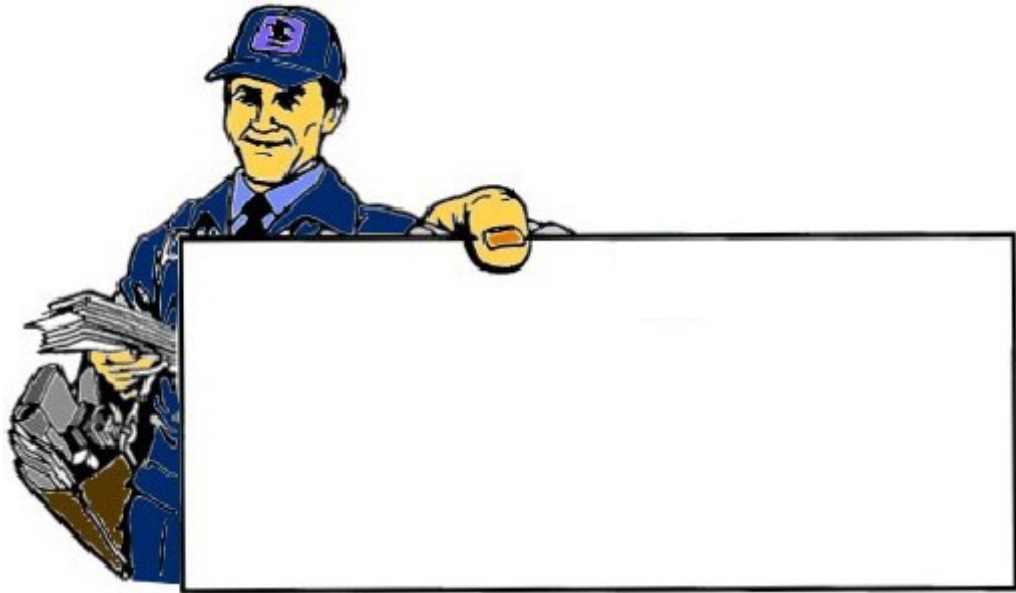
*Balance must be at least \$10,000 or greater to qualify. For loan balances below \$10,000 only the 90 day deferment will be offered. Member must qualify for the loan under normal underwriting guidelines. Minimum rate floor of this offer is 2.99% APR. Interest will accrue over the 90 day deferment period regardless of balance. Member must be able to provide verification of existing rate. Existing PFCU loans are excluded. This institution is not federally insured. **MEMBERS' ACCOUNTS ARE NOT INSURED OR GUARANTEED BY ANY GOVERNMENT OR GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED AGENCY**

Queen City Letter Carriers

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Cincinnati, Ohio 45240

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Upcoming Events

- Officers Meeting** - March 12th, 6:00 PM
- Delegate Meeting** - March 12th, 7:30 PM
- Branch Meeting** - March 12th, 7:30 PM
- Region 11 Rap Session** - March 14 - 16
- April YOPC** - Wednesday, April 1st
- FC Cincinnati Tailgate** - April 18th

