## Ooooh that smell! Can't you smell that smell

Lynyrd Skynyrd [Allen Collins/Ronnie Vanzant]

This is not an easy story to do, especially at this time of the year. It is something I have been working on for about 8 days now. I have vetted this story thoroughly, checking and rechecking sources. The story is solid and confirmed by unidentified official high level sources who asked to remain unidentified and who also asked me not to run the story (not becasue it isn't true, but becasue this is not information that is generally available).

It is my habit to cogitate and ruminate after important decisions or milestone events. Oftentimes, I will read and re-read the words and sure enough some very obvious things tend to pop out. Items that escape the cursory glance or things that seem to fit like a jigsaw with puzzle pieces from other puzzles. Two of those events have stuck in my mind because there are several items that alone seem innocent enough; but, together are very, very troubling. The events that have caused me to pause are as follows:

· The recent interest arbitration award seemed to devote a lot of attention to rural route consolidations, retreat rights, determination of excess carriers and general downsizing.

· Recent trends of employees on the rolls clearly show a downsizing in all crafts except rural delivery which has steadily increased over the last twenty years (see NJ Postal and Rural News Issue 8, November 19, 2007). The twenty year old delivery plan of reducing delivery employee office time to less than 20% of total time and making road time 80 % of total time is still ongoing.

· The Fletters arbitration highlighted a curious anomaly that clearly indicated problems with specific flat sorting equipment that was messing up USPS plans to automate flat sortation. Yes, they managed to escape a financial penalty for requiring rural carriers to do extra work, but the inherent problem is that the flat sorting machines were not working properly and it was endangering USPS automation plans. This is something USPS managed to camouflage from Arbitrator Eischen.

· USPS is proceeding with protocols for extreme reductions in processing hours both in the processing plants and also within local office units.

· USPS plans to actively support expanded contract delivery services much like they aggressively planned contract retail units in local supermarkets and retail outlets using non-postal employees. (see German Postal story with replacement minimum wage workers)

· USPS plans for consolidating processing operations and mail acceptance units and new aggressive pricing and marketing strategies with deep discounts for mailers who autmate the mail for USPS distribution.

· USPS has taken an aggressive approach initially, backed off and then maintained a two steps forward, 1 step back approach to introducing alternative retail, processing and delivery functions. What they did with the contract retail units, they are now following the same plan for contract delivery and post office and facility closings and consolidations.

· USPS has suspended plans for new vehicle purchases and is severely cutting back on replacing over-crowded facilities. An awful lot of money is going into the flat sortation deployments and it is being diverted from other programs that USPS has basically put on hold (much like the bettor at a casino who has been repeatedly losing and decides to pull the kids college funds, the Christmas club and vacation savings for one last desperation blowout play at the tables or in the slots).

All of these items have been on my mind and it seemed like they were adding up to something really big. So I made some telephone calls and touched bases with sources throughout USPS and I've stumbled onto something.

The USPS plans for flat sortation are much more elaborate and detailed then they have generally let on. There are some truly draconian measures coming down the pike that will affect every employee in a major way. USPS is gradually removing all management responsibility from local managers and even district level managers and staff and installing software protocols that based on volume, projected or actual, detail number of hours available for distribution among employees in each work unit. This is

really bad news for managers who are gradually being transformed into glorified clerks, with the area and headquarters calling the shots on nearly every decision. Managers are required to fill out dozens of reports that generate specific instructions that they must follow relative to staffing and control of employee complement. Management flexibility is being made obsolete so that nameless , faceless people who never carried mail or sorted mail in their lives will make all the decisions about sorting and delivering mail from a sterile, isolated location far away.
NOTE: Managers have as much to fear from an aggressive consolidation campaign as do craft employees. If all management functions are removed from local units, why should USPS continue to staff each local unit with managers? The answer; they won't. Through consolidations and changing units into branches, the number of postmasters and supervisors is going to be drastically reduced and "satelite" managers will be the new concept. USPS is not being completely candid even with their managers. The new Postal Service is going to be very lean, very lean and very mean and service will be a meaningless and obsolete anachronism.
The FSS deployment plans are so far advanced, much more so than unions and employees are being told, so that USPS has projections for how many routes will be consolidated, eliminated and downsized over an extended period of years into the future as more offices are scheduled for FSS deployment. USPS is aggressively planning on consolidations that will significantly impact both city and rural delivery. Very few people are talking about these plans and it is really difficult to piece them together, but the areas and districts are diligently working on physically reducing the number of routes through consolidations.
I am sure that when the officers of the NJRLCA sat down to pig out with USPS officials at the district and area levels, they were so intent on chewing their food that no one thought to ask how many routes USPS projected to consolidate when FSS deployment was underway and what the final projections were when FSS deployment was fully implemented. How many city carriers and how many rural carriers would lose their jobs as excess employees. They had the figures! Surely USPS officials at the districts and the areas who were so generous in feeding the starving union people, that they must have been equally candid and forthcoming in telling our Union people how many carriers would lose their jobs while our union representatives pigged out.
Enjoy the lump sums and maybe younger, less senior people should put some of it away for a rainy day. How many routes are going to disappear? Will it be every fourth route? Will it be every fifth route? Will it be every third route? There are a lot of lean years coming and rural carriers will be expected to do much more, but there will be less of us to do it. But don’t worry, at least our union representatives here in New Jersey will be well fed! Maybe if they hadn’t had their mouths full, they would have seen through the masquerade that USPS played for them. WE ARE JUST SO SCREWED! OUR UNION OFFICERS ARE EATING WHILE USPS IS PLANNING TO GET RID OF SO MANY OF OUR MEMBERS! It’s like they trampled us to get to the troughs to pig out.
Remember what I said on December 15, 2007 when the route consolidations start a year from now and employees are excessed. Remember also what your Union officers and stewards were doing while USPS was busy planning this all out. A year from now when it starts and three years or five years from now when a lot of people are getting hurt, remember that your union officers and stewards at least were well fed.
Even in South Jersey District with no FSS deployments scheduled in Phase 1, plans are already developed that forecast a number of route consolidations and the district people have a ball park figure of the number of routes they expect to be affected over the next several years. The pain comes first in Northern NJ and then in Central NJ Districts. No one will be spared a significant impact. Forever gone will be the images of Nero fiddling while Rome burned; ever after it will be New Jersey union officials pigging out on USPS food while employees lose their jobs.
I urge each of you to ask questions. Ask the bigwigs that are trooping through your office saying "No overtime", "No auxiliary assistance". Ask them about the plans for route consolidations. Ask them how

many routes? You will do far more than your union did.

written by John Amtsfield
email: Hierofont@comcast.net
website: rlc onliners google group

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