

The symbol of service

The letter carrier's uniform

When Americans think of the United States Postal Service, they think of their uniformed letter carrier. Letter carriers are the public face of one of the country's largest employers, representing the more than 500,000 employees of the USPS. That's what it means to put on the light-blue uniform with the USPS logo.

Uniforms serve several purposes. They provide immediate visual identification to the public, which makes the job safer when going down streets and up to houses all over America. And uniforms project a neat and professional appearance that customers associate with the outstanding service provided by letter carriers.

The NALC has negotiated an annual allowance with the Postal Service for all letter carriers to help pay for these uniforms. This allowance is defined in Article 26 of the National Agreement and is currently set at \$390 for all carriers, and it will increase each year of the 2011-2016 National Agreement to allow for increasing uniform costs. First-year career letter carriers are provided with an additional \$90, which increases for new hires each year as well.

While they both have \$390 to spend, the method of providing the allowance for purchasing uniforms differs for career city carriers and for city carrier assistants (CCAs). For career employees, the allowance comes in the form of a USPS credit card, which they can use to purchase uniform items from the approved vendors. CCAs are given a voucher that they can use to purchase uniforms through an approved uniform vendor. Once the CCA provides the voucher to the vendor, the vendor is paid by the USPS.

While Article 26 governs the amount of the uniform allowance for CCAs, the Questions and Answers 2011 USPS/NALC National Agreement document (M-01819) covers uniform allowances

that are provided to and used by CCAs (see Q-and-A's on page XX).

What to get first?

Ask veteran carriers and they'll tell you that uniform allowances, even the larger-than-normal first-year allowance, only go so far. To help, many branches collect gently used and unwanted uniform items from veteran and retired carriers and give them to new carriers as they join the union. That can help make the uniform allowance go a little further.

So what should you spend your first allowance on? To help you make an informed decision, *The Postal Record* reached out to branch presidents throughout the country to ask what advice they give to new carriers.

"Obviously out here it's shorts," Arizona Merged Branch 1902 President **Ron Resop** said, before adding that when he was carrying on a daily basis, he loved his pith helmet. "Something that protects your head from the sun. Make sure you buy a hat that covers your ears and the back of your neck."

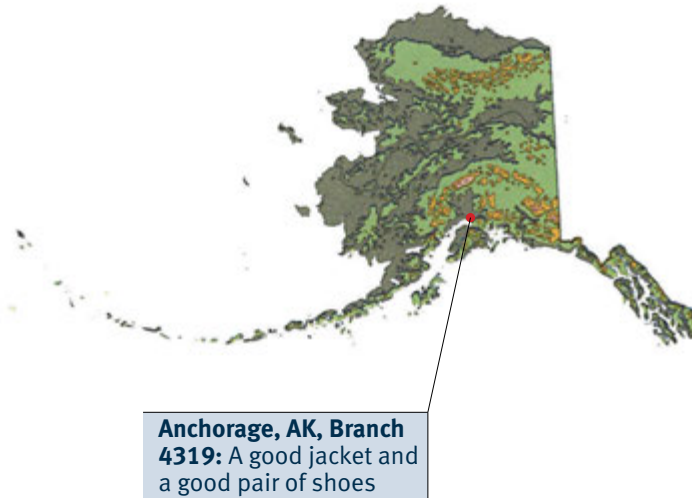
With an average of only three days of rain a year in his area of Arizona, he doesn't recommend rain gear but does recommend long-sleeved shirts to protect from UV radiation—and he recommends getting a lot of them. "The problem in Arizona is, you think you wouldn't be able to spend your clothing allowance, but you go through a lot of shirts a year," he said. "It's a dry heat, but you still sweat. When I was carrying, I'd go through a lot of shirts. They'd be good for about a month and then I'd be getting rid of them."

It's a different story in Eugene, OR, where they get more average annual rainfall than Portland, OR, or Seattle, WA.

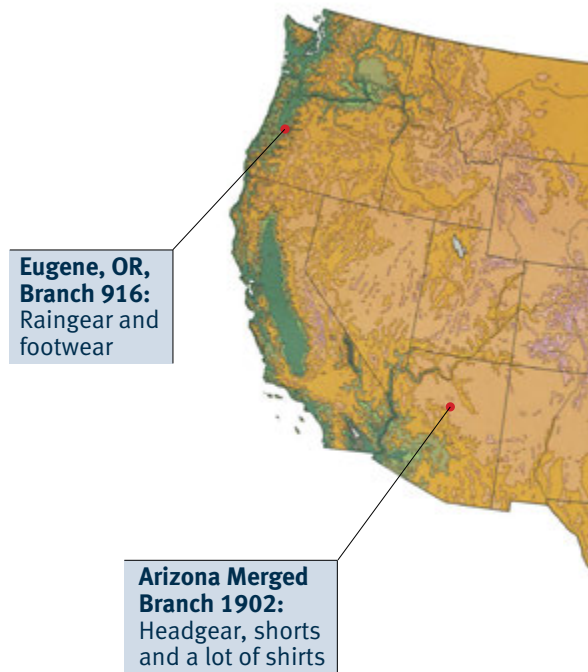
"Our big focus is on footwear and rain gear," Eugene Branch 916 President **Tom Gates** said. He liked the material



What to get first?



Anchorage, AK, Branch 4319: A good jacket and a good pair of shoes



Eugene, OR, Branch 916: Raingear and footwear

Arizona Merged Branch 1902: Headgear, shorts and a lot of shirts

on the newest rain gear products. “From my experience from 30 years on a straight walking route, I wouldn’t put on my rain gear but a half-dozen times per year. The old rain gear we had wouldn’t breathe. So by the time you had it on for any time at all, you were just as wet and more miserable.”

But carriers seem to be using the new gear a lot more because of its breathability, he said. He often saw carriers using the new rain gear along with a cape. “It works out well. Even with the rain gear on, you can have the cape over the bag and the mail. And then you still have your arms free to work in there.”

Moisture is a concern in Mobile, AL, where “the heat and humidity is the main issue,” Branch 469 President **Atrisha Looney** said. “The humidity takes quick tolls on the shirts.”

Her focus is on the core of the uniform first. “I would suggest on the first round of purchases, it be two pairs of pants, two shorts, two pairs of socks and the rest in shirts. Rain is a big issue, but for the first year they can get by borrowing rain gear.”

In Anchorage, AK, rain gear isn’t a priority, either. “Raincoats aren’t very popular up here,” Branch 4319 President **Jim Raymond** said.

“Here in Anchorage, it gets to 20, 30 below, here in town. But if you go up to Fairbanks, which is the northernmost city in the country to have city delivery, they’ll get temperatures of 30, 40 below when they’re out delivering.”

His recommendation for uniform allowance purchases: “a good jacket and a good pair of shoes.” He says that carriers in his city are buying a lot of the three-layer jacket systems, primarily getting the inner fleece and the outer shell, as well as insulated pants.

Finally, there is Honolulu, HI, where the temperature ranges from low 70s

Q-and-A’s

The following questions and answers were agreed upon between management and the union regarding CCA uniforms:

41. When does a CCA become eligible for a uniform allowance?

Upon completion of 90 work days or 120 calendar days of employment as a CCA, whichever comes first. CCAs who have previously satisfied the 90/120 day requirement as a transitional employee (with an appointment made after September 29, 2007), become eligible for a uniform allowance when they begin their first CCA appointment.

42. What defines the anniversary date for the purpose of annual uniform allowance eligibility for a CCA?

The calendar date the CCA initially becomes eligible for a uniform allowance.

43. How is the uniform anniversary date determined for a CCA who is converted to career status?

The employee retains the same anniversary date held as a CCA.

44. How is a uniform allowance provided to a CCA?

When a CCA becomes eligible for a uniform allowance, funds must be approved through an eBuy submission by local management. After approval, a Letter of Authorization form must be completed and provided to the employee within 14 days of the eligibility date. The CCA takes the completed form to

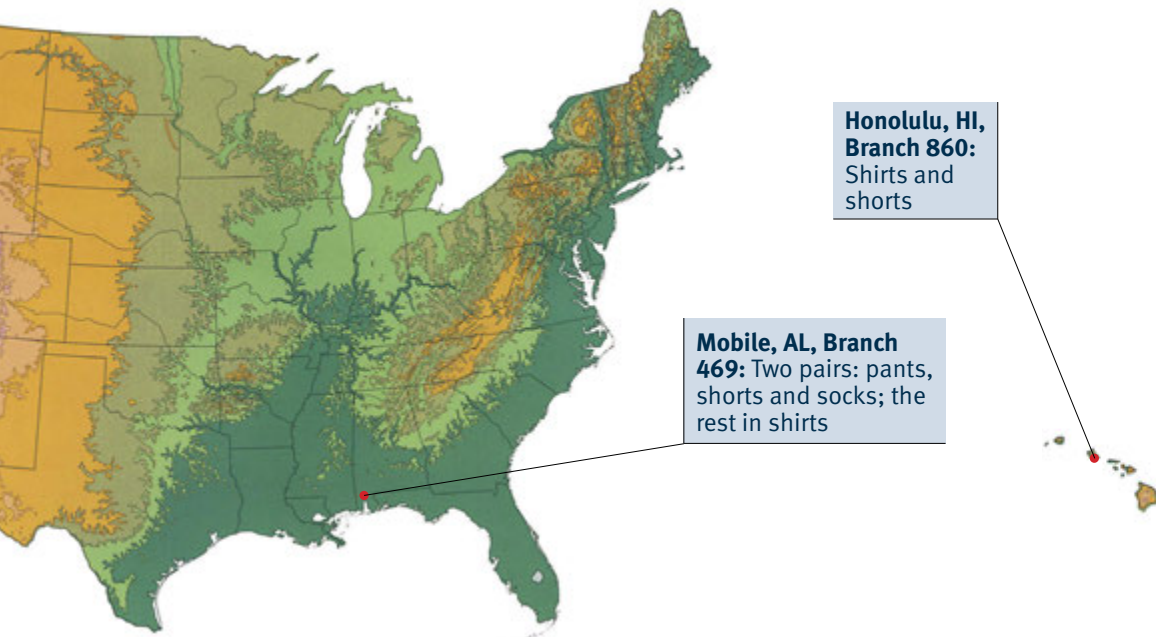
a USPS authorized vendor to purchase uniform items. The Letter of Authorization can be located on the Uniform Program website on the Blue Page under Labor Relations.

45. How are uniform items purchased?

Uniform items can only be purchased from USPS licensed vendors. A list of all authorized Postal Service Uniform vendors is located under the Labor Relations website: Uniform Program from the Blue Page and also on Liteblue under My HR, and look for the link for Uniform Program.

46. How does a licensed uniform vendor receive payment for uniform items purchased by a CCA?

The licensed vendor creates an itemized invoice of the sale, provides



Honolulu, HI, Branch 860: Shirts and shorts

Mobile, AL, Branch 469: Two pairs: pants, shorts and socks; the rest in shirts

to low 80s year round. “We focus on shirts and shorts, initially,” Branch 860 President **Howard Komine** said. “We really don’t have a serious winter or rainy season. So no winter clothing. Maybe a rain coat on the second or third allowance.

“That’s the price we pay for living in the Aloha State,” he joked.

As for footwear, everyone offers the same advice—find a shoe or boot with comfort and durability. In rainy climates, galoshes may be purchased to keep feet dry while walking. Some carriers use new, lightweight overshoes that are more breathable and still waterproof.

We also put the question on our Facebook page, and got some interesting responses:

Jeffrey Babey: “Pants, shorts, shirts, bomber jacket, pith helmet, rain coat and some anti-blister socks.”

Marylou Furbush LaRose: “Shoes are most important wherever you are. Next, weather gear. I started in CT. The parka is a must for New England winters. Now I’m in SE Iowa and rain gear pants and jacket are essential. Best item right now is the floppy Indiana Jones blue hat. Terrific for sun, rain and wind.”

You can see more responses and join the conversation on NALC’s Facebook page at facebook.com/nalc.national.

The best advice is to ask your fellow letter carriers in your station and branch how to spend your first uniform allowance most wisely. Veteran letter carriers are almost always ready and willing to offer helpful advice, and maybe an extra shirt or two.

Note: *Shortly after we interviewed the branch presidents for this article, we were shocked and saddened to learn that Branch 916 President Tom Gates had passed away. “Tom was a tremendous asset to Eugene carriers, the Oregon State Association, as well as to the union as a whole,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “Tom lived and breathed NALC, and will be sorely missed.” PR*

a copy of the invoice to the CCA, and sends the original invoice for payment to the local manager identified on the Letter of Authorization. Upon receipt, the local manager certifies the invoice and pays the vendor using the office Smartpay card.

47. If a CCA does not use the full allowance before his/her appointment ends, does the allowance carry-over into the next appointment when the appointment begins before the next uniform anniversary date?

Yes, however, the CCA cannot purchase uniform items during his/her five calendar day break between appointments. If the full annual uniform allowance is not used before the next anniversary date, the remaining balance for that year is forfeited.

48. Does the annual uniform anniversary date change when a CCA is separated for lack of work and then rehired as a CCA after his/her anniversary date has passed?

Yes, in this situation a new anniversary date is established on the date of reappointment and the CCA is provided a full annual uniform allowance within 14 days of the new anniversary date.

49. What happens to the annual uniform allowance for a CCA that has an anniversary date, is separated for lack of work, and then rehired as a CCA before their next uniform anniversary date?

A CCA that is separated under this circumstance retains his/her anniversary date. If there is no uniform allowance balance remaining at the

point of separation, the matter will be considered closed. If the CCA had any part of the annual uniform allowance available at the point of separation, the remaining balance will be redetermined upon reappointment as follows: If the period of separation exceeded 89 calendar days, the remaining balance will be reduced by 10 percent of the annual uniform allowance for the first 90 calendar days and then by 10 percent for each full 30 calendar days thereafter. In no event will such redetermination result in a negative balance for the employee.

50. Will CCAs receive the additional credit authorized under Article 26.2.B with their first uniform allowance following conversion to career status?

Yes.