

# POSTAL NEWS

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## **1. Mail early as possible, Postal Service says**

By KRISTY DAVIES • Courier-Post Staff • December 10, 2008

BELLMAWR — Boxes full of toiletries, snacks, magazines and games might not seem like much to some, but to troops overseas they are reminders of home.

But time to ship them is running out.

The Dec. 4 deadline has passed to get packages to Iraq and Afghanistan by Christmas, but packages for troops in noncombat zones such as Germany, Korea, Japan, Hawaii and other Army Post Offices and Fleet Post Offices around the world can be mailed until Thursday.

"These are just suggested mailing dates that are in place because of all the conditions and restrictions that apply to the mail going over there," said Ray Daiutolo Sr., spokesman for the United States Postal Service in South Jersey. "We try to err on the side of caution when trying to figure out suggested shipping dates."

Nancy Jones, youth services administrator for the Department of Human Services in Gloucester County, made sure she met the deadline to send packages to troops in Iraq and Qatar. Jones, the mother of an Army soldier, joined two other moms of deployed soldiers in the Gloucester County office to hold a troop drive to collect toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, soap, foot powder, snacks, homemade cookies, magazines and hand-held games. Eight people joined together in Woodbury at the beginning of the month to package 20 boxes for about 10 soldiers overseas.

"My son recently came home from Iraq," Jones said. "But there are two other moms in our building who have sons deployed right now. I thought it would be fun to do a holiday troop drive. The county was very supportive and we received nice donations."

To cheer up the troops, the group placed Santa hats, Christmas ornaments and gag gifts such as whoopee cushions and slime into the boxes.

"They're big kids and need to have some fun," she said. "We're trying to lighten it up a little bit. It's hard to be away from home for Christmas."

To help with the cost of shipping overseas, the Postal Service discounts larger Priority Mail flat-rate boxes being mailed to APO or FPO addresses.

"Priority flat rate boxes are probably one of most convenient services," he added. "It's one price regardless of weight. If you can get it in there and it fits without compromising the shape of the box you know what it costs. If you are sending to an APO or FPO address you'll get a \$2 discount."

The post office expects Monday to be the busiest holiday mailing day of the season and Dec. 17 will be the busiest delivery day.

"When Christmas falls on a Thursday, usually two Mondays before that we start to see a lot of mail coming into the system," Daiutolo said. "This year we're seeing customers heeding recommendations to mail early."

To alleviate or prevent stress at the post office, Daiutolo recommends that addresses be complete, ZIP codes correct, no strings on the package and use a shipping box. Automated postal centers are also at area post offices that allow customers to do many of the same transactions that can be done with a clerk.

He also suggests that customers don't come during times when people are on their way to work, on lunch breaks or heading home from work to avoid congestion and waiting.

For first class mail being sent within the United States the suggested date for cards, letters and packages is Dec. 20 although express mail will be delivered Christmas Day if it is received by Dec. 23.

"We will deliver (express mail) on Christmas Day if it is received by Dec. 23," Daiutolo said. "And we get a lot of them. In some areas we have employees who will dress up as Santa Claus to deliver packages on Christmas Day."

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## **2. New postal manager says he'll work with unions to meet goals**

By KITTY CAPARELLA  
Philadelphia Daily News

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The newly appointed regional postal manager has two goals: to serve customers better and improve working conditions at the U.S. Postal Service's troubled processing plant in Southwest Philadelphia.

Yesterday, Jim Gallagher, the new regional postal manager, told union leaders that he had an "open-door policy" and wanted to work with the unions to carry out the two goals.

"I see this as a very positive first step," said Gwen Ivey, president of American Postal Workers Union Local 89.

Calling the one-hour meeting "very productive," Ivey said that she and other union officials had met with Gallagher and Janet Smith, director of labor relations for the Philadelphia postal service.

Ivey said that Gallagher, a former Philadelphia postmaster, had not elaborated about the problems because "a full-blown investigation was under way."

Gallagher replaced Frank Neri after a series of Daily News stories exposed mismanagement at the Southwest Philly site.

On Oct. 24, the union filed a complaint with the Postal Service's Office of Inspector General about delayed, missing and destroyed mail at the processing plant on Lindbergh Boulevard near Island Avenue.

Among the issues cited in the complaint were that senior postal managers allegedly ordered clerks to do the following:

- \* Undercount the mail by millions of pieces each week;
- \* Change the color codes of mail bins so that mail would not be considered late;
- \* Reroute tractor-trailers filled with unsorted mail to avoid counting the mail;
- \* Send allegedly fraudulent daily mail-count reports to headquarters in Washington.

During the weekend, inspector-general investigators began observing the mail flow and talking with postal workers, Ivey said.

APWU represents 2,200 members at the processing plant, the Air Mail Center and 20 neighborhood post offices in the 190- and 191- ZIP codes.

Gallagher also plans to meet with the unions representing the letter carriers and mail handlers.

Meantime, customers such as the Millay Club, in South Philadelphia, continue to complain about mail deliveries .

Walter Belovitz, executive director, said that the Millay Club conducts quarterly fundraisers for the alumni of Bishop Neumann- Saint John Neumann High School.

Of the club's \$1.5 million budget, nearly \$900,000 is spent on 16,000-piece mailings, which include business-reply envelopes, said Belovitz.

Normally, the club receives between 1,300 and 1,700 responses. But ever since mail processing moved from 30th Street station, "it's been worse," he said.

Not only isn't he getting the reply envelopes back, but the ones he gets back are delayed for months or torn when they arrive, he said. A Sept. 13 check arrived on Nov. 25. A check mailed on Sept. 30 for an Oct. 11 event arrived weeks late and was torn inside a plastic bag, said Belovitz.

When Belovitz checked at a local post-office branch about the club's reply envelopes, he added, he was told there was no one to process them.

If there's only one or two envelopes, he said he was told, they wait until there's 10 or 12.

Postal workers say that the business-reply envelopes sit in bins until they are full before they are processed, or sometimes they are tossed in waste bins to be destroyed.

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