

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Pinehurst post office hours cause emotional mail storm

By Hilary Kraus

Staff writer

PINEHURST — Residents and business owners upset by a reduction in hours at the downtown post office have persuaded the U.S. Postal Service to return to its old operating schedule, but some still are complaining about the hours.

The subject became a hot topic in February, when Postmaster Denise Krise announced the hours would be cut from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. to 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, starting March 16.

Monica Coachman Robbs, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Postal Service, said the reduction was done to cut costs in the face of a decline in retail operations. She said the post office has seen a 30 percent decline in workload from last year.

But because of public outcry voiced in a petition to U.S. Rep. Howard Coble, a Republican from Greensboro, the Postal Service reversed its decision and will return to the old hours beginning Monday.

Some residents, however, still are dissatisfied and said they plan to voice their frustration at a Pinehurst Village Council public hearing, set for Tuesday at 6 p.m. "It's still not acceptable. It's not enough," said Tom Stewart of Old Sport & Gallery. Stewart, who has owned his golf memorabilia shop in historic downtown for 12 years, said he remembers when the post office had more conventional business hours six days a week.

Stewart said he doesn't think it's reasonable to ask small businesses — many with one employee manning the store — to close in order to go to the post office during its short business hours.

During the holiday season, Stewart said, it was not uncommon to wait in line 25 minutes because only one postal employee worked behind the counter.

Other times of the year, people may wait as long as 10 minutes.

"How do we expect to attract business here if we don't have a functioning post office?" Stewart asked.

Customers within a quarter mile of the post office do not have the option of delivery. The post office box area is open 24 hours every day.

There is no stamp machine in the lobby. Two weeks ago, a 2 to 4 p.m. package pick-up service was added, and Robbs said the service will remain available.

Village merchant Richard Shearer, author of the petition and a member of the Pinehurst Business Guild, said more than 1,000 signatures were collected.

Shearer, owner of Jewels of Pinehurst since 1985, is concerned that the shortened hours will take away from downtown foot traffic.

“The post office is the epicenter for the village,” Shearer said. “It’s an economic engine. Because of the (2,400) post office boxes, it drives people downtown.”

Shearer said he would like to see the post office open six days a week. The other Pinehurst post office, which is two miles away, has longer hours and is open on Saturdays.

“Why in a business district does a post office have a three-hour day?” Shearer asked.

“We’re paying for their service and getting less. They’re not delivering.”

Becky Maness, who has had a post office box for about 20 years, said she would have signed the petition had she been approached.

On a recent afternoon, Maness was greeted in the post office lobby by tourists from Virginia in need of postal services. Maness suggested the village’s other post office.

“All these out-of-town people wandering in and you can’t even buy a stamp.” Maness said. “And you’d think there’d be a sign with directions to the other post office.”

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2. USPS Proposes 'Summer Sale' for Many Standard Mailers

April 10, 2009 — The Postal Service has informed mailers that it will be announcing shortly a summer sale on postage for any increased Standard Mail volume for many Standard mailers. “We are very pleased that USPS is taking advantage of the pricing flexibility that DMA worked so hard for in the passage of the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act,” said DMA President and CEO John Greco.

DMA has long advocated seasonal pricing. At the Postal Regulatory Commission/Postal Service Summit in 2007, DMA Chairman Markus Wilhelm urged the Postal Service to offer seasonal rates and even daily rates to grow mail volume during slower times. “The current economic climate demands this new pricing strategy to grow mail volume during the slow summer season,” Greco continued. “It has taken two years for this to come to fruition, and we welcome its continued progress.”

The full details of the plan remain a work in progress, but mailers would be offered 20- to 30 percent discounts from June 15 to September 15 for mail volume over and above that mailer's past mailing. The Postal Service would establish a base mail volume for each mailer derived from that mailer's mailings from June 15 to September 15, 2008 adjusted downward by the current mail trends for that mailer during the first two quarters of Fiscal Year 2009. Any mail volume above that baseline would receive the ‘summer sale’ price.

Since the Postal Service must establish a separate base line for each mailer and provide an appeal to each mailer to contest those calculations, it is likely only the 4,000 largest Standard Mailers will be eligible this summer.

The proposal must go to the Postal Regulatory Commission, and DMA will push for quick approval so that mailers will have the greatest amount of lead time for planning as possible. DMA will also ask the Postal Service to establish this "sale" for the summer of 2010, so that mailers will have a year to plan and the Service will reap the full benefit of the sale.

"Every mailer should immediately examine their mailing program and seek to adjust it to take full advantage of this stimulus program," added Greco.

DMA expects the Postal Service to file the details of this issue with the Postal Rate Commission within the next three weeks, and will keep members informed of developments as they arise.

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3. Your next bank: The Postal Service?

By GREGG CARLSTROM

April 10, 2009

The cash-strapped U.S. Postal Service, looking for new sources of revenue to make up for declining mail volume, is considering banking services — already a common line of business for postal services in Europe.

It's a distant possibility. The Postal Service would need congressional approval. And Postmaster General John Potter said the Postal Service hasn't decided whether getting into banking is a good idea; he said it was a hypothetical option, one of several possible new sources of revenue. The Postal Service estimates it will be \$6 billion in the red this fiscal year.

"I'm not saying that's going to work in America, but we need to be open-minded about what else might be out there," Potter told Federal Times last week. "It's something we're looking at, and have been looking at over the years."

Still, this isn't the first time Potter has floated the idea. He also mentioned it last month, at a hearing of the House Oversight and Government Reform subcommittee on the federal workforce, the Postal Service, and the District of Columbia.

"In some places, posts are banks, and that's how posts are earning money," Potter said at the March 25 hearing.

Many European countries have postal banks. In some countries, the postal services allow commercial banks to operate in their retail facilities; in others, including France and Italy, the postal services actually own the banks.

Postal banks are also becoming common in developing countries because post offices are far more common than commercial banks, particularly in impoverished areas. A 2006 study by the World Bank found post offices outnumbered banks in developing countries by a 2-to-1 ratio.

Developing countries “typically don’t have the kinds of universal access to banking that people ... need,” said Gene Del Polito, president of the Association for Postal Commerce.

There’s even a precedent for postal banking in the United States: the Postal Savings System, which ran from 1911 to 1967. It offered depositors a 2 percent annual interest rate; by the program’s peak, in 1947, it held more than \$3.4 billion in deposits.

But it’s unclear whether a postal bank would succeed in 21st-century America.

Observers say it would likely meet strong opposition from the financial industry, which wouldn’t welcome a competitor with a nationwide network of retail outlets.

And the market is already saturated: The U.S. has more than 4,000 banks, and most Americans already have bank accounts.

“Banks are ubiquitous in the U.S.,” Del Polito said.

And not all countries have had positive experiences with postal banking. The German postal service operated Deutsche Postbank for decades. But it sold most of its stake to Deutsche Bank last year; analysts said the bank wasn’t making money for the postal service, and German postal officials were eager to get out of the banking business.

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4. Mobile Phones Are In But Coffee And Shoes Are Out

10 April 2009 by Helen Prowse - © Hellmail.co.uk

Millions of people across the UK are trying to cut costs, but they are also looking for cheaper, more effective ways of paying for day-to-day expenditure - such as by choosing Pay-As-You-Go mobile phones and instant coffee, according to a new report out today from Post Office® Telecoms.

The Post Office asked 2,000 people which things they’d give up if their finances were stretched, and whilst shoes and shop-bought coffees get the elbow, only 4 per cent of us would consider giving-up our mobile phones to save money.

Items we would cut out to help our cash-flow include:

- * 21 per cent would give up coffee bought from a shop
- * 15 per cent would sacrifice buying new shoes
- * 15 per cent would stop buying alcohol
- * 9 per cent would cut out chocolate
- * 7 per cent would skip regular hair cuts
- * 7 per cent would stop buying music
- * 4 per cent would give up their mobile phone

Despite the fact that only 4 per cent of us would give up our mobiles, the report also shows that 12 per cent of us are currently reviewing how we pay for our mobile phones. Over one in ten customers currently on a pay-monthly mobile contract are in the process of, or are seriously considering changing to a Pay-As-You-Go mobile

phone. In recent months some Post Office branches have seen an increase in sales of mobile top ups of over 100 per cent.

This news follows an earlier report by Post Office Telecoms released in 2008 which showed 53 per cent of mobile phone users could be suffering from 'nomophobia' – the fear of having no mobile phone.

As mobile phone technology becomes increasingly hi-tech and functional we are now using mobile phones to store more than just telephone numbers – 54 per cent of people store photos on their phone, 27 per cent music, 24 per cent diary appointments and 23 per cent store videos.

Men were twice as likely as women to give up their mobile phone, with 6 per cent of men compared to 3 per cent of women saying they'd cut it out for financial reasons.

Commenting on the role of the mobile in our lives, Post Office telephony manager Hugh Stacey said: "We've known for years that we are becoming increasingly reliant on our mobile phones, and it's interesting to see how, within ten years, they have become vital to our everyday lives.

"To help users make their pounds go further, we'd recommend making sure you carefully budget for your mobile phone and seek out cheaper payment options. Our research shows that one way mobile-users are doing this is by switching to Pay-As-You-Go phones, and in recent months we have seen an increasing number of people buying Pay-As-You-Go credit at the Post Office."

The Post Office is the UK 's second largest retailer of electronic top-ups for mobile phones and covers all mobile phone networks.

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5. Slovenian Post Rejects Illegal Collusion Reports

10 April 2009 by Franz Groter - © Hellmail.co.uk

The Slovenian postal service has hit back at what it describes as "false statements or suggestions" by one slovenian media outlet reporting on a criminal investigation at the Agency for Post and Electronic Communications of the Republic of Slovenia (APEK). The report alleged illegal collusion on Pricing in the market for postal services between the Director APEK Tomaz Simonic and Director-General of the Post of Slovenia Alesem Haucem.

Slovenian Post said it operates a legitimate form of business and does not violate the laws or ethical expectations and rejected any suggestions of an illegal attempt to influence the business environment in which the company operates, as well as the decisions of the postal regulator.

Slovenian Post said prices of its commercial services are developed independently of prices for the universal postal service and that the price of standard letters and

postcards, despite the last amendment on 1st May 2008, were still among the lowest in Europe.

It said that whilst the company certainly had its own business goals, any rises in prices affecting the universal service were based wholly within the laws under which it has to operate.

In 2008, the company generated 250 million euros revenue and 23.6 million euros profit before tax, and investment of around 17 million euros. Whilst revenue this year had been affected by the financial crisis, it was still committed to capital investment.

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6. UPS Expands North American Ground Freight Network with Mexico Door-to-Door Service

Also Accelerates Freight Service To and From Toronto

ATLANTA, April 7, 2009 - UPS Freight, the heavy freight arm of UPS (NYSE: UPS), today announced it would offer door-to-door service to and from Mexico, complete with UPS customs brokerage capabilities and single invoicing for all services between the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The company also announced the next-day service umbrella for freight moving to and from Toronto is widening to include Michigan, northern Ohio and northern Indiana. "The expanded service to and from Mexico ensures that customers on both sides of the border will enjoy faster transit times," said UPS Freight Vice President of Strategy Kevin Hartman. "We've effectively combined UPS's global trade experience with local market expertise to deliver the fast, reliable service customers are demanding throughout North America."

Freight moving to and from Mexico will be expedited by using five border crossings, including three in Texas: Brownsville/McAllen-Matamoros, El Paso-Ciudad Juarez and Laredo-Nuevo Laredo. Other border crossing will be at Otay Mesa, Calif.-Tijuana and across the Mexican-Arizona border at Nogales. UPS Freight operates more than 200 service centers in the U.S. and Canada and will rely on more than 40 in Mexico. "This new service complements the expansion strategy we have been implementing in Mexico since 2006," said Griselda Hernandez, UPS Mexico country manager. "We know that more than 80 percent of exports to countries north of Mexico are transported using ground services. Our expanded service will benefit those exporters who seek to deliver their products to the United States and Canada at competitive rates."

UPS technology provides visibility for shipments coming into Mexico, enabling the identification of goods as soon as they enter the UPS network. That helps expedite clearance at the border since the customs paperwork is readied in advance of a shipment's actual arrival at the border.

UPS Customs Brokerage prepares shipment classification, inspections, customs documentation preparation and collection of applicable duties and fees. Single invoicing will automatically apply when UPS Freight provides full door-to-door service, including all customs brokerage services performed by UPS.

Truckload services are available over both borders, with UPS Freight providing dedicated carrier, dry-van equipment and container on flatcar service for long-haul intermodal movements.

In continuation of an effort that has slashed transit times throughout the United States, UPS Freight also is enhancing its network north of the Canadian border. The next-day service belt around Toronto is being widened to include northern Ohio, northern Indiana and Michigan while two-day service is being extended to and from Toronto as far south as Georgia. Transit times to and from the West will be shortened to points as far as California. All these service enhancements include the UPS "no fee" guarantee. UPS Freight, one of the largest less-than-truckload carriers in the United States and a leading truckload service provider, serves customers throughout North America, Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands. For more information, visit upsfreight.com.

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