

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Postal Service bumps up collection times

BY BILL O'BRIEN
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TRAVERSE CITY -- Anyone dashing to the mail box to get a card, letter or bill out on time may have to move a little quicker.

The U.S. Postal Service is moving to "standardize" mail collection times at mail boxes, post offices and processing centers across most of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, and will move up some collection times by as much as 90 minutes.

It's part of numerous cost-cutting and efficiency moves being implemented across the country as the agency looks to shrink a projected \$6 billion-plus budget deficit this year.

"The Postal Service right now is going through some serious financial difficulty," said Jim Mruk, spokesman for the Great Lakes Area of the U.S. Postal Service. "We're looking at opportunities to cut costs."

The changes mean the last local daily mail collection is 6 p.m. at the Postal Service's processing and distribution plant along Garfield Road just south of Hammond Road.

The facility offered a 7:30 p.m. pick-up for the past several years, a service that came in handy for local business owners like attorney Michael Alanson, of Traverse City, who sometimes drove his mail to the plant in the early evening after completing daily paperwork.

"To have a timely postmark is extremely important," Alanson said. "I've been in court hearings where we've argued about postmarks."

The last collection at local post offices is 5 p.m., Mruk said. Mail pick-up in business and shopping collections zones is 3 p.m., and 1 p.m. in residential areas. Mruk said the schedule change affects most of Lower Michigan except the Metro Detroit, Jackson, Flint and Monroe areas. He didn't have an estimated cost savings from the standardized collection times.

"It's hard to put an exact number on that. It really has more to do with improving efficiency," Mruk said. "We're able to get mail into our collection processing plants more quickly."

Dan Windsor, the temporary postmaster in Traverse City this summer, said the Postal Service has taken other steps to reduce costs, including trimming hours at some smaller regional post offices and by leaving some positions vacant. No local layoffs have been made, he said.

The changes also raised questions about the futures of Postal Service processing plants in Traverse City and Gaylord, but Mruk said no changes are imminent at either facility. The Postal Service is required to go through a review and public comment process before making changes to its distribution centers. The Postal Service completed such a review of the Gaylord facility in 2006, but kept the plant open.

"At the moment, we have no formal study at either of those plants," he said.

Special delivery

The U.S. Postal Service is coordinating mail collection times at thousands of pick-up locations throughout Michigan. The new schedule is:

- 1 p.m. at collection spots in residential areas
- 3 p.m. in business and shopping districts
- 5 p.m. at local post offices
- 6 p.m. at Postal Service processing plants

Source: U.S. Postal Service

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2. Quiet Corner Whispers: Modern postal service could use Ben Franklin's help

NorwichBulletin.com

Marge Hoskin, a Quiet Corner native and retired Naval officer, writes Quiet Corner Whispers, which appears each Tuesday in The Bulletin. She also is former chairwoman of the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor Inc. board of directors and one of the founding members of the corridor. Reach her at mlhoskin@sbcglobal.net

By MARGE HOSKIN
For The Norwich Bulletin
Posted Jun 29, 2009 @ 10:37 PM
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Saturday we celebrate the signing of our Declaration of Independence from Britain in 1776 and the courageous men who literally “put everything on the line” for what they believed.

The signers included Benjamin Franklin, printer, scientist and notorious flirt. A year earlier, the Second Continental Congress had appointed him the first postmaster general for the United States, marking the birth of the U.S. Post Office Department, predecessor of the Postal Service.

I’ve been thinking a lot about today’s postal service because it is considering closing 150 of Connecticut’s 400 post offices to save money.

Many of us who have yet to post our face on Facebook or Twitter our first tweet still use visits to the village post office for “social networking.” Its closing could be traumatic. Of course, I would miss seeing all those dogs sitting behind the steering wheels of trucks and cars while waiting for their masters and mistresses to reappear.

The first “post office” is believed to have been Richard Fairbanks’ tavern in Boston, which, in 1639, was designated by the General Court of Massachusetts as the official repository of mail brought from or sent overseas.

Within the colonies, local authorities operated post routes. In 1673, Gov. Francis Lovelace of New York set up a monthly post between New York and Boston. The post riders’ trail became known as the Boston Post Road, part of today’s U.S. Route 1.

Ben Franklin was an obvious choice for postmaster general of the new United States. In 1737, the king had appointed him Philadelphia postmaster, and in 1753, joint postmaster general of America. He was dismissed in 1774 for “actions sympathetic to the cause of the colonies.”

As joint postmaster, Franklin reorganized the service. New surveys were made, milestones placed on principal roads and new, shorter routes laid out.

And in 1760, he even reported a surplus to the British postmaster general, a first for the postal service in North America. Too bad Franklin isn’t available to be called in to consult with today’s postal authorities.

Marge Hoskin, a Quiet Corner native, is a retired naval officer. She is the former chairwoman of the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor Inc. board of directors and one of the founding members of the corridor. Her column appears every Tuesday. Reach her at mlhoskin@sbcglobal.net.

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3. Postal service considers closing nearly 10% of its offices

Gary E. Sattler

Jun 29th 2009 at 11:00AM

How much is your local post office worth to you? Would you miss it if it disappeared? Do you depend on your local post office for services other than regular mail delivery and the purchase of postal supplies? These and other mail service-related questions will soon be a significant concern for many people across America.

Due to the rapidly rising costs of doing business, the United States Postal Service is considering the closure of approximately 3,200 local post offices. That's nearly 10% of the post offices currently in operation. According to an article from MSN Money, most of the postal locations which are being considered for closure exist in metropolitan areas.

I don't know about you, but our local post office is very valuable to our household. First off, we live on a rural carrier route, which delivers our mail with incredible consistency and efficiency. Secondly, my wife has an active hobby selling items on eBay, and our local mail carrier happily picks up her outgoing shipments with only 24 hours prior notice. Additionally, we can always find needed shipping supplies at our local post office, and it's the only place where I like to purchase money orders.

For people who appreciate their local post office as much as we appreciate ours, there is some good news in this situation. When a post office is under consideration for closure, the process is taken slowly and there is generally room for public input on the matter.

It's fairly obvious that mail service in the U.S. is slated for change. Only time will tell how noticeable that change will be, and whether or not it will cause significant hardship for anyone. Consumers might be best advised to check with their local postmaster regarding the viability of their local post office. If it has been determined that your post office is one of those under consideration for closure, I'm certain that the employees of that post office will assist you in finding the ways to keep it alive.

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