

POSTAL NEWS

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- 1. Postal service plans seminar for business mailers in Maine, N.H.. Sept 12, 2009.**
- 2. Can the Postal Service Still Deliver?. Sept 13, 2009.**
- 3. OPINION: Don't cut the postal service to try to save it. Sept 24, 2009.**
- 4. Agency Chief Makes the Case for Teleworking. Sept 25, 2009.**

1. Postal service plans seminar for business mailers in Maine, N.H.

Saturday, September 12, 2009

SCARBOROUGH, Maine — The U.S. Postal Service and the Maine and New Hampshire Postal Customer Councils (PCC) will host a seminar for business mailers on National Postal Customer Council Day on Wednesday, Sept. 16, at the Processing & Distribution Center at 79 Postal Service Way in Scarborough.

Professionals involved in all aspects of business mailing, including operations managers, marketing staff, mail design professionals and print coordinators are invited to attend this free event.

The seminar will include sessions on how to maximize business mailing costs, including using package services nationally and internationally to streamline business operations, and how to develop a results-driven marketing program with direct mail.

Participants will also be addressed (via satellite broadcast) by Postmaster General Jack Potter, and hear remarks from Northern New England District Manager Debbie Essler. A tour of the modern mail processing facility will be available to interested participants at the end of the half-day event.

Pre-registration is required and can be done at no cost. Call 207-482-7189 in advance or register on-site beginning at 11:30 a.m. on Sept. 16. A complimentary light buffet lunch is included. Events will end at approximately 3:30 p.m.

The Postal Customer Council (PCC) is a network of business mailers and representatives of the U.S. Postal Service. They gather regularly to discuss and resolve local mailing issues as well as to develop educational programs.

Visit www.maineppc.com for more information.

September 13, 2009

2. Can the Postal Service Still Deliver?

For more than 200 years, citizens have relied on the U.S. Postal Service to deliver the mail through storms of all kinds. But changing technology, a global recession, and rising debt now threaten the national mail service.

By any measure, the U.S. Postal Service's financial condition is dire. Mail volume is expected to drop nearly 14% this year, and the post office estimates that it will lose \$7 billion. In a recent statement, Postmaster General John Potter said the Postal Service must take drastic measures to "reduce costs so that service is not diminished." But some of his proposals—including shuttering up to 700 branches and delivering mail five days a week instead of six—aren't popular with customers. So far, the Postal Service has tried to fix its budget by raising rates, trimming its workforce through attrition and buyouts, automating mail sorting, realigning routes, and freezing executive salaries.

Some suggest that the solution lies overseas: Germany, Britain, and Japan have opened their postal services to competition from private companies in recent years. "A private company might be more innovative, and that could help keep prices more stable for consumers," says Prof. Michael Crew, who heads Rutgers University's Center for Research in Regulated Industries. "The profit motive would bring a drive for efficiency." But finding a private entity willing to take on the task may be easier said than done. "A critical step is to make the Postal Service attractive to anyone considering buying it," says Don Soifer of the Lexington Institute, a conservative think tank. "It's hard to imagine anyone wanting to take a stake in it under the current circumstances."

— J. Scott Orr

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3. OPINION: Don't cut the postal service to try to save it

September 24, 2009 By WALTER BARTON

Walter Barton is president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, Long Island Merged, Branch 6000.

Members of Congress may primarily be focused on health care reform these days, but there's another national issue that needs prompt attention: the United States Postal Service.

The recession has had a tremendous impact on the Postal Service. This year, mail volume has declined by 40 billion pieces, and the service is forecasting a \$7 billion

deficit. Cost-cutting proposals include shutting post offices and eliminating Saturday delivery.

Dropping one delivery day could save \$3.3 billion next year - a number that looks good on paper. But consider the consequences. Ending Saturday delivery could eliminate at least 50,000 postal worker jobs - about 575 here on Long Island. Most economic experts will tell you that reducing the workforce only adds to the problems of difficult economic times. Creating and maintaining good jobs helps end them.

Five-day delivery will also make the Postal Service more vulnerable to competition, which will step in to fill the Saturday void. And since private companies will only deliver where they can make money, the average customer in a less well-off community will pay more for service.

By contrast, the Postal Service doesn't pick and choose its customers. It delivers to 150 million households and businesses - a number that continues to grow by 1 million each year.

Thankfully, postal management cannot change to five-day delivery without the consent of Congress. And yesterday, the House and Senate Appropriations Committee looked elsewhere to provide some needed financial relief.

Unlike any other business or government agency, the Postal Service is required to fully pre-fund future retiree health benefits each year, and \$5.4 billion was due for this purpose next Wednesday. But the appropriations committee worked a waiver into a continuing resolution bill that Congress is expected to pass next week. According to the provision, the Postal Service will pay \$1.4 billion now and defer the remaining \$4 billion to after 2017. Since the retirement fund currently has more than \$30 billion in escrow, this shouldn't cause any financial hardships.

That's a positive sign that Congress knows it has to get it right when it comes to the post office. Cutting services is not a solution.

Expanding products and offering new services is another promising approach. One new program, Customer Connect - which uses letter carriers to generate leads to new postal customers - has been a great success. On Long Island \$26 million of recurring revenue has been created, and across the country more than \$600 million of new revenue has grown.

This kind of program just goes to show what many postal workers and their customers already know: that letter carriers and other workers know their communities well and have a special bond with them.

They don't just deliver the mail, they deliver support and help in ways that go beyond the job description.

The annual letter carrier food drive in May collects more than 70 million pounds of food for the less fortunate across the nation. Since 1995 Long Islanders have contributed between 800,000 to 1.4 million pounds of food annually.

Many other letter carriers volunteer their time and have spent years working in their communities for their local fire departments. They also support Long Island charities with payroll contributions through the United Way of Long Island, donating hundreds of thousands of dollars annually.

Letter carriers also help the community as they do their jobs. Tim Jones of Baldwin, to take one example of many, knew an elderly woman on his route who lived alone. He became concerned when he saw mail accumulating in her mail box. Jones knew she had a niece on his route, and he contacted her. Together, they found the woman on the floor of her home and were able to save her.

The Postal Service has existed as an essential member of our local communities for more than 234 years. Every possible effort should be made to help this institution survive and flourish.

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4. Agency Chief Makes the Case for Teleworking

By Ed O'Keefe
Friday, September 25, 2009

Office of Personnel Management Director John Berry sees great advantages to having federal workers stay home.

That wouldn't mean taking the day off, however. Berry is an advocate of teleworking and is asking federal managers and employees to help sell the idea to skeptical managers and lawmakers.

Berry was making his pitch Thursday, the same day that Washington area commuters experienced 20-mile backups on Northern Virginia highways and road closures in downtown Washington because of a suspicious package in the District. The director considers teleworking as one of several alternative work scenarios he hopes the entire government can continue to adopt.

"The 1950s model of chaining people to their desks for eight hours is a 19th-century model, and I want to get rid of it," Berry said. "But our semantics could kill us, because if Congress and the public think that teleworking is a day off, then we're dead."

"A telework day is a workday. You are to be engaged in the workplace," he reminded the crowd at a town hall meeting hosted by the Telework Exchange at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington. The public-private partnership is designed to promote teleworking.

During his remarks, Berry noted that federal employees in Pittsburgh who work in buildings near Thursday's Group of 20 summit site were given three days of paid leave this week instead of options such as teleworking.

"Telework is perfect for a situation like the G20 because it changes the conversation entirely. Instead of asking 'What's the minimum we can do during this time?' we can aim high and ask, 'What's the maximum we can do?' Can we do 70 percent of a normal day's work? 80 percent? 90?"

He also urged eligible federal employees to telework at least once a week. It should be "second nature" for them.

"It has to be part of the ethos of the office. We can't have offices with no meetings on Fridays because of telework. Get them on the phone. Get them on video conference if you can."

Postal Service Relief in Sight

The House is expected to vote Friday on a measure that provides \$4 billion in relief for the U.S. Postal Service, among (many) other things. The continuing resolution set for passage funds federal agencies through Oct. 31 as lawmakers continue working on appropriations bills.

In August, Postal officials forecast a \$700 million cash shortfall when its fiscal year ends next Wednesday.

Postmaster General John E. Potter warned that the Postal Service could not afford to make \$5.4 billion in required payments to pre-fund retiree health benefits, and he asked lawmakers to change the law requiring them. Congress mandated the prepayments in 2006 when it passed a postal reform bill, figuring the Postal Service's financial condition would probably worsen as mail volume dropped with the increase in Internet use.

If the House and Senate pass the continuing resolution, then the Postal Service will make the payments, Potter said Thursday.

"I'm encouraged by what's gone on in the House and the Senate, and I know we have administration support. If that law changes, we will pay \$1.4 billion into the retiree trust fund on Sept. 30," Potter said during a meeting with Washington Post editors and reporters.

In addition to the anticipated financial relief from Congress, full-time Postal employees must decide by this Friday whether to accept buyout offers. Up to 30,000 employees can take the \$15,000 buyout, which the Postal Service describes as a way to save up to \$500 million during the next fiscal year.

The Postal Service is also expected to release an updated list of facilities slated for possible closure or consolidation on Oct. 2. Potter would not comment on the record about the process Thursday.

Joe Davidson is away. He will resume writing this column when he returns. Contact Federal Diary at federaldiary@washpost.com.

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