

'Your Postal Podcast' 69th Edition Transcript – February 2014

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Richard Watkins: Welcome to *Your Postal Podcast*. This is Richard Watkins of U.S. Postal Service Corporate Communications. In this February 2014 edition, you'll learn how the Postal Service keeps an eagle eye on its live shipments, and we'll go to one of the nation's best Customer Connect units to get the secret of their success.

Chicks in the Mail

Watkins: As long as an item isn't potentially hazardous, you can probably get it through the mail. Pete Nowacki is here with a story about an unusual mail-order product that is growing in popularity.

Pete Nowacki: Sue Lambertz has an official postal title: Networks Specialist. But --

Sue Lambertz: Well, first it started off as the 'chick lady.' After 34 years, now I'm 'the Queen of the chicks!'

Nowacki: Baby chicks, that is. The Postal Service has been shipping live birds for nearly 100 years. Lambertz is point person for the live animal operation at the distribution center at the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport. She works with four Upper Midwest hatcheries and a number of smaller local producers.

Bud Wood works for Murray McMurray Hatchery in Webster City, Iowa. Every Friday from January through October, he coordinates the hatch, sorting, packing and transportation of as many as 100,000 newborn chicks. We caught up with Wood and his rather vocal brood on a recent Friday.

Bud Wood: We have been shipping birds since 1917 and we have been putting them through the mail ever since.

Nowacki: It's not a matter of waltzing into the local Post Office with a box of chicks, applying a stamp and away they go. Just before hatch, a chick draws the yolk of the egg into its abdomen, providing all it needs to eat and drink for the first three days of life. Still, live animal mailers must comply with complex regulations, use only approved and properly-vented containers, and take other precautions to ensure safe and humane transport.

McMurray trucks leave for the Twin Cities in the Friday overnight, with each truck timed to hit a specific dispatch time. At the postal center, the boxes go to a transfer desk. They're scanned to generate a tag for the airlines and real-time tracking information for McMurray. There's also a little emergency station in case something has gone wrong.

Lambertz: We have heat lamps; we have new boxes if a box gets wet. We have straw we put in there. We do anything we can to keep those little baby chicks alive.

Nowacki: They're then taken to planes in specially-marked yellow carts to indicate live animals. The entire transfer process can take as little as 40 minutes and the birds are soon in the air.

If all goes as planned, the chicks arrive at their destination Post Office within 48 hours. Shipments are watched closely and schedules tweaked as need arises. Communication between shippers, the Postal Service and transportation providers is a constant.

Wood: We track all the packages. We try to spot trouble areas, try to talk to the routers and see if we can get routes changed and things done to get those birds there in time.

Nowacki: Demand for live chicks is growing rapidly, Wood says. Consumers increasingly want to know where their food comes from. Eggs are a great protein source and raising chickens is an easy, fun family hobby.

Four-time Olympic triathlete Hunter Kemper agrees. He works with McMurray in community outreach programs and recently ordered a box of chicks for his growing family in Colorado Springs. He also learned about the Postal Service commitment to deliver chicks to their destination safe and healthy.

Kemper had expected his chicks on a Saturday, but the shipment was delayed by weather issues. He was resigned to waiting until Monday, and then....

Hunter Kemper: Sure enough, Sunday morning, like they come a-knocking on the door; and it's the Postal Service saying, 'Hey, we got your chicks.'

Nowacki: For *Your Postal Podcast*, I'm Pete Nowacki.

The Secret to Customer Connect Success

Watkins: The Customer Connect program, now almost a decade old, has enlisted letter carriers who in the course of their duties, help small businesses with USPS mailing solutions. While many units have had some success stories, there are few that are as enthused about the program as one Colorado postal station. David Rupert is here with the details:

David Rupert: Colorado Springs' Templeton Station is one of the nation's best performing Customer Connect units. With more than 50 carriers, the station has 100 percent participation. Much of the energy behind the success belongs to Delbert Marcum – he's carried mail for 19 years from this station.

Once he got all the carriers in his unit to participate, he was dispatched to the city's nine other stations to help them with participation. We asked him the secret to Customer Connect success.

Delbert Marcum: There's three types of people: people who make it happen, people who watch it happen and people who wonder what happened. And the example I used for that was, how many businesses in your lifetime have you seen go under? But if we could help one business gain enough revenue to hire one employee, and at the same time help the Post Office gain revenue....

Rupert: According to Marcum, an important element is to make sure that the sales group follows up with leads, and then to give proper recognition to the carrier.

Marcum: At the stand-up we give them a certificate of participation -- hey, "thank you for turning in a lead." As soon as that lead turns into a sale, we give them a certificate saying, "thank you

for that sale.” I’ve heard another good idea, where one station was putting pictures up on a bulletin board of carriers that made sales, or what the sale was. I thought that was great.

Rupert: Marcum believes carriers should participate to protect their own survival, as well as the health of the Postal Service.

Marcum: Basically, I’m trying to be persuasive to say, you know, it’s not a waste of time. Somebody’s going to follow this lead up. The Post Office needs the revenue. It’s important to our survival to do as good as we can for the customers and through Customer Connect it’s the best program going.

Rupert: For Marcum, his outreach effort starts the minute he goes on his route.

Marcum: Every time I walk out of this station, in a postal uniform and a postal vehicle, I am displaying the market brand – the Post Office. So I’m selling the Post Office by my performance as a letter carrier.

Rupert: Carriers don’t need a broad level of knowledge. According to Marcum, they just need to be positive and to be prepared to make the connection.

Marcum: I tell carriers, you know, you don’t have to know everything, just tell them that we have people that are not on commission who’s willing to show them what products and services we have available. And to me, Customer Connect is the smartest thing the Post Office has ever done. It’s a chance for somebody to go out with a good customer and say, “Here’s how you order on line. Here’s how you do Every Door Direct Mail. Here’s how you get packages picked up at your door or at your business.” And just basically inform customers we want to earn your business, we want to help you be successful.

News Roundup

Watkins: And now here's a roundup of recent Postal Service news.

The Postal Service announced in a February 7th news release that it ended the first quarter of its 2014 fiscal year with a net loss of \$354 million. This marks the 19th of the last 21 quarters that it has sustained a loss. Though the Postal Service has been able to grow revenue by capitalizing on opportunities in Shipping and Package Services -- and has aggressively reduced operating costs, losses continue to mount due to the persistent decline of higher-margin First-Class Mail, stifling legal mandates, and its inflexible business and governance models.

Quoting Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe, "The Postal Service is doing its part within the bounds of law to right size the organization, and I am very proud of the achievements we have made to reduce costs while significantly growing our package business. We cannot return the organization to long-term financial stability without passage of comprehensive postal reform legislation. We appreciate the efforts of the House and Senate oversight committees to make this happen as soon as possible." Unquote.

And on January 31st, the Postal Service paid tribute to pioneering Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm with the issuance of a limited-edition 37th Black Heritage Forever Stamp during a special ceremony in Brooklyn, New York. Chisholm joins several of the nation’s leading African-American educators, entertainers, civil rights activists, politicians, scholars, athletes, and business pioneers featured in the Black Heritage stamp series, which was launched in 1978

with the issuance of the Harriet Tubman stamp. The Shirley Chisholm Black Heritage Forever Stamp is available at Post Offices nationwide, online at usps.com/stamps, or by calling 1-800-STAMP24.

Thanks for listening to *Your Postal Podcast*. Now, we'd like to hear from you. Please email your feedback and story ideas to YourPostalPodcast@USPS.com.

One lucky listener who emails a comment about this month's podcast will be picked at random to receive the Postal Service's book titled "A Century of Dance," which includes seven Forever Stamps honoring Innovative Choreographers. The winner will be selected from all qualifying comments emailed to YourPostalPodcast@usps.com by Tuesday, March 11th, 2014.

Our congratulations go out to John Pietrowski of Temperance, Michigan, who emailed us a comment about January's podcast and has won a set of Latin Music Legends Commemorative Prints and Forever Stamps.

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