

## Your Postal Podcast 43rd Edition Transcript – December 2011

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**Richard Watkins:** Welcome to Your Postal Podcast. This is Richard Watkins of the Postal Service's Corporate Communications Office. In this month's edition, we'll literally go to the ends of the earth to find out how mail is delivered to U.S. researchers, and we'll hear from the retail owner of the State of Missouri's very first Village Post Office.

### Antarctica Mail Segment

**Watkins:** Much of the holiday mail season is focused on a certain North Pole address. But in our first story, David Rupert takes us to the opposite end of the Earth, to the Antarctic Polar Cap, where mail is equally important to its recipients.

**David Rupert:** The reach of the United States Postal Service extends to the ends of the earth – literally. There's even a U.S. Mail outpost located at McMurdo station, which sits on the edge of Antarctica. There, nearly 1,000 people are involved or support scientific research efforts for six months out of the year.

Mail Clerk Stephanie Prince works as a contractor at the Post Office, and when I was able to talk to her through a satellite phone connection, it was a balmy 23 degrees. That's not so bad until you realize that it's summertime there.

So, what's it like?

**Stephanie Prince:** It's Antarctica. What you're envisioning is probably what it's like. It's really cold. It's really white. It takes a little bit of mental toughness to get through the six months you're here. But overall it's a really great experience. It's just kind of an awe-inspiring environment. It's unlike anything I've ever seen.

**Rupert:** Since there's no express route to the ends of the earth, the mail takes about three weeks to wind its way down to the station from the states.

**Prince:** The mail arrives first at our APO in San Francisco, and then it flies on a commercial flight to New Zealand. And, they work with our cargo teams, our logistics teams, to figure out how much mail we can get on the flights that are coming down. And it comes probably anywhere from one to four times a week.

**Rupert:** Her mail duties at the APO, under the authority of the U.S. Air Force, are not much different than a regular Post Office.

**Prince:** I work in the Post Office, and there's also a mail room, and they're different. We work six days a week, nine hours a day. Our duties include sorting all of the incoming mail, organizing it, and getting it ready for people to come pick it up. And also we work at the counter, taking packages and letters, all the outgoing mail, so selling postage and getting it prepared to go.

**Rupert:** The C-130 touches down on the sea ice runway. It's all hands on deck to break down the mail, which can be as much as 20,000 pounds on a single flight.

Since there aren't any traditional Post Office boxes, all the mail is General Delivery. The employees at the Post Office tell the station residents of incoming parcels by publishing a list.

**Prince:** We post that list on the Internet and we also put it hard copy in the well-trafficked hallway. People, even if they're not on the list, come up to ask if they have a package. Even though they're not on, and, you know, they get the sad, puppy dog face if they don't have anything. Letter mail and flat mail goes in different little cubbies, and we don't put that stuff on the list. So, you know, people come up and check all the time for that, too.

**Rupert:** The mail that comes in connects these people to their friends, families and the outside world.

**Prince:** Definitely, mail is a big deal here. It's very – it's seen as very valuable. You know, it's kind of people's connection to the outside world. And these people get really excited about it. They get really emotional about it.

**Rupert:** Stephanie's friends and family are using the mail to connect her to home.

**Prince:** Here I've received tons of candy and homemade cookies, which is great. And I had some family make me a handmade Christmas tree to kind of put on the wall. It's made out of, you know, cloth. It's just the little things here, you know -- anything that can brighten up your room or space makes a big difference.

**Rupert:** She thinks she has the best job on the base.

**Prince:** The thing to really stress is how much people enjoy the mail here. It's really kind of rewarding to be a part of it -- just to see people how excited they get when they get a package. It's great. It's fun to see all the postcards that come across the counter that are sent out, as well. It's a fun place to work, definitely.

### **Village Post Office Segment**

**Watkins:** Village Post Offices -- or VPOs for short -- are a new concept for the Postal Service and are being considered in communities that either have no Post Office or lose their Post Office. VPOs are located in non-Postal Service establishments -- such as an existing community business, town hall or government center. VPOs provide a range of services that include the sale of First-Class postage stamps, offering Priority Mail products, and accepting mail.

More than a year ago, the small, leased Post Office structure in Doe Run, Missouri, was destroyed by an explosion caused by a leaking gas line. While no one was injured during the late night explosion, it appeared doubtful that the Postal Service would rebuild in Doe Run. But David Fischbeck, the owner of Sherry's Quick Mart, thought his retail store, located just a few hundred feet from the site of the Doe Run Post Office, might make a good candidate for a Village Post Office.

**David Fischbeck:** They had a meeting here at the local park down here and we all attended. They said something about maybe keeping it and giving it to a business in the community locally and keeping it in town here. So I went down and put a bid in on it and told them I was interested, and then they contacted me, and it just went from there.

**Watkins:** Mr. Fischbeck said that in the few weeks the VPO has been open, the customer response has been very good.

**Fischbeck:** Not having to drive to Farmington, which is about four miles away, which you know it's big to them, too. Plus being open 24/7 they can get their mail anytime they want to now, so that's a big plus, too.

**Watkins:** And with about 375 Post Office box customers, Fischbeck said his customers enjoy the convenience of picking up their mail 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Fischbeck:** When they come to the store here other than get the mail, they can get a soda, or you know whatever they want to get, get groceries, and a little bit of food. It's kind of a one-stop shop now for them, you know, which they really like that. It's been tough to get to the boxes and get everything organized, and get everybody adjusted to coming here, but it's really worked out fantastic on my part. My foot traffic has really picked up tremendously. It's a win-win situation for me.

### **News Roundup**

**Watkins:** And now, here's a roundup of recent news headlines about the U.S. Postal Service: On December fourteenth, the Postal Service announced that, in response to a request from multiple U.S. Senators, it had agreed to delay the closing or consolidation of any Post Office or mail processing facility until May 15, 2012. In the announcement, the USPS said it would continue all necessary steps to review these facilities during the interim period, including public input meetings.

In a statement, the Postal Service said it (QUOTE) hopes this period will help facilitate the enactment of comprehensive postal legislation. Given the Postal Service's financial situation and the loss of mail volume, the Postal Service must continue to take all steps necessary to reduce costs and increase revenue. (UNQUOTE)

The Postal Service receives no tax dollars for operating expenses and relies on the sale of postage, products and services to fund its operations.

In other news, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe recently heralded the Postal Service's successes as a sustainability leader during a United Nations-sponsored climate conference in South Africa. The Postal Service was the first federal agency in the United States to measure and publicly record its greenhouse gas emissions – and reported an 8 percent reduction in those emissions compared to 2008. The USPS was awarded the Climate Registry's Gold Status Recognition for this accomplishment – a first for any company or agency in the U.S.

At the conference, Donahoe discussed the Postal Service's 400 "Lean Green Teams," made up of employees who work on a cross-functional basis to identify and implement low- and no-cost ways to conserve natural resources.

In recent years, the USPS has won more than 75 environmental awards, including 40 White House Closing the Circle Awards. For more information about going green with the Postal Service, visit USPS-dot-com slash green ([usps.com/green](http://usps.com/green)).

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