

Your Postal Podcast 28th Edition Transcript

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Richard Watkins: Welcome to Your Postal Podcast. This is Richard Watkins with the Postal Service's Office of Corporate Communications. In this edition, we'll address how the Postal Service deals with mail that has no deliverable address, and believe it or not, we'll learn about a record hailstone and a ball of stamps that have even Ripley scratching his head.

Mail Recovery Center Segment

Watkins: "Never, never, never give up." That could be the rallying cry for Postal Service employees and their efforts to deliver First-Class Mail – even when there's not a deliverable address. David Rupert takes us to the Atlanta Mail Recovery Center, where hope lives every day.

David Rupert: Return to send. Address unknown. Or is it? The 96 employees of the Atlanta Mail Recovery center are all about reuniting mail that was misaddressed, mislabeled or just missent.

And there's a lot of it -- 81 million pieces of mail last year alone. I spoke to two mail recovery clerks about their experiences. The first was Sharol Mathis. I asked her, what's it like to work there?

Mathis: "The first thing I have to do, when I come in, I have to leave my heart outside. When I see pictures coming through, maybe an older family member passing on to someone else, I know with me they hold sentimental value.

Rupert: The feelings of connecting missing packages with distraught customers are what keeps Mathis engaged in her job

Mathis: "When the package actually shows up or it's recovered here and we send it to them, it's really, really, you just don't know the feeling that overcomes you -- the joy of knowing that you made somebody's day."

Rupert: Unlike other mail processing assignments, this one requires a little bit of customer compassion.

Mathis: "Just showing empathy. Just letting them know that you understand how they feel, you understand what they're going through."

Rupert: Mail Recovery Clerk Aleta Montague says her job is satisfying.

Montague: "That's a great feeling for us as employees here. Because it lets us not that what we're doing is not in vain. It's changing people's lives sometimes and making a difference with people.

Rupert: However, she would prefer that less mail be sent to the recovery center and more of it delivered. She encourages better mail preparation.

Montague: “Even though I love working here at the mail recovery center, and I like my job. I really wish customers would mail their packages properly at the retail counter so they never have to make it here.

Rupert: “And Mathis has changed how she sends her own personal mail.

Mathis: “Before I drop something in the mail, I always make sure it has an address, a return address, and stamps.

Hailstone and Stamp Ball Segment

Watkins: People seem to have a fascination with balls of...stuff. String, rubber bands, yarn...and hail. Lisa Nystuen reports on two record setting spheres -- one natural and one man made.

Lisa Nystuen: Hail or ‘solid precipitation’ as the meteorologists call it, is formed from cumulonimbi or thunderclouds found typically on the leading edge of a severe storm system. What you may not know is that hailstones are layered and can be irregular and even may be clumped together.

Our story today covers a whopper of a stone that left Vivian, South Dakota resident Leslie Scott dashing for the measuring tape in the wake of its destruction. Where did Scott go for the official weigh-in? The Post Office of course! Scott put the stone in a cooler with some dry ice and then later went with a news crew down to his local Post Office where Postmaster Linda Perry weighed the stone.

Linda Perry: “After the July 23rd storm, I had several people bringing in hailstones. And they weighed like 1.3, 1.5 and even 1.8, and everyone kept telling me, ‘there’s a bigger one out there and it might be a record.’”

Nystuen: The drama built, as Les Scott finally came to the Post Office five days later, accompanied with a news crew, an official from the National Weather Bureau, and of course, his frozen trophy.

Perry: “It was just kind of exciting. Everyone was wondering if it was going to be a new record. They opened this cooler and they handed it to me. I couldn’t believe it. It was huge. It was about the size of a cantaloupe. I put the stone on the scale and it weighed one pound, 15 ounces. So they did some calculating and they decided it was the heaviest hailstone recorded in U.S. history.

Nystuen: The downside to the record hailstone was the storm that accompanied it, causing widespread destruction to the town.

Perry: “There was a lot of damage. We were just thankful that nobody was hurt. Just about every roof in town had to be replaced, and of course broken windows and siding. Here at the Post Office we were fortunate enough we just needed a new roof.”

Nystuen: What a hail of a tale from South Dakota!

Our next spherical miracle takes us to Boys Town, in Omaha, Nebraska, which houses the world's largest Ball of Stamps. Founded in 1921 by Father Edward J. Flanagan, Boys Town is an organization dedicated to the housing and education of at-risk children.

According to Boys Town Director of Community Programs Thomas Lynch, the idea for the stamp ball was the result of the imagination of youth and a burgeoning stamp collection.

Thomas Lynch: The idea for a stamp ball came from the kids back in the 1950s. They were collecting stamps and it was decided they had such a large collection that they would do something unique and create a stamp ball.

Nystuen: With what is believed to be a tennis ball at its core, the boys began layering stamp after stamp after stamp. Two years and more than four million stamps later, the philatelic masterpiece measured 32 inches in diameter and weighed in at 600 pounds!

The ball was featured in the syndicated newspaper column Ripley's Believe It or Not. More than a half century later, the stamp ball continues to hold the title of World's Largest Ball of Stamps. It drew crowds then, and it continues to draw people today.

Lynch: We still have visitors come to see the stamp ball from across the United States even around the world who visit our village. And it's in a place of honor in our stamp visitor center in the stamp museum and people can come in and see it any time they want to. We're open seven days a week.

Nystuen: The kids currently living at Boys Town still enjoy the stamp ball today.

Lynch: When our boys and girls who live with us today have the opportunity, they tour the visitor center and see the stamp ball, and they're always amazed to see it was something created by fellow students back in the 1950s.

Nystuen: To see images of the record stamp ball and hailstone, go to yourpostalblog.com.

News Minute Segment

Watkins: And now, here's a brief rundown of Postal Service headlines. On September 22, Senator Tom Carper of Delaware introduced the Postal Operations Sustainment and Transformation or "POST" Act of 2010. The Act addresses the current budget issues facing the Postal Service by proposing a series of provisions including easing postal employee pension and retiree health costs and allowing partnerships with state and local governments. Postmaster General John Potter said that Senator Carper's legislation, "... is a roadmap to recovery for the Postal Service. It incorporates many of the key elements we have identified as necessary and essential to allow the Postal Service to meet the changing needs of its customers."

A recent edition of Post & Parcel reported that Postmaster General Potter stressed that long-term sustainability for the Postal Service will be achieved through fundamental change. Mr. Potter made the statement in his annual state of the business address to the mailing industry at the National Postal Customer Council -- or PCC -- Day broadcast on September 15.

Despite cutting spending by \$3 billion in 2010, the Postal Service continues to seek meaningful change for greater control over its business decisions, including delivery frequency, pricing and products, public policy and workforce flexibility. The postmaster general also looked forward, telling PCC members that new flat-rate products and a Priority Mail "Regional Rate Box" are being developed and will be available in January of next year.

Watkins: Thank you for listening to Your Postal Podcast. And special thanks to Omaha Customer Relations Coordinator Roger Humphries for his contribution to this month's podcast. Now we'd like to hear from you. Please send your feedback and story ideas to YourPostalPodcast@usps.com. A production of USPS Western Area Corporate Communications, Copyright 2010, All Rights Reserved.