

Your Postal Podcast 33rd Edition Transcript

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Richard Watkins: Richard Watkins: Welcome to Your Postal Podcast. This is Richard Watkins with the Postal Service's Office of Corporate Communications. In this edition, you'll hear from a stamp artist whose work includes America's great jazz instrumentalists and the Great Plains of Kansas. You'll also learn more about a key link in the Postal Service's delivery network, the rural letter carrier. And they say that diamonds are forever -- and now, so too, are the Postal Service's commemorative stamps.

Watkins: Dean Mitchell is a highly successful commercial and fine artist. But even as his artwork graces galleries, museums and private collections, some of his most well-traveled illustrations are found on First-Class letters. He illustrated many of 1995's Jazz Instrumentalists stamps, including Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker, and most recently, the Kansas Statehood stamp. Mitchell, who was born in Pennsylvania and raised in Florida, talked from his Tampa studio about the challenges of designing a commemorative postage stamp.

Dean Mitchell: The assignment sometimes will also kind of in some ways dictate your limitations. It's kind of like doing the Kansas Statehood stamp, you have to do something that really represents the state. And so trying to find a very, very simple way to design something so that it's legible once it's reduced can be pretty challenging for an artist. Because you have to really actually eliminate a lot of things and sort of come up with the essence of something that people can read and that is very legible to the eye once it's reduced.

Watkins: Mitchell also works with a stamp's art director and members of the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee to gain additional insight into a stamp's subject matter.

Mitchell: Sometimes I'll have a little brainstorm with sometimes like Howard Paine was director of this particular job, and sometimes they'll have general ideas that they discussed in a committee meeting about some possible concepts. And then what we do is we go through this and then through a process of elimination we'll just say, um, that probably won't work, or that's been done before. So you have to come up with something else. And so it's a back and forth process of sketches and drawings and submitting and back and forth with the committee. And then even once you've come up with a general idea then you have to also go through the committee again to see if the colors are right and where they're going to put the U.S. on it. There's a lot of things to consider even though it's a small space.

Watkins: And how does Mitchell feel when he sees one of his miniature works of art arrive in his mailbox from time to time?

Mitchell: You know to actually see a work of art of mine that's going all over the world, for that matter, it's pretty surreal and amazing. And actually it's gratifying to know that I'll be a part of history. The stamps are a part of American history. So it's a great honor for me as an artist.

[Rural Carrier Segment](#)

Watkins: Service with a smile – that’s the motto of the National Association of Rural Letter Carriers. Since rural free delivery started back in 1896, rural carriers have been providing Americans with a vital link between urban and rural America. Brian Sperry recently caught up with a Kansas rural carrier, whose route is beyond compare.

Brian Sperry: Doug Kraft loads the mail and himself into his red Dodge Truck at the Gridley Post Office where he has served as a rural carrier for more than 22 years. The blacktop soon fades to gravel as he pulls up to the first of 258 mailboxes on his route.

Like most rural carriers, Kraft has mastered the art of driving a left-hand drive vehicle and delivering the mail out the passenger window, a feat accomplished by sitting in the middle of the bench seat and using his left foot to accelerate and brake. The achievement becomes more impressive when you learn Kraft is accident-free.

No rural carrier in America covers more ground each day than Kraft. At 182.5 miles, his rural route is the longest in the nation.

Doug Kraft: Well, maybe that’s why my day’s pretty full. I just figure it’s just part of a day’s work. I grew up on a farm, kind of a farm boy, I just do whatever needs to get done, and didn’t think anything else about it. I just enjoy every day. I tell people that Monday’s the same as Friday to me.

Sperry: Former Gridley Postmaster Paula Raaf, who worked with Kraft for more than 20 years, praises his work.

Paula Raaf: He cares for every customer.

Sperry: Old Man Winter is no match for Kraft, who embraces the challenge.

Kraft: The wintertime I like the best. My wife sometimes tells me in the morning, ‘I sure hate to see you have to get out today.’ And I said honey I’m ready to go. I like the challenge to see if I can make it through the day without any bad hitches.

Sperry: Just as customers depend on Kraft, he depends on them.

Kraft: Well, I guess in 2010 was probably the most challenging. There was several times that the snow was pretty deep, and then it drifted quite a bit, so I got stuck I guess more times that year than any time in my over 20 years of running. I have a lot of good farm friends out there that are willing to get out in their tractor and pull me out.

Sperry: With few exceptions, the mail always gets through.

Kraft: It always has. I think there was one day that it didn’t come from Topeka because of ice and that was probably maybe 8 or 10 years ago. So there wasn’t much else we could do about that. I try to get it out even if it’s late or after dark, whatever it takes. I like to finish the route because I like to get my mail every day. I like to treat other people like I’d like to be treated. So whether they like me as a carrier or not, I still try to do the best I can.

Sperry: Kraft knows he plays a vital role in the continued success of the Postal Service.

Kraft: I'm just interested in doing what I can do where I'm at, and that's about as far as I can go, in being efficient and cost-effective in the delivery and making a satisfied customer. I think that's the key. If we don't have satisfied customers were not going to make it anyway.

Forever Stamp Segment

Watkins: Forever stamps started out as a good idea. Now, every commemorative stamp will be forever. David Rupert is here with a short history lesson.

David Rupert: The Forever Stamp first went on sale in April 2007. Since then, more than 6 billion Forever Stamps have been sold.

The Postal Service developed the Forever Stamp for consumers to ease the transition during price changes

As the name suggests, Forever Stamps can be used to mail a one-ounce letter regardless of when the stamps are purchased or used and no matter how prices may change in the future.

For many years, there was only one Forever Stamp design — it featured an image of the Liberty Bell.

Beginning this year with the 2011 Lunar New Year stamp, every stamp issue henceforth will be Forever.

News Roundup

Watkins: And now, here's a roundup of recent Postal Service headlines: While work is ongoing to redesign the Postal Service's organization and introduce new products and further expanded access to its services, Postmaster General Pat Donahoe took a moment earlier this month to thank postal employees for their commitment to service even as record snow and cold pummeled much of the nation.

On Feb. 8, the PMG said "Thank you to everyone for all the hard work you've been putting in across the country with this recent bad weather we've had over the past several weeks. The weather has been very disruptive, but you have come through and done a great job. Our customers appreciate the dedication and the great service you've been providing."

Regarding upcoming changes, Vice President for Delivery and Post Office Operations Dean Granholm was interviewed by The Wall Street Journal for a January 24th article about plans to potentially close up to 2,000 Postal locations which operate at a deficit. "We want to make the smartest decisions possible with the smallest impact on communities," Granholm said. Factors to be considered when reviewing possible candidates for closure include their proximity to other locations offering postal services.

Earlier in January, Postmaster General Donahoe announced a new senior management structure cutting the number of officers by 16 percent, and streamlining of the organization that includes the closure of the Southeast Area office in coming months. The Postmaster General said the change was the beginning of a much larger process

that will involve every organization within the Postal Service. Additional details of the streamlined organization are expected in March.

Watkins: Thank you for listening to Your Postal 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 2011, All Rights Reserved.