

Figured out



Some of Manley's figurine collection

Retired letter carrier David Manley can't get enough of letter carriers. He likes them so much that he has collected several hundred letter carrier figurines and built his own cabinets to hold them.

Like many letter carriers, Manley, a member of Alton, IL Branch 309, collects modern and antique postal mementos. He started collecting figurines in 1985, when his wife bought him one for his birthday. He and his wife began collecting more, and friends and family gave him others as gifts.

Over the years, Manley's collection has expanded to more than 400 pieces. As his collection grew, Manley put his cabinet-building skills to use making homes for the collection, working in his large woodworking shop. His collection fills eight cabinets that occupy a space 7 feet tall and 13 feet wide, stacked together as one.

"I hated woodworking in high school," Manley recalled, but when he had a chance to try it again while serving in the military before joining the Postal Service, he had a change of heart. "I picked it up in the Air Force and kept it up after that," he said. He spent two or three nights a week in the wood shop at Vance Air Force Base in Oklahoma, where he was stationed from 1969 to 1973.

Manley also learned to carry the mail in the Air Force—for most of his military service, he worked as a postal clerk and letter carrier on the base. He took the USPS exam a few months before leaving and found an opening in St. Louis. "I got out of the Air Force on Oct. 26, this is on a Friday, in 1973," he said, "and I was hired by the St. Louis post office the following Monday." He soon transferred to Bethalto,

IL, and delivered the mail there for 29 years until he retired. He still lives in the small town.

Manley has built many other custom cabinets for various uses, from trophy cases and lecterns for his church to shelf and desk units, entertainment centers and cedar chests he has made for family and friends. Manley's cabinet creations, which he makes in a garage next to his home that he converted to a woodworking shop, are expertly made with many classic details and mostly luxurious natural wood finishes. It's difficult

to distinguish his pieces from professional works.

Manley finds figurines in many places. He searches eBay, antique stores and flea markets. In his retirement, he's done considerable traveling, and he shops wherever he goes.

"I bought four in Hawaii," he said. "I bought one in Alaska."

He also has written letters to a well-known figurine manufacturer, Vanmark, to ask the company to make letter carrier figurines. The company obliged with several versions of a letter carrier, and Manley bought every version.

Manley has acquired other interesting postal collectibles as well. His col-

lection includes "mailman belt buckles, beer steins, whiskey decanters and 90 Christmas ornaments," he said. With the figurines, about 700 items fill his cabinets.

He even collects antique letter carrier uniform items. Manley has a coat from the 1930s or 1940s era and a hat from the 1880s.

Bethalto provides him with an annual opportunity to put on that uniform and walk the streets again.

"Every year at Christmastime, we do a Victorian Christmas walk in town," he said, "and I dress in the old-fashioned

mailman uniform with the bag." Last Christmas, in a nod to the odd practice of mailing children by parcel post (the last-known child shipped by mail was mailed in 1915), Manley posed for photos with several youngsters in his satchel, including his great-niece, Ellina.

While Manley's homebuilt cabinets are sturdy and large enough to hold his collection, he still wonders where it will go next.

"It would be really nice to find an old post office to turn into a city museum or something," he said. "It would be neat to put the whole collection there so people could see it." **PR**



Manley dressed as an old-fashioned mailman from when people sent children by parcel post.