



The civilian army fighting to



Letter carriers depend on the Postal Service for our livelihoods. It's not surprising to see postal workers and their families doing their part to urge the postmaster general to keep Saturday delivery to encourage Congress to pass postal reform legislation.

But some everyday people with no official connection to the Postal Service also devote their time to the cause. They may have less at stake, but they still dedicate energy to spreading the word about the importance of mail. Some of them value the Postal Service as a vital system for business. Others want to preserve post offices as connectors of communities, or treasure the mail as an unmatched way to provide truly personal, meaningful communication.

Here's a look at some everyday Americans who are speaking out for the Postal Service just because they care.

From rescuing a post office to saving the Service

Many communities facing the threat of their local post office closing or reducing service have stepped up to defend them, but for Steve Hutkins, the effort led to something much bigger. Two years ago, when the historic post office in Rhinecliff, NY, near his home was facing closure, Hutkins started a blog to defend it.

As he dug deeper, Hutkins, a professor of literature at New York University, realized that his local post office's woes could

be traced all the way back to Washington, DC, in Congress and Postal Service headquarters at L'Enfant Plaza. "I started writing about bigger subjects, like legislation," he told *The Postal Record*.

The effort grew into savethepostoffice.com, a website brimming with detailed stories about struggles over local post offices and national-level postal reform news, along with links to other stories and ways to get involved. He isn't paid for the many hours of time he devotes to the site, but Hutkins is driven by other motives.

"I like what post offices represent as places in the public sphere," he said. "I find all the ins and outs of the Postal Service interesting, like a puzzle."

He's also angry about how Postal Service management contributes to the problems of the agency by doing things like cutting service, while Congress does nothing.

"I'd like to see a study done on the decline in revenue caused by the Post Office itself that have nothing to do with the Internet," Hutkins said. "They are driving business away now. That's the kind of stuff that irks me."

On his site, Hutkins maintains lists and maps of post offices that have closed or are threatened with closure, as well as details on the process. He posts regular news articles covering both local and national postal developments. His articles often focus on local backlash against post office closures, or on how big mailers and other business customers drive postal decision-making to the detriment of consumers.

"I didn't realize the extent to which the private sector influences the Postal



Service,” when he waded into broader postal issues and started writing about the driving forces behind postal financial woes. “The postmaster general is listening to business, not the average customer.”

As you’d expect from a literature professor, the articles are engaging and well-researched, and Hutkins’ site has muscled its way into the circle of professional media sources the postal community relies on for news.

“The reaction has been great,” he said. “The site gets plenty of visitors, and I get e-mails all the time both from postal workers and average citizens worried about what’s happening to their post office. I also get calls from journalists looking for background information about stories they’re working on.” About 25,000 readers visit his site each month.

As for the Rhinecliff Post Office, located in this tiny town on the Hudson River since 1858—it is no longer slated for closure, but the postmaster has been transferred and a part-time contract worker will take over soon, with the office scheduled for reduced hours of service.

A small businessman ‘sticks’ up for his Postal Service

Though he has no formal connection with the Postal Service aside from his home-based business, “We’re all connected to the Postal Service,” Carl Bunin said. Bunin prints and ships buttons and other products, and he recently began voicing his support for the mail by printing and selling stickers—suitable for attaching to letters and packages—and buttons and

window signs with pro-postal messages.

Bunin’s business, peacebuttons.info, has sold thousands of buttons with various messages in support of social causes from his home in the Detroit suburb of Huntington Woods. Before starting peacebuttons.info (the name is also the website address), Bunin worked for a union printer for nearly 20 years, and his products still are union-made.

His appreciation for the door-to-door service his letter carrier provides grew dramatically when Bunin became permanently disabled and eventually required a wheelchair to get around.

“I was hobbling around with a bunch of packages, and the friendly clerks at my local post office said I should check out the online services,” he said. He discovered Click-N-Ship, and soon was sending almost every shipment from his house.

“I realized with this endeavor just how much I depend on the Post Office to do this,” Bunin said.

Bunin’s business is part of a renewal of the activism of his youth in the 1960s. “I became politically active when I was in college,” he said. “I’ve drifted in and out of it.” The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, inspired him to activism again, and he built peacebuttons.info around that calling.

Adding the Postal Service to his list of causes came naturally. After learning about the way Congress had poisoned the Postal Service’s financial health, he grew increasingly annoyed. He began producing stickers, buttons and window signs calling for saving Saturday delivery and preserving, not privatizing, USPS. Since he lacks the money to run ads to express



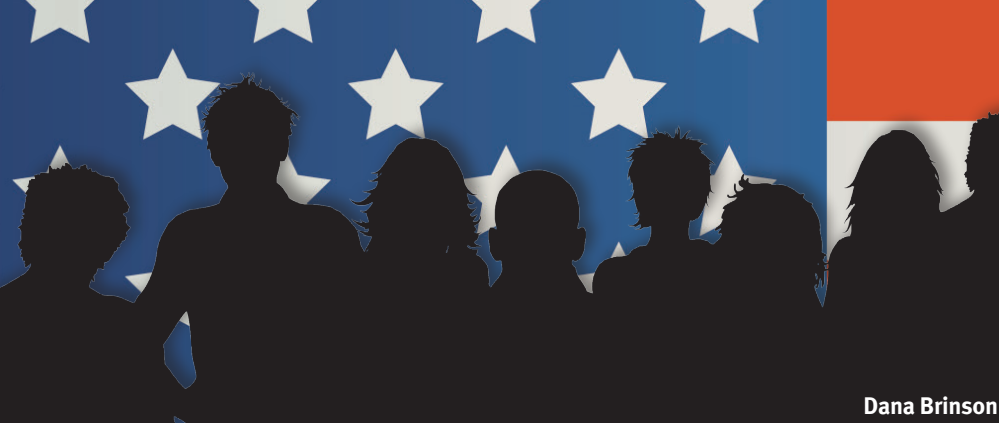
Steve Hutkins



Carl Bunin

Two of Bunin’s window signs





Dana Brinson



Recruit your own volunteers

We all know people—customers or others—who appreciate the Postal Service and want it to last, as Brinson, Bunin and Hutson do. What should a letter carrier tell someone who shows interest in standing up for the mail?

“I’d simply encourage people not to believe everything they read in the news and to spend a little extra time learning more about what’s going on,” Hutkins said. “And of course, if there’s a choice between using the USPS versus a private carrier, go with the Postal Service.”

Bunin stressed the loss of service and higher prices the public would face if the Postal Service isn’t preserved, and the importance of reaching Congress with the message.

“I would say the most important way to support our Postal Service is to help raise awareness about these political challenges,” Bunin said. “You can raise that awareness with your friends, family and neighbors about this very important issue. Our buttons, stickers and signs are one way to start that conversation. From there, let your members of Congress know where you stand and encourage others to do the same.”

If someone asks for more information, Hutkins’ site is a great source, and NALC’s public outreach website, DeliveringForAmerica.org, has the background material and latest news that citizen activists need to speak up for the Postal Service. Once they understand the issues, they can explain them to others. One of the most effective ways for people who want to reach a wide audience about postal issues is to write a letter to the editor to their local newspaper.

If you know people who care enough to speak out on behalf of the Postal Service, let them know you’re willing to help. **PR**

his opinions, Bunin said, he lets his products speak for him and his customers, one button or sticker at a time.

“A lot of people don’t even know the Post Office is in trouble and under attack,” he said, “and some would like to keep it that way.” But Bunin is doing his part to spread the word and defend the 238-year-old institution that, like our democracy, is accessible to all. “It’s amazing that, for 46 cents, you can send something anywhere. It’s equal for everyone.”

Spreading love for ‘snail mail’

For Dana Brinson, “snail mail” is a term of endearment.

“You find paper and an envelope, think of something meaningful to write, ponder for a bit, hand write it out, seal it, find a postage stamp and an address, maybe decorate the envelope with a couple stickers or some decorative tape or stamps and take it to a mailbox,” she said. “The entire process is ‘snail’—and that’s what I love about it.”

Brinson, of Chapel Hill, NC, shares her love for sending and receiving letters on her blog, savesnailmail.com, which is “dedicated to the preservation of handwritten traditions in a modern world.” On the site, Brinson shares treasures she has received in her mailbox, artful creations she or others have sent and news items about history as seen through letters. By using a blog (and Twitter) to spread her love of mail, Brinson bridges the gap between new media and traditional mail.

Brinson’s site encourages people to write letters to their friends and family, but it also connects her to new acquaintances interested in exchanging mail. Through her site, Brinson has found hundreds of people who share her passion. Many have mailed her letters and art, and she always responds. A few became regular pen pals.

“People really just feel an affinity for letter writing with me, so they send a cute note to share that and often share something about themselves,” she said. “Sometimes we find we have a lot

in common or interesting stories to share and it turns into a regular thing. Most people reach out just to say, ‘me too,’ as in, ‘I love to write letters and use beautiful stationery and nice pens and pretty stamps, and to make someone’s day by letting them know I thought of them, took the time to write and gave them something delightful to find in their mailbox.’”

Brinson writes up to 50 letters a month, often on stationery she created, and receives about 15 letters each month.

“I genuinely like how you can really get to know someone through a letter,” she said. “A few words on a postcard are fine, but inside the safety of an envelope, people will share more of themselves, and that can lead to deeper connections and more satisfying pen pal relationships.”

While savesnailmail.com helps to revive the joy of letter-writing for a generation raised on the Internet, service reductions are making that task harder.

“I know the Post Office is trying to save money, so sometimes hours are cut,” she said. “My local post office is open from 9 to 4, so it’s hard to get there during the workday since I’m at work at those times. I think this will only hurt the Post Office in the long run, because it makes it harder for folks to get to the counter.”

Brinson was featured in the December 2011 issue of *The Postal Record*. Following that article, several *Postal Record* readers sent her cards and letters, and she still keeps in touch with some of them. Brinson’s address is P.O. Box 95, Carrboro, NC 27510.

Stories like these remind us that our customers are an essential part of the effort to defend the Postal Service on our own. The American people, who rely on our service for vital documents, medicine and small business shipping and rate us as the most trusted federal workers, are speaking up too, and together, we can succeed. **PR**