



You ought to be in pictures

The letter carriers who appeared in USPS' holiday ads



Top: Rick Henn
Above: Regina Woods

You probably saw them on television—a series of ads with letter carriers singing cheerfully to the tune of Christmas carols to promote package delivery before the holiday, and another ad that ran immediately after Christmas with carriers promoting the ease of returning gifts by mail to the tune of “Auld Lang Syne.” But you may have wondered whether they are real carriers, or just actors in postal uniforms. And, if they are real, what was it like to star in a national TV commercial?

They are all real carriers, and they all had quite an experience last fall when the Postal Service cast them in its ads to promote Priority Flat Rate package delivery.

“I felt like I was Brad Pitt,” Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member **Rick Henn** said. Henn, of Huntington Beach, was one of several dozen city carriers who received star treatment at one of the shoots for the ads.

“We had great food,” he said. “We had our own private trailers that had bathrooms cleaner than most people’s homes. And the people were very professional.”

Henn was chosen after a production company hired by the Postal Service visited his station and invited carriers

to audition on the spot, one of several facilities in the Los Angeles area the producers scoured for talent. Others from outside L.A. were chosen from hundreds of carriers who sent video clips in response to a casting call to stations across the country.

Making the cut and appearing on camera didn’t ensure that every carrier appeared in the ads, though—the performances of some had to be edited out to narrow the spots to 30 seconds. Henn made it to the final cut in one of the pre-Christmas ads, singing four words—“through 12 blizzards blowing”—to the tune of “The Twelve Days of Christmas.”

“It was really an honor and a blessing to do the ad,” he said. “First, to support the Postal Service, and second, to feel what it’s like to be in front of a camera.”

The ads were shot at Disney Studios’ Golden Oak Ranch, a permanent outdoor set complete with suburban homes and manicured lawns an hour’s drive north of downtown Los Angeles. The producers added fake snow, decorations, Christmas lights and letter carriers in winter uniforms. Both spots featured several carriers, each singing part of a song while delivering or picking up packages—some with exceptional singing talent, others not so much.

The Postal Service turned to real carriers because it wanted to showcase the dedication they bring to their jobs, especially during the holiday rush. “Letter carriers are already the face of the Postal Service, and Americans know and trust them, which is one reason the Postal Service tops the list of most trusted federal agencies each year,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “The spirit letter carriers bring to serving their customers shows on camera better than any actor playing a letter carrier could manage.”



“Having our employees in this TV commercial is like reality TV—people doing what they do in real life,” Richard Maher, a communications program specialist for USPS who helped create the ads, said. “No one does that better than our employees.”

It also didn’t hurt that many letter carriers are comfortable in public situations. “I’m not shy in front of a camera,” Henn said.

Most of the actors didn’t have time to be nervous. **Jeff Saleem** of Long Beach, CA, also a Branch 1100 member, was one of about 20 carriers who auditioned when producers visited his station.

“I went in and just read my lines,” he said. “Two days later, they said, ‘You need to go to the set in L.A.’” Saleem had a little background in the business, since he had studied public relations and marketing in college and had done some acting on the side.

To take the time off to do the ad, Saleem took annual leave, but some carriers chose leave without pay. They were all paid the standard Screen Actors Guild (SAG) rate for their work on the ad.

Saleem brought his uniform, but it was southern California garb not suited for a wintry setting, so the producers gave him a suitable cold-weather uniform. “They put fake snow in our hair and on our faces,” he said. It was over as fast as it started—Saleem was done in two days. “We just went in, shot our parts, and got out,” he said. After singing several different lines on-camera, Saleem ended up in three of the ads.

Even with the heavy coat and fake snow in his hair, Saleem’s customers noticed him in the ad immediately. “When I walk on the street, I wear my sunhat and sunglasses—but people still said, ‘Hey, I know that was you!’”

Regina Woods of Downey, CA, got a call one morning before heading to work telling her that she had been chosen for the ad and should go to the studio that day instead. Instead

of delivering the mail, the Branch 1100 member spent the next three days on the set being pampered while awaiting her turn in front of the camera.

“The staff were really, really, really, really nice,” she said. “They treated you very nice on the set.” She recalled that in her rush to get to the shoot her first day, she missed breakfast, so the staff brought her whatever she wanted while she got her hair and makeup done.

Woods appeared in one of the pre-Christmas ads in a singing part, and can be seen picking up a package in the post-holiday spot. Some of Woods’ customers recognized her from the ads, and many of her friends highlighted it on Facebook and other social media sites. “They were super-excited about it,” she said.

All three carriers enjoyed the experience enough to consider doing more work on camera, especially now that they have the postal ads on their acting résumés.

“I’m open to anything that comes up,” Saleem said.

“If I ever get the opportunity,” Woods said, “I’m going to jump on it.”

“I’m seriously considering getting my SAG membership,” Henn said. “I can see myself totally doing more commercials.” Henn thinks the daily workout that comes with walking his route would contribute to his new career: “I can still move like I’m 18 years old.” **PR**



Jeff Saleem, as seen in the commercial (top) and getting his makeup applied (above)