What’s a 10-letter word for a letter carrier who designs crossword puzzles?

JULESMARKEY.

Markey, a member of Philadelphia Branch 157, has created and published more than a dozen crossword puzzles. Really hard crossword puzzles. New York Times crossword puzzles. But for Markey, creating crosswords isn’t just something he does in his spare time—he is constantly thinking of clever new clues as he walks his route.

“You’re not daydreaming—you are still focused—but your creative mind is free,” Markey said. Anything can inspire him, from people he sees, to addresses, to items in the mail or on the street. Sometimes he is thinking through a puzzle; other times, ideas just pop into his head. Either way, the world along his route is a treasure chest of wordplay.

Markey remembers the first time crossword clues formed in his mind. On his route in downtown Philadelphia, he passed some construction debris. “I deal with doors every day,” he said, but it took a pile of old doors a landlord had dumped on the sidewalk to prompt his brain to think of words associated with doors. He thought of words that can describe a door and how they can combine to form other words.

Dutch door. Oven door. Dutch oven.

He and his wife, Piljo, had often worked on the Times crossword together. Using a simple computer worksheet Piljo created as a template for a crossword puzzle, Markey tinkered with his ideas at home. He submitted about 10 puzzles to The New York Times—the major leagues of crosswords—before one was accepted and published on May 10, 2012. The door clues ended up in a later puzzle, one of seven of his puzzles published by the Times so far, with four more accepted and awaiting publication. Other publications have printed his puzzles, including the Journal of Higher Education.

Markey’s first Times puzzle was a challenge, even for hardcore puzzle players. Parts of some words were circled—for instance, the “rope” in “European.” Other circled parts of words included “suit,” “seat,” “ball” and “bail.” These words all pointed to one word that can precede them all—“jump”—which was the key to solving the puzzle, because some clues had to jump over others instead of simply intersecting. Some players loved it, others hated it, but it made an impression.

And the clues were no less clever—or frustrating, depending on your outlook: “Facilities housing large planes”
yielded “sawmills.” The answer for “Phone voice” was “Siri,” the talking assistant on iPhones. The puzzle stumped many players, including his colleagues at the Fairmount post office.

*Times* crossword puzzle editor Will Shortz called Markey’s puzzles “expert constructions.”

It’s no surprise that postal themes creep into some of his puzzles.

Sometimes the answers involve simple postal terms, such as “USPS” or “mail.” Other times, the clues play on classes of mail: “first class” led to “cabin,” “priority” to “seating,” “express” to “checkout” and “registered” to “nurse.” In a rebus puzzle, a type of crossword that involves pairs of letters at the beginning of answers, Markey used “p” and “o” to generate answers such as “popcorn popper.” Once solved, the puzzle’s center revealed the words “Post Office boxes.”

Markey majored in mathematics at the University of Albany in his native New York. While math may not seem like the typical background for a maker of word puzzles, Markey said the thinking power and creative leaps found in math fit well with puzzles.

“There are quite a few puzzle authors who are in the science or math or music fields,” he said.

Likewise, many of his fellow postal workers have a wide variety of educational backgrounds and abilities. “I work with a lot of other talented people,” he said. Markey wants managers and critics of the Postal Service to understand the level of thought required to deliver the mail. “To do the job, you not only have to care, you have to have the capacity to take in a lot of information,” he said.

When word got out about his skills, postal patrons began giving Markey suggestions for clues or themes.

He also exchanged ideas with a customer when he noticed a puzzle magazine, *Collector’s Crosswords*, in her mail. She was delighted when he asked her, “Would you like to do my crossword?”

Chances are the more Markey walks his route and exercises his brain, the more crossword puzzles we’ll see. PR

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**For your enjoyment, we’ve printed one of Jules Markey’s puzzles below. You can find the answers to this puzzle on page 52 of this magazine.**

**ACROSS**

1 Mediterranean and Baltic, in Monopoly: Abbr. 5 Org. suggested by the starts of 17-, 31-, 41- and 62-Across 9 Kind of point 14 Toro ___ (African area) 15 Pop 16 One of the Dutch Antilles 17 Prissy accommodations on a ship 20 Hi hi 21 Kaput 22 Fruit drink 23 One who knows his beans? 26 In a row 28 “I ___ what I said” 30 “s.” thing 31 Ward worker 38 Like some highly-rated bonds 39 Grant-giving org. 40 Dog command 41 What disabled people are entitled to on a subway 48 Mich./Minn. separator

**DOWN**

1 ‘90s-’00s Britcom 2 “Ta-da!” 3 Overthrowing a base, e.g. 4 Menu item often accompanied by wasabi 5 Pac-12 school, for short 6 Roman sun god 7 Droids, e.g. 8 Obama girl 9 Group within a group 10 Man-mouse link 11 Like the number, originally 12 Tolerant 13 Like interstates 18 Shocks, in a way 19 Sphere or pyramid 21 Bit of body art, informally 24 Regarding 27 Beast with a beard 28 Low poker holdings 31 Jay-Z’s genre 32 Musician’s asset 33 Moo goo ___ pan

**Answers:**

1. Mediterranean
2. Baltic
3. in Monopoly: Abbr.
4. Org.
5. suggested
6. by the starts
7. of 17-
8. , 31-
9. , 41-
10. and 62-
11. Across
12. 9 Kind of point
13. Point
14. Toro ___ (African area)
15. Pop
16. One of the Dutch Antilles
17. Prissy accommodations on a ship
18. Hi hi
19. Kaput
20. Fruit drink
21. One who knows his beans?
22. In a row
23. “I ___ what I said”
24. “s.” thing
25. Ward worker
26. Like some highly-rated bonds
27. Grant-giving org.
28. Dog command
29. What disabled people are entitled to on a subway
30. Mich./Minn. separator

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**Puzzle by Jules P. Markey**