

With a song in their hearts

Some letter carriers have musical talent, and sometimes it takes them places when they aren't on their routes. *The Postal Record* found a few with great voices who impress the world, and their patrons, with their musical ability.

Many of **Otis Hembre's** customers know that if they are having a bad day,



the Las Vegas Branch 2502 carrier can sing a tune to cheer them up. Hembre has plenty of experience using his voice to thrill people—he sang with The Platters, one of the most successful vocal groups in early rock 'n' roll history.

"A lot of people have caught our shows or know I used to sing," he said. Hembre will deliver a few lines of music when a customer requests it. "Sometimes they come out to the box just for that. It's very flattering," he said.

Hembre wasn't part of the original group that recorded 1950s hits such as "The Great Pretender," "Only You" and "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." He joined the group in 1979 when he heard a girlfriend's sister's husband singing and sang along. "Just out of habit, I harmonized with him," Hembre said. The man turned out to be a member of The Platters and invited Hembre to audition.

Hembre performed and toured the world as a full-time member of the band from 1979 to 1982, and in the years following, he joined the group for occasional tours several times and recorded albums with them. "We went country to country and city to city," he said. "It was a fun thing. There were some tough times, but most of them were good times."

Yearning for stability and a family life, Hembre moved back to his hometown of Las Vegas and took a job as a letter carrier in 1988. "The road can get really, really hectic," he said. "and I was trying to break away from that life-style." Since starting with the Postal Service, though,

Hembre has taken time off a few times to rejoin the group to perform at special events, including concerts celebrating the 50th anniversary of the group or to fill in when other members were away. He also started his own singing group with a pair of former Platters members who performed in Las Vegas.

Hembre is still making people happy with his voice. "I'm a love-song singer," he said. "I love to sing happy music and bring back memories."

Cherry Hill/Haddonfield, NJ Branch 769 retired member **Doug Dash** has always enjoyed singing in church choirs and small professional singing groups. But he didn't expect to get the ultimate church choir gig—singing at a papal mass when Pope Francis visited the United States in 2015.

The bass singer auditioned, along with thousands of other hopefuls from across the country, for a spot on the 240-member papal mass choir when a friend of his, a Catholic nun from Philadelphia, urged him to try out. At first, he was told the auditions were over and he lived too far away, but it turned out the choir needed more male singers. Dash had only 15 minutes to show off his voice (some candidates were rejected in just five). Despite having a sore throat that day, he impressed the choir director. His music sight-reading ability helped, too.

At the rehearsals, the voices soon came together and Dash realized he was in the company of great singers. "All of a sudden, I'm hearing baritone, second tenors, sopranos and I'm thinking these people are really good," he said. With Pope Francis presiding, the choir performed more than two





Doug Dash took part during a rehearsal with the Philadelphia Orchestra, which accompanied the Papal Mass Choir.

dozen pieces at the outdoor mass in September 2015 with the backing of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Dash was a voice major in college and taught music at a junior high school before joining the Postal Service in 1979. He retired from carrying the mail in 2006, giving him more time to sing.

"It was a tremendous experience for me," said Dash, who is Catholic. "I told my wife, 'What could I possibly do that's more important than singing for a pope?' Some of those young people may have another chance, but I was 71 at the time."

Stephanie Bostic hasn't heard back from her audition for the television contest show "The Voice" yet, but keep watching.

The show's producers flew Bostic, a member of South Florida Branch 1071, to Los Angeles to audition after someone (she doesn't know who) sent the producers a link to a YouTube video of her singing. That was more than a year ago, but she could end up on the show at any time. "They said they always keep you on file," Bostic said, "and if they ever want you on the show, they'll call you."

You may have already heard Bostic sing, though—she opened the first session of the NALC's Biennial Convention in Los Angeles last August with the National Anthem, and has performed at several previous conventions.

Bostic has loved singing since she was a small child. At age 5, her parents bought her a toy record player. She listened to Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots are Made for Walkin'" and sang it over and over. "I drove them crazy for a while with that song," she said.

She joined her church choir at age 9. Soon she was singing in musicals and appearing on talent-search TV shows such as "Showtime at the Apollo" and "Stairway to the Stars." Bostic took her job as a letter carrier in 1986.

When she isn't carrying the mail,

Bostic does voiceovers for TV and radio ads and sings at weddings, funerals and parties.

Want a sample? Check out "Stephanie Hayes sings" (she uses her maiden name as a performer) on YouTube at youtu.be/jdxsGewXdHI.

Bostic plans to retire from the Postal Service next year, which will give her even more time to sing. In the meantime, she loves her job. "I like the fact that I'm out here all alone all day, and I have very nice customers," she said. "I couldn't sit at a desk all day." **PR**

Stephanie Bostic is well known for her soaring rendition of the National Anthem performed at recent national conventions.

