



## Mail delivered early gift for child with cancer

**W**hen Jacob Thompson's parents learned that the 2017 Christmas season likely would be the Saco, ME, youngster's last, they hoped to make it as joyful as possible.

Jacob, 9, had battled neuroblastoma, a childhood cancer, for nearly half his life, but his doctors told them that it had worsened and he probably wouldn't last until Christmas.

How to make the holiday season memorable, the parents wondered?

The answer they hit on: the mail.

Opening lots of holiday cards would be a pleasant diversion from Jacob's medical procedures and hospital stays, especially if drawings of some of his favorite items—such as penguins—were included.

On Wednesday, Nov. 1, a local TV station ran a story about Jacob. Other news outlets followed, the story went on social media, national media picked it up, and by the following Monday, the mail began pouring in.

A week later, on Monday, Nov. 13, letter carriers delivered more than twice as much mail to Jacob as to all other residents on the 15 routes in Portland's 04102 ZIP code combined—no small feat, given that Portland is New England's second-largest metropolitan region after Boston. He received 64,500 letters (compared with 30,000 for everyone else) and 5,100 packages.

The total for the first two weeks: 203,624 letters and 16,437 packages, delivered to Jacob's room in Portland's Barbara Bush Children's Hospital or to one, then two, then three, then four storage units.

"I've never seen anything like this,"

**Mark Seitz**, president of Maine Merged Branch 92, said. "Not even close."

What most pleased Jacob and his family were from all over the country and the world, that many contained stuffed

penguins or pictures of penguins, and that there were heartfelt expressions of encouragement and love.

"When you look at these letters, you can see that sometimes it is the handwriting of a young person, sometimes the writing of an elderly person," Branch 92 Executive Vice President **Mark Terry** said.

Terry, who visited the family several times, said the "outpouring of hope and empathy to the family and to Jacob himself" was especially powerful because it came in the form of "something that is tangible and that people can actually hold."

When Jacob particularly liked a card or package, he'd often show it with his telltale nose scrunch.

From the start, letter carriers rallied around Jacob. They visited, took great care to ensure that the enormous amount of cards and packages was delivered in accurate and timely fashion, and helped Jacob's family with storage issues.

On Sunday, Nov. 19, Jacob died.

His mother, Michelle Thompson Simard, told *The Postal Record*, "The letter carriers and the other postal employees have just been absolutely phenomenal. I've become very fond of them. They're good people, really good people."

She also noted that the postal delivery system "worked like clockwork. It just goes to show how good the system is."

The most meaningful aspect, Simard said, was that people throughout the United States and many foreign countries "have taken the time to sit with their children, get out their art supplies, talk about this little boy that none of them have ever met, and take the time to make cards. I'm sure questions come up, 'Why are we writing a letter to this little boy?'"

And how did Jacob react?



**Above: Jacob Thompson**

**Top l: Branch 92 President Mark Seitz (r) and Executive Vice President Mark Terry stand in front of one day's mail for Thompson.**

"Oh, he loved it," his mother said. "He thought it was cool to see all the different drawings of penguins and the art projects. He was pretty excited to see that people were thinking about him."

The first week after Jacob's passing, about 15,000 cards and 1,000 packages arrived daily. When this article was written in early December, the mail had slowed to a few thousand pieces daily—enough to fill up a car or two each day as the family leaves the post office.

As of Sunday, Dec. 3, the local post office had received a total of 260,489 letters and 20,968 parcels for Jacob.

Simard said the family is giving the gifts to Toys for Tots and to the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital. "Families may need some extra help," she said. "We're just trying to help as many people as we can." She asked those who had planned to write to Jacob to send cards or care packages to the troops.

"For something that was such a sad thing," she said, "the beautiful thing is to look at it and say, 'This is going to help more than just one little boy.'" **PR**