

Customer Connect adds up for USPS

By touching every address in the United States at least six days a week, letter carriers naturally develop special relationships with their customers. Since USPS's Customer Connect program began in 2003, thousands of carriers have successfully leveraged their interactions with business customers to encourage them to use the Postal Service instead of relying on private delivery and mailing services. Below are some recent stories about Customer Connect leads submitted by letter carriers that have helped USPS earn new revenue.

Nature aquarium business makes a natural choice: USPS

When city letter carrier **Raymond "Ray" Paralejas** of San Mateo, CA Branch 1280 was picking up mail at Aqua Forest Aquarium Warehouse in San Francisco, he noticed a bunch of parcels—and an imbalance in who was providing the shipping. There were a lot of UPS and FedEx packages; not so many were USPS.

Paralejas spoke with Steven Lo, who owns the business with his brother, and suggested that Aqua Forest could save money with the Postal Service. Lo was quite interested, as FedEx was about to increase its shipping rates.

Paralejas turned in the lead and a local business development specialist immediately contacted the company.

For most of us, the



Ray Paralejas, left, with Steven and George Lo, owners of Aqua Forest Aquarium Warehouse.

Help wanted: The position of Customer Connect coordinator (CCC) is unfilled at many post offices. If you have been considering volunteering as a CCC and would like to know more, make your branch president aware of your interest. You can read about a CCC's duties in M-1742, found at mseries.nalc.org/Mo1742.pdf.

word "aquarium" conjures up images of a tank filled with colorful fish swimming among cute nautical décor. But there is another type: the nature aquarium, or aquascape. Aquascaping is the art of creating natural underwater worlds that may or may not include fish.

Aqua Forest deals in nature aquariums. They sell everything from tanks and substrate stones to live plants and driftwood. Lo explained that he needed a solution for parcels over 20 pounds. Field Sales offered him Priority Mail and envelopes, Regional Rate A&B boxes, First Class and free pick-up with no hidden surcharges.

Lo was sold, and switched a large portion of his volume to USPS. Thanks to Paralejas's initial effort, the Postal Service now receives an extra \$81,120 in new estimated annual revenue—and devoted aquascapers can have 15-pound sets of rare Japanese Manten stones or 9-liter bags of Amazonia aqua soil delivered with USPS TLC.

A Texas-size deal from online sales of auto parts

As mentioned in January's Customer Connect article, online sales of auto parts have grown steadily in the last few years, and several members have turned in successful leads from this burgeoning sector of e-tail.

Steven Lopez of Houston, TX Branch 283 noticed that AJP Distributors, a new auto and racing parts company on his route, was using Postal Service competitors for its shipping.

The city carrier introduced himself to the owner and said he "gave him a little rundown. I asked some questions about his business." He thought USPS might be able to save AJP money on lightweight shipping, and inquired if someone could contact the company about Postal Service offerings. The customer agreed, and Lopez submitted the lead that day.

It was a smooth start, but the road to a deal was rockier. Sales and marketing ran into a series of detours, and, after months passed, it appeared the lead would turn into a deadend.

But there was a happy surprise at the end of the rough patch. The team never gave up, and when the dust settled, AJP signed on for Priority Mail and First Class Parcel options. The end result was more than \$656,370 in new estimated annual revenue for the Postal Service.

"I didn't think it would be that much," Lopez said. "...When I saw the number, the total sales price, I said, 'Wow, that's a lot of money.'" **PR**



Beverly Hills, CA Branch 2293 member Denise Serna's lead about a business on her route seeking to raise its profile resulted in more than \$12,600 in new estimated annualized revenue for USPS.