

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.

Many watchful eyes lead to big dividends in Iowa

In the Hawkeye District in Southern Des Moines, IA, the local carriers have their eyes peeled for packages. Led by Customer Connect Coordinator **Michele Donnelly**, Central Iowa Merged Branch 352 members **Mike Sinclair** and **Jason Berkley** know to be on the lookout for businesses that use competing delivery services.

"I do five different routes, the same five, every day," Berkley said. "And I take notice of all [the businesses] that have UPS or FedEx mail coming in." Sinclair has an even more specific method. "I watch for those UPS bills in the brown envelopes," he said.

One of Berkley's leads was a major success on this front—before the carrier spoke to them, he "saw the FedEx truck outside [the store] every day." Now, they get their delivery service from USPS.

After they identified these potential customers, they sent the leads to Donnelly. Both carriers were full of praise for the work she has done for Customer Connect. "She's really turned the program around," Sinclair said. "She's the type of person, when you talk to her, you want to do business with her." Berkley agreed: "The majority of the

credit goes to Michele Donnelly."

Donnelly has made a massive difference in her time as coordinator—in 2017, when she took up the post, Des Moines was 65th in the nation for revenue generated by Customer Connect. In 2018, the office was in first place, and it



Michele Donnelly (far l), along with former Branch 352 President Marvella Mure Holland, Hawkeye District marketing manager Deb Heath and Donnelly's BDS partner, Loretta Eue.

is on track to repeat that feat in 2019.

Because Donnelly was a carrier for 23 years before taking the coordinator role, she knows how valuable carriers are when it comes to generating leads. "They're the ones going in and coming out of these places," she said. She reminds the carriers that program leads can be found anywhere: "It's not limited to their routes. It can be something they see when they're out, or on a different route." The most important thing, she said, is remembering that "no lead is a bad lead."

Donnelly also focused on how carrier-generated leads benefit NALC members. "The more [carriers] bring in, the more vital we are to USPS," she explained. "I have a job to do for NALC, and second place is not good enough." Her drive is paying off; in the Hawkeye District alone, the program has generated about \$4 million for the Postal Service.

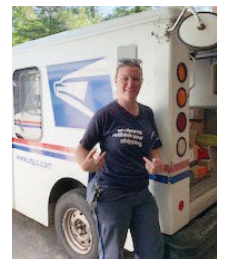
In Virginia, persistence and persuasion pay off

It all started with a parking lot. On her usual route, Richmond, VA Branch 496 member **Carolyn Duncan** had formed a friendly relationship with several of the owners in a small shopping area. "I was going into the stores every day, checking to see if they had anything for me, and it was always, 'No, no, no,'" she said.

The carrier kept up her persistence even as she delivered more and more packages to the stores. Duncan eventually took the lead over to the sales/business side of her post office herself to tell them about the opportunity. They told her to go door-to-door around the parking lot, and things "blossomed from there," she said.

Aside from their good rapport with Duncan, there was another incentive for the small business owners to switch to USPS: the city was threatening to turn their parking lot into a fountain/play area. If that happened, it would cut into the companies' ability to send out shipments with USPS's competitors. The carrier convinced them that the Postal Service's delivery assistance and no surcharges would make up for the loss of the lot. "Pretty much everyone got on board," she said, even though the parking lot still is intact for now.

Despite the amount of extra work it took to convince all the customers, Duncan downplayed her efforts. "I call it being a decent human being," she said. "You just have to treat people with respect and give them the information they're looking for." **PR**



Carolyn Duncan