

# Communications talent



**Philip  
Dine**

**I**nteracting with letter carriers daily, I marvel at how many of you are skilled communicators in one way or another.

Is it the job—the independence and space for thinking, the interactions with customers, the variety of situations you encounter—that provides the inspiration and the material? Or are people already predisposed to creativity drawn to the craft by those very factors?

Either way, we have some gifted folks in our ranks.

**Worcester, MA Branch 12's Dave Flattery's** talent for calligraphy shines through the art he creates on his envelopes. Yet, as striking as the envelopes are, they are no match for what's inside: artfully drawn messages from a Gandhi or Harry Tru-

man, a Plato or Martin Luther King, including a stirring one about the power of the letters of the alphabet.

Over the past difficult months, he has sent uplifting messages to many, designing posters that can be folded and sent in a First-Class envelope.

"I just love to do it," Dave said. "You can do a lot for a lot of people with this. This pandemic, you couldn't see people or associate with them. If I find something that someone would appreciate, something inspirational, if I can make someone else happy or if it comforts someone—yes, absolutely."

Dave, who retired in June 2020 "after 33 years of pounding the pavement in Worcester," has studied, practiced and taught calligraphy for four decades-plus—even designing the official invitations to dignitaries for the grand opening of Worcester's postal store—but never more meaningfully than the past 16 months.

His goal throughout the pandemic: to "brighten people's mailboxes." And, thereby, their spirits.

**For years, a poet in postal uniform traversed Lancaster, OH—**Ernest Karcher's love for poetry born of loneliness for his family during World War II. As a soldier, he composed poems like "The Alphabet Plate," depicting his wife teaching the alphabet to their three little children.

It was honed delivering mail from 1947 to 1969, as he trod territory he loved and delivered to people he knew—his own home (a log house that in his childhood had no electricity or running water), his brother next door, his daughter/granddaughter around the corner.

Retired librarian Joyce Harvey drew me in with her recent headline in the local newspaper—"Remember When: Ernest H. Karcher, a Postman who 'delivered' poetry."

The "self-made poet," a Verse Writers' Guild of Ohio member, portrayed his hometown, from its residents to the town's cov-

ered bridges to his stint picking fruit for a living. The *Selected Poetry of Ernest Karcher* was published in 1977.

"He loved writing poetry because it was people he had met and situations he had encountered," his granddaughter, Cindy (McLaughlin) Smith, told me. "He enjoyed working in the post office, and he enjoyed carrying the routes."

She added: "Grandpa was a paratrooper and a disabled American veteran. Shrapnel came through, crushed his kneecap. It was amazing he had that postal career, but after he retired, he ended up in a wheelchair."

The Branch 340 member's "tribute" poem after President John F. Kennedy's assassination ran in the January 1964 *Postal Record*.

Proud of her grandfather's poetry and contributions to Lancaster, Cindy is working on a book about his legacy.

**As a youngster in Oakland, CA, John Brennan was fascinated** by airplanes, then worked at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC. His interest took on a decidedly tangible cast during his military service.

"My own Army aviation tour in Vietnam gave me a leg up later in civilian life in knowing what subject to tackle before it was lost to history," he says.

After a quarter-century carrying mail, John decided he had a story to tell—about the unofficial network with which U.S. soldiers adorned their helicopters in Vietnam, expressing the "everyday voice of the everyday soldier."

And tell it, he has—in eight books since 2011. Online reader comments speak for themselves: "extremely well researched," "excellent," "really interesting book," "John Brennan's books are of the highest quality," "astonishing art." The latest is 2021's *Vietnam War Army Helicopter Nose Art, Vol. 2*.

True to the ethos of both uniforms he's worn, the retired Greater East Bay, CA Branch 1111 member is quick to deflect—and share—credit: "I count myself lucky as an author in being able to pursue a subject that I love, aviation, and in the process interact with thousands of Army aviator veterans in documenting the history of helicopter nose art. It was both my contribution and my brother vets' contributions, through their photographs, collected data, and their recollections, that helped fill a void that was in danger of being omitted from history.

"Luckily, thousands of iron butterflies were saved from extinction."

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