

# Carriers and the mail make news online

**R**ecently, numerous mail-centered stories and anecdotes have appeared on social media and other news sources. The following are some that have come to NALC's attention. If you come across a story you'd like us to consider featuring, send it to [postalrecord@nalc.org](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org).

## Rare stamp sells for \$2 million

One of the extremely rare 105-year-old "Inverted Jenny" stamps sold for a record-smashing \$2 million to stamp collector Charles Hack on Nov. 13.



An "Inverted Jenny"

Only 100 Inverted Jenny stamps were ever sold, because they featured a mistakenly printed upside-down airplane. They are among the most rare and expensive stamps ever produced.

The stamp that was sold in November, known as "Position 49" because of its place on the original sheet of 100, has an especially high value for more than its rarity—it was locked in a vault by its original purchaser and his descendants for its entire lifespan, resulting in a lack of sunlight exposure and wear and tear, according to an article published online by the BBC.

A Nov. 20 article by National Public Radio quoted Scott Trepel, a stamp expert, who said that Position 49 is "the cream of the crop" when it comes to inverted Jenny stamps. "We grade stamps from one to 100 in terms of the centering of the design with the perforations around it," he said. "And this one is a 95, and there is no better. There's no 98. There's no 100. This 95 is the best that any Jenny will ever get."

The stamp's fame even made its way into pop culture when it was featured in an episode of "The Simpsons." In the episode, Homer is at a flea market where he finds the highly coveted Inverted Jenny stamp in a 5-cent bin. After noticing the stamp's printing mistake, he decides not to purchase what he thinks is clearly a defective item.

## 50 years later, message sent by egg is answered

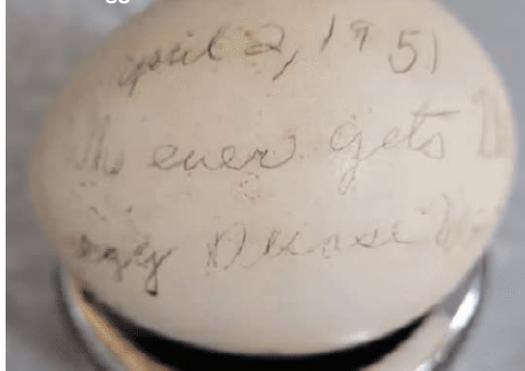
Instead of sending messages by post, in 1951 Iowa native Mary Foss Starn communicated by egg. Bored at her egg-packaging job, Starn and her friends started selecting random eggs and writing their name, town and a message asking whoever found them to write them back. In the past 73 years, the now 92-year-old Starn never got a message back, until recently.

John Amalfitano, a New Jersey native, was helping an older friend clean out his house when Amalfitano found one of Starn's eggs tucked in a cloth inside a box. The egg still said, "Mary Foss. Forest City, Iowa. Whoever gets this egg, please write." His friend told him that he had held onto the egg all those years because of its message, and gifted the egg to him.

Amalfitano kept the egg in a metal container in his cabinet where it stayed for nearly 20 years. At one point he tried to search the internet for Starn, but came up empty-handed. Years later, in August 2023, he was looking for something to post on the "Weird (and Wonderful) Secondhand Finds That Just Need To Be Shared" Facebook group, when he remembered that he still had the egg.

The post received more than 11,000 likes, 1,900 comments and 546 shares on Facebook, and was written about

Mary Foss Starn's egg



by many news outlets, including *The Washington Post*. A cousin of Starn's daughter saw the post on the Facebook page. She was able to get the two in contact and they were able to talk on the phone.

After speaking with Amalfitano, Starn told *The Washington Post*: "I'm happy to have a new friend. I finally have my pen pal and it only took 72 years."

## New designs, price of stamps in 2024

USPS's mantra for the new year seems to be new year, new stamps—and new stamp prices. The Postal Service announced the release dates of new stamps up until March in a press release, and is planning to release more throughout the year.

Marking the fantasy tabletop role-playing game's 50th anniversary, the Postal Service is coming out with its first ever Dungeons & Dragons Forever stamps. The 10 stamp designs will feature dragons, warriors, wizards and other popular creatures from the game.

Another new face on 2024 Forever stamps will be former University of California Los Angeles basketball



**The Dungeons & Dragons stamps**

coach John Wooden. Wooden follows James Naismith as the second college basketball coach to be featured on a stamp, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. He is known for leading the UCLA Bruins to 10 national college basketball championships in a 12-year stretch, including seven in a row.

Aside from people, 2024 will see stamps celebrating Lunar New Year, carnivals, love, bluegrass music, weddings, manatee conservation and a variety of other phenomena. Some of the new stamps will debut with first-day-of-issue ceremonies in cities that particularly identify with the theme of the stamp.

Another change to Forever stamps came on Jan. 21 when the price of stamps went up from 66 to 68 cents—a 3 percent increase. This is the fourth time stamp prices have risen in the past two years, and the 18th time they have risen since 2000, according to *Axios*. The last increase was about eight months ago, in July, with an increase from 63 to 66 cents.

### Message in a bottle found 26 years later

It was 1997 and Ben Lyons, a Sandwich, MA, fifth grader, put a message in a bottle and then it was thrown off a Cape Cod pier and into the Atlantic Ocean for a science project.

“Dear Beachcomber, Thank you for being kind enough to pick up my bottle,” Lyons wrote. “We are studying ocean currents in science class. We dropped these bottles in Nantucket Sound in October 1997. If you could please fill out the question and return them to us.”

His message asked where the bottle was discovered and what condition it was in.

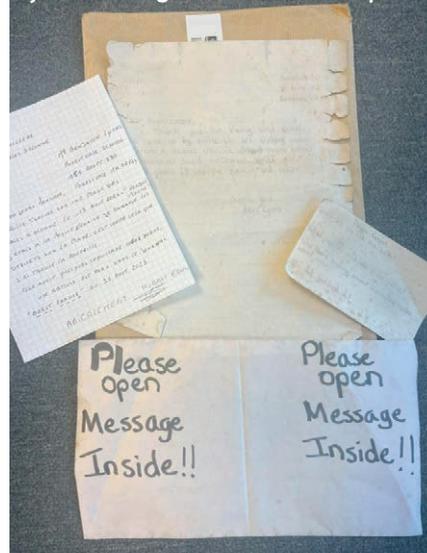
A 71-year-old French fisherman, Hubert Eriau, found the bottle on Aug. 11, 2023, at a beach in Les Sables-d’Olonne in the western region of Vendée on the Atlantic Ocean. Eriau told the newspaper *Ouest France* that he spends most mornings fishing and cleaning up the beach.

Eriau mailed the note along with his answers to the questions back to the Forestdale School in Sandwich, but that was followed by confusion. According to *USA Today*, the school Lyons had given as the return address no longer offered fifth grade, as it goes only up to the second grade.

Hoping to find Lyons, the note was sent to the town’s third-to-sixth grade Oak Ridge school, where a teacher who knows his parents recognized his name.

Assistant Principal Brandy Clifford told *USA Today* that when she delivered the message to Lyons, “It brought back really great memories [to him] of his classmates and his math and science teacher.” She added, “The secretaries were thrilled because they felt like they found the message in a bottle themselves.”

Lyons’s message and the letter in response



After 26 years, Lyons was finally able to complete his fifth-grade science project, according to the newspaper.



The Postal Service lead singer Ben Gibbard

### The Postal Service band due to perform for 20th anniversary

The Postal Service, an indie rock band, took its name from its practice of mailing recordings on CDs back and forth to band members with conflicting schedules. Ironically, the band members never actually used USPS to send their recordings—instead opting for FedEx or UPS, according to *Entertainment Weekly*.

According to a 2004 *New York Times* article, after the band’s first album came out, USPS issued a cease-and-desist order for copyright infringement. However, the band and USPS struck a cross-promotional deal where the band was able to continue using its name as long as it encouraged people to use the Postal Service. The band even performed at that year’s USPS National Executive Conference and USPS sold the band’s CDs on its website.

The band released two albums, one in 2003 and one in 2014. Celebrating the 20-year anniversary of its first album, the group plans to perform the entirety of that album on May 14 at the Just Like Heaven festival in Pasadena, CA. **PR**