

Continuing to shape public opinion



Philip Dine

Letter carriers and the Postal Service represent so many different things to so many: a birthday present eagerly awaited by a small child, a handwritten letter from a distant relative, a kind word—or a life-saving act—to an elderly customer, lunches for a hungry teenager during summer months out of school, a boost for a fledgling small business hoping to make its mark by timely and efficient product delivery, a secure job for a military veteran who's changing uniforms while continuing his or her public service.

And so, it was nice to see such a wide array of news coverage over the past month, coverage that went well beyond finances and legislation. As profoundly important as it is to educate the public and their representatives about those matters, it's also helpful for the public to read, watch or hear about other aspects of what we and USPS do.

This breadth gives the public a full flavor of what the Postal Service and letter carriers do, and reinforces the positive sentiments people already have about us.

The favorable image you have in the community and the dedication you put into your work spurred the feature stories, while your growing media outreach helped produce some of the constructive news reports.

A moving piece by Bloomberg/*Businessweek* focused on Boston Branch 34 member John Bachman. He carries mail in Hull—a small peninsula of a town that juts out into the Atlantic Ocean and gets some of the harshest winter weather around. Son of a retired postal employee, he's an Army vet who served in the Iraq war, following conflicts in Bosnia and Panama.

The article vividly portrays Bachman's commitment to his route and his customers as he makes his way around large icicles, disappeared sidewalks, chunks of ice bumping into the shore, 50-mile-an-hour winds and below-zero temperatures—all amid a depth of snow covering the town not seen since the Great Snow of 1717.

Bachman doesn't mind the frigid weather; his attention is on the mail. "The snow's OK," he told the reporter. "It's the rain I worry about. There's no way to protect the mail."

As he delivers, he helps his customers in various ways; they've reciprocated by helping pull his marooned mail truck out of snow banks.

Other print and TV reports, from New Hampshire to West Virginia, depicted the challenges letter carriers face in this unusual winter, and how residents can make their work easier.

Meanwhile, Postal Service plans to buy new trucks for letter carriers are gaining mounting publicity, which is positive on a number of fronts—not least of which is that it shows that as postal finances improve, USPS is planning for the future, and in a way that benefits letter carriers.

The most articulate spokesman about this effort has been NALC Director of City Delivery Brian Renfroe. He has lent substance, often as the only person quoted, to reports by such diverse outlets as Detroit-based *Automotive News*, which covers the North American auto industry; the U.K.'s Pulitzer-Prize winning *Guardian*; and Fox News.

The *South Bend Bulletin* (IN) ran as good a column on the actual situation at USPS as I've seen, getting every nuance right. It included this powerful paragraph:

Critics like (Rep. Darrell) Issa, seeking to 'reform' the system out of existence, seem to regard the Post Office as a socialist scheme. Were the Founding Fathers really socialist schemers? They authorized Congress in the Constitution 'to establish post offices and post-roads.'

Asked how he'd mustered so much insight on postal matters, columnist Jack Colwell, retired from full-time duties after a career writing about politics, told me he'd paid attention to news reports. Which, given what he took from them, means he's paid attention to what you've said.

Then there were the letters and op-ed pieces in which letter carriers and NALC officers directly informed the public about a variety of matters. In a letter to *The Daily Comet* of Lafourche Parish, Houma-Thibodaux-Lockport, LA Branch 2464 letter carrier Reed Ordoyne explained how residents can keep letter carriers safe from dogs.

And President Rolando continued to inform the public and lawmakers of the Postal Service's increasing profitability and how to achieve real postal reform. His efforts included hard-hitting commentaries in metro papers in Connecticut and Texas; the latter piece resonating partly because he illustrated the respect both George W. Bush and Rick Perry have displayed for letter carriers and the USPS.

What a month of news—wide-ranging and compelling—you generated as you continue to shape public opinion!

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