

Your Postal Podcast 40th Edition Transcript

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Richard Watkins: Welcome to Your Postal Podcast. This is Richard Watkins of the Postal Service's Corporate Communications Office. In this month's edition you'll hear about the short life of the Pony Express, and we'll dispel some myths about it. And you'll hear from a New Jersey postmaster who's made thousands of special deliveries – all to members of his favorite Major League Baseball team.

Rob Potts is the officer-in-charge at the Laurel, NJ, Post Office, but he also pitches in -- literally -- to help the Philadelphia Phillies with batting practice during the team's home games. I asked Rob how he got his start with the Phillies.

Batting Practice Segment

Rob Potts: It happened on a whim; I was playing in a men's league down in Florida. One of my teammates was the official scorer for the Phillies, commented on how everybody wanted to take batting practice from me. And I said, "You know, hey, give me a name over there, I want to send an email -- maybe I can get a job." So, he gave me a name, and an email and before I knew it, Milt Thompson, who was the hitting coach for the Phillies called me and said they were looking for a new batting practice pitcher and would I be interested in coming down and working out. And I said, "Absolutely." So when I got down to the -- this was in the winter of '07 -- I got down to the facility, and Jimmy Rollins and Marlon Byrd, who plays for the Cubs now, they were at the facility waiting for me and I threw to both of them. And Jimmy and I hit it off and he asked me if I wanted to come work for them and got the job. And that was '08 and in '08 we won the World Series and it's been an unbelievable run since then.

Watkins: Potts said when he first began throwing batting practice to the Phillies in 2008, it could get a bit nerve-wracking.

Potts: My first year or two, I really struggled on days driving over there; nervous. I used to really get worked up on certain days, there were certain guys I couldn't throw to. It was in my head. And then each year, it's gotten easier.

Watkins: He added that he's able to maintain a regular postal schedule and still travel to the ballpark on nights and weekends, while helping the team he's rooted for his whole life.

Potts: It's definitely a job that nobody else has. But to be able to do that, being a Phillies fan my whole life, and growing up -- like I said -- 15 minutes from the stadium. Of course, working with today's players is truly a gift, but you know, at the stadium you just run into so many of the older players; Mike Schmidt and (Steve) Carlton. Guys, who, when I was younger they were my favorite players. So it's been a real amazing ride for me for the last four years.

Pony Express Segment

Watkins: Despite its relatively short existence and eventual financial collapse, The Pony Express is etched deep in the annals of American history. But some of the perceptions are more the stuff of legend, rather than fact. David Rupert is here with the whole story.

David Rupert: The Pony Express conjures up wild tales of adventure of young men who rode their steeds across the American frontier with satchels full of mail. Spurred on by Wild Bill Hickok's Wild West Show and television drama, some think that's how mail was delivered in the olden days. And each year hundreds of modern reenactments romanticize the delivery service.

But the truth is that the Pony Express was operated by a private company that was short-lived and in the end, unsuccessful. You see, the Postal Service contracted the service to the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company to expedite mail across the frontier, bypassing stagecoaches in favor of swift, lone riders.

The 1,900-mile route ran from St. Joseph, MO, and terminated in Sacramento, CA, with a series of relays and riders along the way. It only operated from April 1860 to October 1861, yet it did help coast-to-coast service, reducing it to about 10 days.

At its height, the Pony Express had 120 riders, 184 stations and 400 horses. The stations were about 10 miles apart from each other – about the maximum distance a horse could charge at a full gallop without a break. Riders couldn't weigh more than 125 pounds, but they were paid upwards of \$25 a week. Despite fees that ranged up to \$5 for a five-ounce letter, the venture was a financial bust and operations ceased after just 18 months.

After its demise, who delivered the mail? The Postal Department using trains, stagecoaches and horses to transport it from town to town – and of course, the loyal postal employee who would deliver it.

News Roundup

Watkins: And now, here's our monthly roundup of recent news about the U.S. Postal Service. In mid-September, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe announced the Postal Service would conduct studies of 250 processing and distribution facilities across the country, in an effort to optimize the Postal Service's network of these facilities. The studies will look at consolidating these "behind-the-scenes" operations into larger processing centers – which could save the Postal Service as much as 3 billion dollars annually. The proposed change would also revise USPS service standards for First-Class Mail from a one-to-three-day service to two-to-three days nationwide.

These studies are just the latest in a series of cost-cutting efforts the Postal Service is putting into motion in the face of unprecedented declines in mail volume and revenue. Over the past five years, First-Class Mail volume is down 25 percent, and the USPS now expects that its budget deficit will reach or exceed \$10 billion at the end of the Two-thousand-eleven fiscal year on Sept. 30th. In late July, Mr. Donahoe announced that nearly 3,700 Post Office locations would be studied as well, in order to optimize retail operations.

The latest announcement of processing and distribution facility studies was followed three days later with President Barack Obama's announcement of his plan to reduce the

federal deficit, which included provisions to provide up to 20 billion dollars in savings to the Postal Service over the next several years.

The president's plan includes support for a five-day delivery week, restructuring of the prepayment of future retiree health benefits, and a refund of 6.9 billion dollars in surplus funds the Postal Service has contributed to the Federal Employee Retiree System. Details about the president's plan are available at 1.usa.gov/919plan.

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