

Your Postal Podcast 39th 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 learn about some mail jumpers in Wisconsin, who draw gasps and applause from customers. And you'll hear from McAvoy Layne, who'll share his impression of the Postal Service's recent Mark Twain stamp -- as well as his impression of Mark Twain, himself.

Mail carriers have always gone to great lengths to serve their customers, but as Brian Sperry tells us in our first story, few are likely to do it with the style and athleticism of some young people in Wisconsin whose greatest fear isn't being attacked by a dog, but rather plunging into a lake.

Mail Jumpers Segment

Brian Sperry: All eyes are on Oliver Pringle as he leaps from the bow of a moving tour boat to a slippery dock where he quickly delivers the mail, grabs any outgoing mail, and leaps back onto the boat, which never stops. The feat is repeated daily for all 60 customers who live on the shores of Wisconsin's Lake Geneva. Pringle says the length of the leap depends on who's at the helm.

Oliver Pringle: It certainly varies with the captain, but I'd say anywhere between six to eight feet is the jump. It's nice that the boat is moving because it gives you a little momentum, but it's definitely tough to do a 6-foot standing jump.

Sperry: Pringle is one of six young mail boat jumpers who work for Lake Geneva Cruise Line. The Cruise Line contracts with the Postal Service for \$1 a year to make the lakeside deliveries. The mail has been delivered by boat to residents since the 1870s, as roads into the lake weren't constructed until the 1920s. Customers on Lake Geneva have two mailboxes, one on their boat dock for summer deliveries, and one in front of their home for deliveries the remainder of the year.

The mail jumpers double as tour guides of the large homes and estates surrounding the lake, but it's the uniqueness of the mail delivery that people seem to enjoy most.

Pringle: Boy, you really get to hear from every one of those 150 people as you do your trip. You can hear a collective gasp from everybody, it seems like all the air is sucked out of the place if it looks like you may or may not make it.

Sperry: The deliveries don't always go as planned.

Pringle: I've fallen off twice, once last year, once this year. This is my second year as a mail boat jumper. It's always a surprise falling into the water. He circles back and it gives you a little time to try and dry yourself off and maybe wave to the crowd while they're laughing at you.

Sperry: Each morning Pringle and his fellow mail jumpers clean and prepare the tour boat before heading for the Post Office, which is just down the street.

Pringle: I actually sort the mail by hand. I walk around to the various mail stations and pick up whatever mail boat mail they have and then I go back to my own little corner in the mail office and sort the mail out, and then I roll it up into tight rolls and bring that back to the boat.

Sperry: Pringle says the challenges of being a mail jumper extend beyond the physical aspects.

Pringle: It's a big mental block that you have to get over -- the jumping itself. And it's also a timing issue where as you have to make sure that you look over your shoulder as you're putting the mail in the mail box just to know that if a particular roll of mail isn't going to fit in the mailbox you better just drop it on the deck and run back, otherwise you're going to get wet.

Sperry: For more information on the mail jumpers, go online to CruiseLakeGeneva.com.

Mark Twain Stamp Segment

Watkins: The 19th century American writer and humorist Samuel Clemens; better known throughout the world as Mark Twain, was honored by the Postal Service with a commemorative Forever stamp earlier this summer. I caught up with McAvoy Layne, who, with his wife, Rebecca, own and operate the Mark Twain Cultural Center in Incline Village, Nevada, located on the north shore of Lake Tahoe. Twain described the beauty of Lake Tahoe in his second published work, "Roughing It."

Layne explained how he first got interested in the humor and writings of Mark Twain.

Layne: I was trapped in a cabin up here in Lake Tahoe for five days alone. And as good fortune would have it, on the coffee table was a complete essays of Mark Twain. I got cabin fever, my brain got soft and in that condition those essays made perfect sense. And that seed was planted in fertile good.

Watkins: Layne has been portraying Mark Twain for nearly a quarter-century, and opened the Mark Twain Cultural Center about a year ago. He shared his thoughts on why he thinks Twain's writings are still just as powerful.

Layne: I think Twain's voice still resonates 100 years after his death because he was a prodigious noticer of human nature. And human nature hasn't changed that much in the last 101 years.

Watkins: And of course, what interview would be complete without hearing from the "Ghost" of Mark Twain himself?

Layne (as Mark Twain): Well now, that forever stamp is a compliment. We all love compliments, the humorous, congressman, burglars, all of us in the trade. Caroline Cutler, our postmaster made a wonderful event out of it. We signed many of those sheets of stamps. And then I made a comment in a column of mine that I was going to have it blown up and shave by it. Not have to use a mirror any longer. I got a nice letter from the artist, Gregory Manchess, thanking me for that compliment.

News Roundup Segment

Watkins: And now, here's our monthly roundup of recent news about the U.S. Postal Service.

As more customers choose to conduct their postal business online and at non-postal shopping destinations such as grocery and convenience stores, the need to maintain a network of 32,000 retail locations diminishes. And, as mail volume continues to decline, the Postal Service needs greater ability to make workforce adjustments.

In late July, a seemingly non-stop nationwide flurry of news stories about retail optimization began when Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe released a list of 3,700 Post Offices to be studied for possible closure. Another wave of Postal-related headlines was sparked in mid-August with the Postmaster General's request that Congress make changes to federal law to help the Postal Service reduce its workforce to match the declining workload – allowing layoffs where necessary.

Mr. Donahoe also asked that the Postal Service be allowed to establish its own health benefits program and administer its own retirement system, rather than continue to be included in federal government employee programs.

A list of the Post Office facilities to be studied, as well as two USPS white papers, providing details on the latest proposals shared with Congress, are available online at *usps-dot-com slash news*.

Thanks for listening to *Your Postal Podcast*.

Now, it's time to announce the two winners of books about Owney the postal pooch authored by Dirk Wales, who was featured in last month's edition of *Your Postal Podcast*.

Congratulations to Carla Rodakowski from Gladstone, North Dakota, and Ann Schnell from Clayton, Wisconsin -- both were selected at random from the many listeners who sent us comments about last month's podcast. Carla and Ann, your Owney books are in the mail, with our thanks.

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