

Richard Watkins: Welcome to Your Postal Podcast. This is Richard Watkins of U.S. Postal Service Corporate Communications. In this January 2014 edition, you'll hear about how record-breaking cold temperatures don't stop a letter carrier who's gotten used to the frigid weather. And, as mobile devices become ever more popular among postal customers, USPS is testing a new device in select locations that will help retail clerks keep pace.

Alaska Cold Weather Carrier Segment

Watkins: U.S. Postal Service Letter Carriers must cope with all kinds of weather as they go about serving their customers. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges is working in the cold and darkness. Fairbanks, Alaska is one of the coldest places on earth. James Bratten has been a City Carrier in Fairbanks for over six years and has learned how to put up with the frigid conditions. He shared some of his experiences with Ernie Swanson.

James Bratten - It gets down to about 50 below here. Basically, I wear lots of layers, so when it gets down to that cold, I'll wear like five layers on top and then five layers on the bottom. I've got a thick parka on top, and then a jacket, and then a sweater, and then a long-sleeved shirt. And on the bottom I'll have my postal issued snow pants and then I'll sometimes even have two pairs of sweat pants and a pair of long-johns underneath that. I actually wear my tennis shoes down to about 35 below, but that's with two pairs of thick, wool socks and I try to keep moving a lot. If it gets colder than that, then I've got a set of 100 below thick boots that I had bought when I was working up on Prudo Bay. I just try to stay hydrated out there. I take cold showers in the morning – that helps my body acclimate to the cold. I actually eat very healthy, lots of superfoods to keep body energized. Lots of little things come together to make the cold not that bad.

Ernie Swanson - Bratton is a T-6, so he carries mail on several different routes.

James Bratton - They are very varied, only one of them is a heavy business route where I'm inside a lot. A lot of them are lots of walking, park and lubes, a lot of dismount. The good thing about that though is it kinda keeps me moving. The routes where they're just looking at NDCBUs all day, those are the ones where the cold ends up getting to you, which is what I don't really care for. I like to be moving.

Ernie Swanson – Bratton's postal delivery vehicle has two heaters to help combat the frigid conditions.

Bratton - We have FFVs up here, that's flex fuel vehicles. They've got 4 wheel drive with all-season radial tires on them. It's based off of a Ford Explorer. Besides the heater coming off the engine, we also have an auxiliary artaheater that's underneath the trays, and that thing actually keeps you pretty darn warm. If you have both heaters on, you're not really going to get cold, even with that window open.

Ernie Swanson – Because Fairbanks is so far north, the hours of daylight are short in the heart of winter. And Bratton carries something extra to help illuminate the darkness.

James Bratton - You've got to have your headlight with you. About this time of year, it doesn't get light until about 10 o'clock, and then by 3 o'clock, it's pretty much getting dark at that time. So yeah, there's only a good 5 or 6 hours of light in the dead of winter. But as long as you've got your headlamp, its not that bad.

Ernie Swanson – Bratton says his favorite time of the year is towards the end of winter for the recreational opportunities cherished by many Alaskans.

James Bratton - I've been here my whole life. I love the snow, I like being outside. My favorite part of the year is probably about February-March. We're pretty much getting out of the deep cold by that time, and that's usually when we get our best snow. I like snow machining and snowboarding, those outdoor snow activities.

Richard Watkins: At a few select locations, the Postal Service is trying something new – putting a mobile postal clerk in the lobby to conduct

simple transactions. It's an innovative solution that might just pay future dividends. David Rupert has the details.

Arizona Mobile Lobby Retail Segment

David Rupert: Just about anywhere you go, you have to cue up in a line and wait your turn. The supermarket, the drug store, and yes, the Post Office. But in future visits to the Post Office, that whole paradigm might be radically changed. Currently in the testing phase of deployment, a Mobile Point of Sales (mPOS) system allows lobby assistants to service customers in the lobby rather than at the retail counter.

The system allows for simple retail transactions, like flat-rate products, shipping supplies, acceptance scans, and books of stamps, It helps reduce overall wait time in line.

Denise Cardelli, a Postal Support Assistant who works in the Litchfield Park, AZ, Post Office, is one of those testing the system. She explains the gear attached to her uniform.

Denise Cardelli –It works well. Yep, this is over the shoulder belt. This is the printer. It prints out the labels – the label maker. This one you wear around the waist and this is your receipt. It tells you everything, your delivery dates, your tracking numbers, and your insurance amounts. And in my pocket, I have my little iPhone and it is also a card scanner. So it scans the cards, scans the product, gives me a total, and designs a receipt which comes out of the receipt machine. It's a package. I'll tell you, it's a lot of fun.

David Rupert: Priority Mail postage labels generated by the mPOS system includes the service commitment, tracking number, NDC code, origin ZIP Code, date, and purchase amount. The ease is winning customers over. Customer Renee Rasberry is impressed.

Renee Rasberry – I love it. I think anything that will move the process along faster, I'm all game for it. I think that, um, Litchfield Park has been very innovative in trying to get us in and out of here faster because I can remember a couple years ago when I used to come, the line would be out the door. So I'm really happy with the process.

David Rupert: The new system is currently being tested in 49 Post Offices to gauge effectiveness.

Denise Cardelli – We do have an older community here and they are flabbergasted by the technology. They go back to their high school days and their grade school days and say, “do you remember when you read that in the scholastic when you were a little kid and you thought never would that come true, but here you are talking on telephones and using all this technology that you just kind of read about when you were a kid. It’s all here now. It’s great. They love it.

News Roundup

Richard Watkins: And now here's a roundup of recent Postal Service news. On January 26th, postage price changes will go into effect, including an increase in the price of a First-Class Mail, single-piece letter from 46 cents to 49 cents. Other price changes include a 1-cent increase to 21 cents for each additional ounce for First-Class letters; and a one-cent increase to 34 cents, to mail a postcard.

The Postal Service expects the new prices to generate two billion dollars in incremental annual revenue.

And finally... calling the Postal Service “star of the holiday shipping season,” a *Bloomberg Businessweek* article reported that “meticulous planning” allowed the Postal Service to plow ahead with “no widespread complaints about tardy deliveries.”

The report said 2013 holiday package volume jumped 19 percent compared to 2012. The online publication also noted USPS was “swamped with parcels” but detected the uptick in volume in early December and “made adjustments to avoid delays. One of its adjustments was delivering packages on the three Sundays before Christmas in its busiest markets, reported the article.

“USPS also delivered 75,000 packages on Christmas Day,” according to the report, which lauded the Postal Service’s overall “stellar performance.”

Thanks for listening to *Your Postal Podcast*. Now, we’d like to hear from you. Please email your feedback and story ideas to YourPostalPodcast@USPS.com.

One lucky listener who emails a comment about this month's podcast will be picked at random to receive a set of Latin Music Legends Commemorative Prints and Forever stamps, suitable for framing. The winner will be selected from all qualifying comments emailed to YourPostalPodcast@usps.com by Tuesday, February 11th, 2014.

Our congratulations go out to Peggy Roit of Ohiowa, Nebraska, who emailed us a comment about December's podcast and has won a "Garden of Love" Notecard Set with Forever Stamps.

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