

'Your Postal Podcast' 74th Edition Transcript – August 2014

MiMi Johnson: Welcome to *Your Postal Podcast*. This is MiMi Johnson for U.S. Postal Service Corporate Communications. In this July 2014 edition, we'll go to San Francisco, where certain letter carriers capture the attention of tourists from around the world while making their daily rounds. We'll also take you to a Post Office where the summer temperatures often top 120 degrees – in the shade.

Cable Car Carriers Segment

Johnson: We know mail is carried on boats, and trains, and even mules. But David Rupert takes us to a storied West Coast city where he found yet another conveyance for the U.S. Mail.

David Rupert: The city of San Francisco is one of the world's greatest destinations. Think of the iconic images: the winding streets, the Golden Gate Bridge, Fisherman's Wharf and the famous cable cars.

Cable cars made their debut in 1883 and their operation remains virtually the same 131 years later. Each day both residents and tourists ride them up and down the hills of the city. However, few know that the cars also shuttle about 20 USPS letter carriers to and from their routes.

Carrier Alma Silva-Orden is a 28-year employee who works out of the Pine Street Station. She rides the cars twice a day, to and from her route. Tourists are always surprised to see her jump on the cable car with her satchel.

Orden: They get surprised because they assume that we might have vehicles. But because of the space situation in our station, we can't. But usually they just take pictures and they point at me like they've never seen that before -- which they probably haven't (laughs).

Rupert: She freely interacts with people during her ride and is an unofficial ambassador for her city, answering typical tourist questions. She's also an ambassador for the Postal Service.

Orden: Well, yes because while I'm riding the cable car, people ask me questions about the Postal Service. They really like our United States Postal Service uniform. So it's very, very nice to hear that.

Rupert: Alma finds herself in the viewfinder of many cameras and her image is probably in the travel photobooks of hundreds of tourists.

Orden: All the time, you know, they ask me if they can take my picture. And if I'm not doing Express Mail – because, you know, when I'm doing Express Mail, I've gotta run – then I don't mind. Especially when it is from other postal services in different countries. These were some carriers from Germany. They showed me pictures of their uniform in Germany, and well, honestly I thought ours was better, but I didn't tell them. Carriers from Italy; also from Ireland, Spain.

Rupert: She is a customer favorite and Alma returns the admiration.

Orden: I think I have the best customers ever. Even though it's 100 percent business route, our customers they love the Postal Service.

Rupert: James Stallworth is a Customer Service Supervisor at Pine Street Station. He tells us why carriers ride cable cars.

Stallworth: Well, because the way that San Francisco is set up, there's not a lot of parking. And because there is a lot of congestion in downtown San Francisco, we have to catch the trolley car in order to get to the route.

Rupert: According to Stallworth, the carriers have a USPS-provided pass that pays for the fare. Local management understands and embraces the role the carriers play.

Stallworth: Oh yeah, people all the time, in San Francisco, especially tourists, because San Francisco is huge tourist destination. So you get a lot of people asking, you know, how to get here; how to get to Fisherman's Wharf; how to get to Lombard Street, which is the most curviest street in the world; how to get to downtown. It is a very exciting job, which a lot of people don't realize. It's hard work, but yet, it's rewarding because you get to go out and you get speak to a lot of people. You get to meet people from all across the world – literally all across the world – just by simply by being a mail person, 'cause everybody wants to talk to you to get to know you.

Rupert: For Alma, it's satisfying when she meets USPS admirers.

Orden: This person was telling me how they wish that, you know, their postal service would be like ours. And that for me was very memorable, because I think we have the best service in the world.

Rupert: Alma has some bedrock principles that she keeps so she can be the best ambassador for the Postal Service.

Orden: Always be kind to people. Always say "hello" – just plain, good manners. It's amazing the response we get from people – the feedback – because people love the Postal Service.

Death Valley Post Office Segment

MiMi Johnson: For our next story, we travel way out west, to a place where coyotes, rattlesnakes and tourists all roam. Brian Sperry reports on a Post Office in California's Mojave Desert, where temperatures soar to dangerous highs in the lowest place in North America.

William VanBokkelen: When you step outside it's so windy and so hot that it's like a furnace blowing in your face. It's just crazy heat.

Brian Sperry: That's Death Valley Postmaster William VanBokkelen describing the intense heat and wind of Death Valley, CA, which is located nearly 300 miles Northeast of Los Angeles. He came to Death Valley nearly a year ago and despite the heat has fallen in love with its unique beauty, residents, and tourists, who in the summer time come to the Post Office by the busload.

VanBokkelen: There can be 22 buses in the parking lot out here, and they're mostly German and French. They'll come in throughout the summer time. I'll have a line out the door. It's crazy. They want stamps and they want collectible stamps. So I have two display cases. I must have 50 different stamps that they can choose from. They always want a postmark, always.

Sperry: While the tourists come to experience the extreme climate, they are often unprepared for its consequences, says VanBokkelen.

VanBokkelen: They've got a really great rescue team here. And I've seen a lot of rescues. You know someone is bound to collapse from the heat and they do. They come out and they try and go to the museum, they come to the Post Office, they go over and buy postcards, they're walking around the ranch, they're taking pictures, you know it's really pretty here.

Sperry: Tourists aren't the only ones to enjoy hanging out at the Post Office.

VanBokkelen: There are coyotes, which actually are roaming around the Post Office. There are bunny rabbits, lizards, and snakes, not too dangerous, but you know in the summertime you have to be careful because that's when scorpions and the rattlesnakes come out.

Sperry: The Death Valley Post Office is small, yet has three air conditioners to do battle with the radical climate, which regularly reaches into the mid to upper 120s during the summer.

VanBokkelen: We've never closed the Post Office due to the air conditioning being down, and you know we never would. Actually you know, I would just sweat it out (laughs).

Sperry: VanBokkelen says the reason for the high temperatures is because Death Valley is 282 feet below sea level, the lowest point in North America, making the Death Valley Post Office the lowest, driest, and hottest Post Office in the country.

The highest temperature recorded in Death Valley was 134 degrees in 1913 – it's also the highest ever recorded temperature in the world. Death Valley is a stark contrast to the 11,000 foot mountains that surround it. It makes for a beautiful setting anytime, but especially during the winter, which VanBokkelen says is his favorite time of year.

VanBokkelen: The winter time is a special time here. You know, you get the great sunsets and great sunrises, and during the day, you know, all of the mountains surrounding Death Valley are full of snow and it's really beautiful.

Sperry: Approximately 300 people live in the Death Valley area year round, with several hundred leaving in the summer for cooler climates. No matter the season, VanBokkelen says the Post Office is always busy.

VanBokkelen: For some reason down here I do an extraordinary business. I sell so many stamps and I have so many customers that live here seasonally, so when they leave they are shipping all of their stuff because it's cheaper than putting it on a plane. At the ranch all they sell are postcards. They don't sell greeting cards. And so I'm the only greeting card person down here, which is awesome because I make a huge revenue off that.

Sperry: In less than a year he has won over the community with a can-do attitude and a penchant for providing outstanding service.

VanBokkelen: That's probably why I got the job. It's because that's what I'm all about. Yeah, so far I love it. It's really like the best job I've ever had. Not like, it is the best job I've ever had.

News Roundup

Johnson: And now for a roundup of recent postal news:

The tally is in, and thanks to the generosity of customers across America, U.S. Postal Service letter carriers collected 72.5 million pounds of food on May 10th in the annual Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive.

This represents the 11th consecutive year the event has surpassed 70 million pounds and adds to the more than 1 billion pounds of food collected since the Drive began.

Stamp Out Hunger, the nation's largest single-day food drive, was launched in 1993 by the National Association of Letter Carriers and is supported by the Postal Service. Canned and non-perishable items are collected by 230,000 letter carriers and other postal employees in 10,000 cities and towns in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam.

About 50 million Americans — including 16 million children — lack sufficient food, according to Feeding America, a partner in the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive and the nation's leading domestic hunger relief charity.

Thanks for listening to *Your Postal Podcast*. We'd love to hear your thoughts on this month's program. Please email your feedback and story ideas to YourPostalPodcast@USPS.com.

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