

Post office announces new changes for 677 zip codes

By Kevin Bottrell

kbottrell@nwkansan.com

The U.S. Postal Service confirmed Tuesday that incoming and outgoing mail processing for the 677 zip codes has moved to North Platte, Neb.

Brian Sperry, regional spokesperson for the service in Denver, said mail sent within the 677 area will still be delivered overnight. The 677 area includes Sherman, Cheyenne, Thomas, Decatur, Rawlins, Logan, Wallace and Gove counties.

Mail sent from the 677 zip codes will go to North Platte, be sorted by automated machines, then put on the truck to maintain that overnight delivery. Mail heading to the 677 area will go to North Platte first to be sorted. Sperry said the sorting machines at the North Platte facility can handle 35,000 pieces of mail in an hour. Currently, mail periodical bundles with the full five-digit zip code will stay local.

"Bulk mailing will not change," he said. "But the time to submit may be different."

Outgoing processing had been

done in Colby until a previous round of consolidation, when it was moved to Salina. That facility is being closed and processing there moved to Wichita. Incoming mail processing was still being done in Colby until Tuesday.

Sperry said the change will result in a loss of the equivalent of two full-time positions in Colby, which will be shifted to North Platte. Colby will still serve as a transportation hub and a regular retail post office.

In an effort to stem the billions of dollars in losses the Postal Service has been experiencing, more than 100 processing facilities are scheduled for closure by July. The Postal Service had been looking at closing North Platte. The facility would have been consolidated with Cheyenne, Wyo., but that study was halted last February when the decision was made to send mail from Alliance, Neb., and Colby to North Platte.

The processing changes will save about \$1.2 billion a year, Sperry said, and the service has its eye on several other changes that may re-

quire acts of Congress. The service announced earlier in February that it plans to stop delivering and collecting letters, including first-class mail, on Saturdays beginning Aug. 5. Packages will continue to be delivered, however. Post offices that are currently open Saturdays will remain open, and mail to post office boxes will be delivered.

This change is expected to save the service \$2 billion a year.

The service has been asking for several years to get rid of Saturday delivery, and since 2006 it has been required by law to prepay retiree health benefits, which cost about \$5.5 billion a year.

"We are asking Congress to resolve that," Sperry said. "We will still pay retiree benefits, but we're asking Congress to make it more manageable."

Though the service is going ahead with cutting Saturday delivery, Congress has yet to act on either issue. A postal reform bill died in the last Congress and no action has been taken yet this year to get the effort going again.

Ag Talk with Jeanne

Spring Oats for Forage Production

Over the last several years, cattle producers across the state have found spring oats to provide excellent spring pasture and hay. With reasonable inputs, spring oats can provide a bridge for producers short on available pasture in April and May until perennial pasture or summer annual forage production becomes available. In addition, it may help fill some of the gaps producers have this year with the dry conditions.

In northwest Kansas, the optimal date is from the first week of March through the end of March. However, adequate pasture is practical after the optimum planting date. To maximize pasture production potential, it is necessary to plant as early as possible. A seeding rate of two bushels per acre is recommended. Under good soil moisture or irrigation, three bushels per acre may be preferable for grazing.

Oats may be successfully planted no-till, however, growth and vigor are typically greater when pre-plant tillage is used. No-till is more successful in fields that have been under no-till for a period of

years, and riskier in "opportunistic" no-till situations. In either case, a firm seedbed is necessary for optimal production. Under adequate soil moisture conditions, a seeding depth of 1/2 to 1 inch is preferable. Oats may be planted at depths greater than one inch under dry conditions; however, oat seedlings are less vigorous than wheat and can experience difficulties emerging at deeper planting depths, especially after crusting rains.

Oat pasture should be treated the same as winter wheat pasture in terms of stocking rates and time to initiate grazing. Since grain production is not practical or recommended under grazing, producers should treat oat pasture as a graze-out program or remove it when ready for the next crop. Oats are easily controlled by a variety of herbicides, such as glyphosate and atrazine. The length of effective grazing is a function of stocking rate and weather. Rotational grazing may extend the window for effective pasture production.

For hay, late boot to early heading is the optimal timing to bal-

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ance quantity with quality considerations. Harvested at the dough stage, hay should have an approximate total dietary nutrient of 56 percent with 10 percent protein, both on a dry basis. A nitrate test is recommended. Prussic acid levels should not be a concern.

Silage is another option for spring oats. Oats should be harvested for silage from late milk through early dough stages. Expect silage with a total dietary nutrient of approximately 60 percent and 9 percent protein on a dry weight basis.

Finally, oats in Kansas may be planted for grain with expected yields of 50 or more bushels per acre most years. However, typical growing conditions during grain fill normally result in low test weights, making the grain unsuitable for food use. Grain from oats is acceptable as livestock feed; however, a market should be identified prior to planting since few markets exist locally.

Hometown Hero

John Finley has been selected as the Hometown Hero for February.

Mr. Finley is known for the many things he does in the community but where most people see him is trucking down the road in his white golf cart, flag flying on the back, and, in his hand, he is carrying an envelope. Yep, John is the guy who remembers birthdays and anniversaries with a card he has made, personalizing it for the person he is delivering it to.

John has been making cards and delivering them for several years. Last year, he delivered 720 cards.

Mr. Finley, age 85, had some health issues. Dr. Miller, he said, told me I needed to quit driving. I told myself, if I had an accident and killed myself that would be bad but, if I had an accident and killed someone else, that would be tragic!

"I sold my car and bought a golf cart," he said.

He was looking for something to do. His computer had the program, "Bluemountain.com" and he found lots of cards. With his Lions birthday calendar and the Christian Church bulletin which announced birthdays and anniversaries each week, he began making cards for people on those lists. The phone book had most of the street addresses.

"I don't know what it costs but I think people appreciate the cards and I like giving them," John said. "If we don't work and hang together, we won't have a community."

With around 50 cards to make each month, he is organized and generally has cards made two to three weeks in advance. February hasn't ended and John said he already has the cards for March made and waiting to be delivered.

John has been an active member of the community for years. In 1947, he helped build the first roping arena at the county fairgrounds. Since that time, he has helped with the fair and served as a fair board member. When the grandstand was being built, he was underneath, helping with the erection.

As a fair board member, when the fair building is rented for events, he reads the gas and electric meters and checks to building to see that it is ready to be rented. The day after the event in the building is held, he again reads the meters and checks out the building.

When volunteers were needed at the emergency building on U.S. 36, John was there doing whatever he was told. If residents at the Village have a problem, John takes their concerns to the administrator. He is a member of the Lions Club, an elder at the First Christian Church, is a volunteer for Hospice and works with the Relay for Life.

Helping others makes me feel better, he said. So, the next time you see John headed down the street, it is very possible that he is on his way to make someone's day by giving them a birthday or anniversary card.

John's birthday is Aug. 8. People are urged to send him a card at 200 N. Ash, Apt. 11, St. Francis, KS 67756 and help make his day!

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Thank you to everyone who helped us celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary by coming to the party and sending cards and flowers. Also thanks to our children, Alan and Janet, Laurie and Paul, who organized the event along with the help of our nieces, Becky, Karla and Vera. A special thanks to Jim and Pam, and Thelma for their help and to everyone else who helped. We live in a wonderful community! Stan and Neva Wahrman

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