

Citizens tell USPS not to change Colby mail service system

By Kevin Bottrell
kbottrell@nwkans.com

One citizen summed up the mood of the crowd at the U.S. Postal Service meeting Monday when he remarked that "Nobody wants two-to three-day service."

"It doesn't seem like cutting back service is a way to attract business," he continued.

Omaha Processing Plant Manager Roy Reynolds gave a presentation on the processing center study and the proposed move to a two-to three-day mail delivery standard, and when he opened the floor for comments found himself moderating a contentious and sometimes heated question and comment session with the public.

Reynolds was asked point blank why it is necessary for in-town mail to go to Denver and back. He responded Colby won't have the employees to look at every piece of mail by hand, and the automated sorting machines are already gone. Vera Sloan of Colby asked if the outcome of the study was a foregone conclusion.

"Is the postal service's mind already made up?" Sloan asked, to which Reynolds said "No."

Ken Poland of Gem said moving Colby's mail processing out of Kansas doesn't make sense.

"Now we're going to send everything to Denver, which has been a black hole," he said.

Poland objected to the two-to three-day delivery, saying, in his experience, two days would be optimistic and the mail to rural areas would likely take three days or more. Poland said he does business with grain brokers, who do not take money over the Internet, so any checks sent to them would take days to get there, even if they were in the same county.

Reynolds replied Poland could use express mail, which will not go to Denver first. That service, which costs \$15 to \$18, has been offered for years, he said.

Sloan asked why the service spends so much money on advertising. Reynolds said its because many people don't know about all the services the post offices have to offer. Sloan went on to say the post office should not be concerned with being profitable when it receives some taxpayer money to provide service for the deaf and blind and military.

Sloan said she is concerned about people not getting absentee ballots back in time to be counted. She said people here support their local post office and do not want a change in service.

"We are efficient here," she said to general applause. "We have good employees. We care about each other. Please keep our post office intact."

Quinter Postmaster Darrel Evans said his post office is the farthest east in the 677 zip code area. Trucks take a route from Hoxie to Grainfield to Quinter and then to Grinnell, he said, and sometimes letters going to Hoxie from Quinter have taken up to six days.

Evans said he had been told by many people they would no longer use the post office if the service goes to a two-to three-day standard.

"677 is just a drop in the bucket," he said. "I stand to lose more than that \$14,000 in my office alone. We're shooting ourselves in the foot for \$14,000."

Many in the crowd agreed if processing has to move, it should go to Wichita, saying the weather is better heading east. Many times during the winter I-70 is closed at Colby heading west, but remains open going east. In addition, Saturday mail from Colby has been processed in Wichita for some time without problems.

One contractor who's company hauls mail throughout Kansas said he was concerned over whether his routes would be eliminated. He said in the past he hasn't known about changes until the day they are made, and he has had trouble getting a hold of anyone who can give him correct information. Reynolds asked the contractor to give him contact information after the meeting and said he knew of one truck route between Colby and McCook that would be lost of the service goes ahead with the plan.

The contractor took issue with Reynolds' claim no postal employees had been laid off, saying his uncle, who had driven mail trucks for 42 years was laid off not long ago. Reynolds had said earlier in the meeting the service had gone

from 880,000 employees to 559,000 entirely through attrition and voluntary early retirements. Independent contractors, he said, were not part of those figures.

When asked how much money these Area Mail Processing studies cost, Reynolds said the calculations of time, distance, maintenance and money saved are done in-house by an employee who is working full time anyway, so that part does not cost extra. The studies will include the public comments from the meetings, he said.

Reynolds said the service does sometimes hire outside firms to audit its business.

Colby citizen Mel Fry asked whether the impact on local business had been taken into account at the Postal Service headquarters. Reynolds replied it hadn't, but the service's economists expect to lose another 39 billion pieces of mail and some of that would likely come from people who choose not to utilize the post office.

Fry suggested since the federal government is intent on creating jobs, why doesn't the post office go back to hand-sorting so it can hire on more people and have better service. He suggested the service raise fees.

"People don't mind paying for a good service," he said.

Colby Free Press Publisher Sharon Friedlander said the Postal Service is forcing newspapers out of the system, which in turn is not good for the service.

When asked if any of these studies had resulted in a processing center not being moved, Reynolds said the center in North Platte, Neb., was not moved after a study found consolidating it with Cheyenne, Wyo., would not save any money.

"Not every one of these studies is a slam dunk," he said.

Free Press Systems Administrator Evan Barnum said his mother-in-law received medication through the mail that had to be kept chilled. He said the medicine was packed with a cold pack good for 24 hours, but was not sure it would last 72 hours.

State Rep. Rick Billinger said if the service wants to compete, it's going at it all wrong, and it should start cutting at the administrative level.

Martha Ruiz Martinez, a representative for Sen. Pat Roberts, was at the meeting. She distributed two letters Roberts has sent to Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe. In the first letter, sent in October, Roberts wrote about the 134 rural post offices in danger of being closed.

"Sure, given the threat this policy poses to the identity of small community America, there must be some other alternative!" Roberts wrote by hand at the bottom of the letter.

The second letter concerned the processing centers. Roberts said he understood the pressure the Postal Service is under, but he urged Donahoe to consider the economic loss in jobs and delays caused by closing processing centers.

Reynolds said people can send additional comments - postmarked by Dec. 27 - to Manager, Consumer and Industrial Contact, Central Plains District, Box 199504, Omaha, Neb., 68119-9404

Postal decisions delayed to May

MAIL, from Page 1A

has a lot of excess capacity.

"Now we have equipment out there that maybe used to run 10 hours that's now running 8 hours and might have the capacity to run 20 hours," he said.

While standard mail, which includes newsletters, flyers and ads, has remained steady, it brings in significantly less income. It takes three pieces of standard mail to equal the price of one first class letter, Reynolds said.

Another piece of the puzzle is a \$5 billion payment congress has required the service to make each year to cover pension costs, including those for employees not hired yet.

There is anywhere from \$40 billion to \$75 billion set aside now from those payments, but Reynolds said the Postal Service is not confident it will get that money back, even though Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe has asked for Congress to allow it.

Public officials have been weigh-

Genesis baskets filled for holiday



Jeana Roe helped fill the Christmas food baskets on Wednesday night at the Goodland Methodist Church Fellowship Hall. Volunteers filled 191 Christmas food baskets to be picked up by families on Saturday. The baskets were laundry baskets and a bottle of laundry detergent was included with the different food items. Dawn Jolly, food bank manager, said that was an increase over the 175 given out last year. Genesis ordered 3,000 pounds of food in August from the Kansas Food Bank and the members of the Goodland High School football team unloaded it in 30 minutes as a community service project. Genesis gives out food to families through out the year, said Jolly.

Photos by Pat Schiefen
The Goodland Star-News



Christmas on Us grand prize drawing moved to Central

TICKETS, from Page 1A

\$10 and for every \$10 over with a limit of 250 tickets per transaction.

If you ask at the Star-News office, we'll give you one free ticket each week. No purchase is required to win. If you buy a newspaper at the same time we will give you another ticket.

The customer takes half of each ticket and the other side is dropped into gift-wrapped collection boxes, which are emptied once a week into a large barrel. The Star-News staff will pick tickets each week and hide the winning numbers in "Christmas on Us" advertisements, which will run on Friday.

Winners have four days after the numbers are printed - until noon each Wednesday - to bring their tickets to the Star-News office, 1205 Main, and collect \$50 in scrip, which can be spent at participating businesses.

All 10 of the \$50 instant prizes will be given out during the contest, for a total of \$500. Winning numbers appear in ads, which means shoppers have a chance to win with the prizes given out on a first come basis until all the instant prizes are gone. Numbers will appear in today's edition. All of the \$50 instant winners will be given out during the month.

The grand prize drawing for \$1,000 and second prize for \$500 will be held at 4 p.m. on Tuesday,

Dec. 20, in front of Central Elementary.

It's simple enough, but there are a few rules.

- You must be 18 to participate.
- Employees of participating businesses are not eligible at their workplace, but can collect tickets from other sponsors. Star-News employees and their immediate

family are not eligible.

All prizes will be awarded in scrip, which can be spent only at participating businesses.

- The last day to collect tickets is Monday, Dec. 19.
- Winners must be present at the grand prize drawing and be able to show their winning ticket.
- All winners agree to have their

name and photo published in the Star-News. Winners of major prizes must provide their tax identification number, and agree to be interviewed and photographed for publication in the newspaper.

- Be sure to remind the clerk if you're not offered tickets. If that happens, you should get one extra ticket.

Christmas On Us!

The location for the drawing of tickets for Christmas On Us! has changed!

We will now hold the drawing in front of CENTRAL SCHOOL on the lawn!

Time remains the same-only the location has changed!

Tuesday, December 20 at 4 p.m.

We'll see you there!

The Goodland Star-News

1205 Main Street, Goodland, KS 67735 • (785) 899-2338