

'Your Postal Podcast' 71st Edition Transcript – April 2014

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Richard Watkins: Welcome to *Your Postal Podcast*. This is Richard Watkins of U.S. Postal Service Corporate Communications. In this April 2014 edition, you'll hear about how and why some world-famous cartoon characters have helped remind postal customers to participate in the annual Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive for more than two decades, and we'll talk with two city carriers who are hitting all the right notes after putting down their mail satchels for the day.

Letter Carriers' Food Drive Segment

Watkins: For more than two decades, familiar characters who appear in fourteen-hundred newspapers' "funny pages" have helped remind postal customers to participate in the nation's largest food drive. Peter Hass has the story behind how these cartoon favorites came to support the annual event.

Peter Hass: On Saturday, May 10th, 2014, the 22nd Annual Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive will see letter carriers and other Postal Service employees make it easy for Americans to donate non-perishable food items to families in need across the nation.

Every year, a family known and loved by millions of people around the world helps the National Association of Letter Carriers and the Postal Service remind customers to save the date for the food drive. And once again this year, the familiar images of Billy, Dolly, Jeffy and P.J. from The Family Circus newspaper comic strip are helping to publicize the nation's largest food drive.

More than 20 years ago, Family Circus creator Bil Keane started providing a promotional cartoon each year for use on Food Drive posters, t-shirts and postcards. When Bil Keane passed away in 2011, his son Jeff Keane carried on with The Family Circus comic strip – and with the Food Drive cartoon tradition.

Jeff Keane said he believes his father was convinced to create the cartoon to promote the food drive after being asked by the letter carrier serving his childhood home in Paradise Valley, Arizona.

Jeff Keane: The mailman was our connection to the world. and our first mailman was named "Red." In those days, Red would come driving down our dirt road delivering mail. The houses were few and very far between; kind of in the middle of nowhere. Dad would spend a few minutes talking to Red. Sometimes he'd ask him to wait if he needed an immediate response or something like that. Sometimes it was going to take a little longer, so Red would be invited inside and he'd patiently wait as my brother and I would play around him. There were days I'm sure Red must have been awfully late wrapping up his route due to our Keane delay.

I don't know if it was the reason, but soon Red altered his route, not to avoid us as most people would choose, but to make it easier for us. And what he did was after he stopped at the house directly across from us, he would hang a U-ey and pick up and drop off the mail at our house, and then he would then hang a U-ey again and head on down the other side of the street as usual. And our dad would run out to the mailbox and check whether something needed to be answered right away, and he'd answer it and then slip in a couple of cartoons that were due, and then have one of us put it all in the mailbox and raise the signal flag on the mailbox. And an

hour or so later, Red would come driving back, this time on our side of the street and see the flag and stop and pick up our mail again.

Through the years, the road got paved and more and more houses were built and the different carriers – but that route never changed – each new carrier would make that U-turn making it to our mailbox twice. So really, I think my dad’s involvement in the Food Drive these last 20 years or so was his way of trying to show thanks for all the U-turns.

Hass: National Association of Letter Carriers Director of Community Services Pam Donato said the caring attitude employees serve their customers with on a daily basis is magnified on the day of the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive.

Pam Donato: I think letter carriers -- this is very personal for them. Because this comes out of what they see every day when they are out on their routes. They see families and children and older people who need help and who don’t obviously have enough to get by. For them, it can be a national program, but it’s always going to come down to a very personal experience that’s one-on-one with them and their customers.

Hass: Jeff Keane’s cartoon for this year features a play on words – a Family Circus tradition. Now in his third year of creating the Food Drive cartoon, Keane said he looks to the past when trying to come up with a new idea for this special promotional image.

Keane: I go back and I look at what’s been done before and eventually, hopefully something comes into my head – usually very little is in my head, but every once in a while something will come in there, and then we can figure it out. But I think it’s an important cartoon just to reach out, and it has a recognizability I think, for people to see it and then it reminds them of what they need to do that day.

Letter Carriers Form Band Segment

Watkins: Postal employees are a diverse group with many gifts, interests and talents beyond collecting, processing and delivering the mail. Brian Sperry reports on a musical duo from Medford, Oregon, whose songs are often inspired by the people they meet while delivering the mail.

(The song “Humanity” fades in and out)

Brian Sperry: That’s the song “Humanity,” written and performed by Steve Byam and Craig Randolph of the group Post, with guest vocalist Whitney Weems. Randolph and Byam are musicians by night and city carriers by day. Interest in their music is growing, and they believe they could be on the verge of bursting on the music scene.

Steve Byam: We’re actually just a couple postmen that write music on the side, and we’ve partnered up with a local celebrity here in town who’s the drummer for a band from the 70s called Firefall. He actually liked what we were doing and so it’s kind of taken a life of its own. We’re looking forward to putting out an album here very soon. Most of it is upbeat, happy-go-lucky, jump-on-in kind of songs. But there is a few that scratch at the subconscious mind and say “Hey, are we doing the best we can? Can we help others?”

Sperry: Many of Byam’s song lyrics are inspired by the customers he serves, customers he regularly serenades.

Byam: Some of the lines in it, you know, “Find a lonely soul and make them smile.” I do that every day on my route. It’s usually with a little old lady. You know, I’ll be singing to her, brightening her day. Whatever it takes to leave them with a smile is the priceless gift that I get back from it, and I’m in a position to influence smiles, and so I take that real serious. And it reflects very positively on my employer. So absolutely, I drew the song from experiences out on the route and the difference I want to make in everyday life.

Sperry: Randolph met Byam for the first time three years ago after transferring from Hawaii to Medford, Oregon, where his mail sorting case was right next to Byam’s.

Craig Randolph: I overheard Steve talking about him playing music and I’m like, “Hey, I play music, too,” and he didn’t even want to give me the time of day to be honest. And I’m like, “No really, I’ve been playing my whole life.” And he finally gave me a shot; he said, “Yeah, come on over -- we’ll see what happens.” I went over to Steve’s house and we just clicked like butter and biscuits. It just started flowing. I just started playing music and he started coming up with lyrics. So I pretty much write the music and Steve writes the lyrics, and it’s been going great since.

Sperry: Randolph began playing the piano at the age of 4. By the age of 14 he discovered the electric guitar and couldn’t put it down. He was soon playing in various bands in southern California, but it wasn’t paying the bills. So he took a job carrying the mail until he became rich and famous, which he jokes, has yet to happen.

As for Byam, being a musician was the farthest thing from his mind when he walked into a church on his mail route years ago.

Byam: At the end of the service, the Pastor said he had a few inspired words for a few people and he said, “Would our postman stand up?” So I stood up, feeling really awkward, and he said “I just feel that God wants you to begin your work and your work will come to you as you walk. Does that mean anything to you?” And I’m thinking to myself, I’m never coming back to this church; I’m so uncomfortable. Well the odd thing is, in the next two weeks out on the route, I write like 14 songs – never written a song in my life; don’t sing.

Sperry: Post recently released a song titled “Race.”

(Music from the song “Race” fades in and out)

Byam: That song “Race” for NASCAR is so high-octane that your heart jumps out of your chest. It’s just hard drivin’.

Sperry: Byam and Randolph wanted the name of their group to reflect their positive postal experience.

Byam: We’d like to call the band “Post.” We just want to bring good publicity to the Post Office. They’ve sustained us, you know, with our lifestyle for this long and both of us are real appreciative of it, and any positive light we can shine on them, we definitely want to do that. We want to show people that the Post Office is real, we’re tangible people, and that they’ve made a difference in turning our business around, and we want to thank them. And I think that’s kind of what “Humanity” does, is it shows them they’ve got carriers out there with conscious minds to just serve and make it all about the customer.

(Song Humanity fades.)

Sperry: “Humanity” and “Race” are currently available on iTunes and other digital audio stores.

News Roundup

Watkins: And now here's a roundup of recent Postal Service news.

On April 11th, legendary Hollywood icon and humanitarian Charlton Heston was honored as the 18th inductee into the Postal Service's Legends of Hollywood stamp series. The event took place during a first-day-of-issue stamp dedication ceremony at The Creative Life Chinese Theatre as part of the TCM Classic Film Festival.

Quoting Postal Service Board of Governors Chairman Mickey Barnett, “Acting was not Charlton Heston's whole life. He was never afraid to stand up for his beliefs. In the 1960s, he believed so strongly in civil rights that he marched on Washington, D.C., with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whom he called ‘a 20th century Moses.’: Unquote.

Beyond winning an Oscar for ‘Ben-Hur,’ Heston also received the Motion Picture Academy's Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award, as well as the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

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 an official program from the First Day of Issue Ceremony held in Austin, Texas, for the Jimi Hendrix Forever Stamp. The winner will be selected from all qualifying comments emailed to YourPostalPodcast@usps.com by Monday, May 12, 2014.

Our congratulations go out to Scott Eberhard of Denver, Colorado, who emailed us a comment about the March podcast and has won a Civil War 1861 Commemorative Stamp Folio.

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