

## Forced use of mail tracking barcodes

Benefits to community newspapers from the U.S. Postal Service's proposed mandatory use of a "full-service" Intelligent Mail Barcode (IMb) are meager and do not justify the substantial investment in the technology, the National Newspaper Association told the Postal Service today.

USPS is considering a new requirement for the use of a full-service IMb after January 2014 for newspapers that want to claim automation mail processing discounts. NNA's Postal Committee Chair Max Heath has long questioned the value of the full-service IMb, which attaches an individual identifier to each newspaper. USPS wants these tracking codes on the mail so it can measure service and provide data back to mailers, such as address changes.

But the software and implementation can be tricky for a smaller newspaper, Heath told USPS. Much larger mailers with information technology departments have struggled with the installations and training, he said.

Community newspapers are already facing a January 2013 requirement to upgrade to a simpler IMb, which codes in certain mailer information but does not track individual mailpieces. NNA's objection is to requiring a second upgrade, which USPS once said would be forever optional but now wishes to require for all mail.

Heath detailed the reasons for newspapers' lack of enthusiasm for the more sophisticated IMb.

The technology's most useful data are provided by scanning each mailpiece as it travels through mail processing equipment. But much newspaper mail is handled manually, so scans would elude most NNA members' mail.

Although receiving data on some long distance newspaper mail might be useful if scans were successful, most community newspaper mail is entered into and delivered from the local delivery unit. Newspapers do not need scans to know where their mail is, Heath said.

USPS has provided some smaller mailer tools for using IMb, such as an online mailing statement application, but these do not provide the full panoply of work-sharing discounts that NNA has earned over the years for its members. So to get a small automation discount, NNA members would have to abandon their current software that programs much greater discounts.

Heath and Brad Hill, general manager of Interlink, produced formal comments to the USPS proposal. Both represent NNA on the USPS Mailers Technical Advisory Committee and provide NNA member assistance through the Postal Committee.

NNA President Merle Baranczyk said that NNA's Postal Committee faced a busy year of assistance to members as the first IMb upgrade hits the industry in January. He said he hoped NNA's comments would persuade USPS that requiring the second upgrade would not be cost effective for NNA or the Postal Service. He urged newspapers to maintain their membership in good standing so they would receive NNA information and assistance when needed.

"NNA questions whether USPS really wants to be able to track long-distance newspaper mail in the detail it is currently considering," Baranczyk said. "Our experience is that the long-distance delivery is pretty bad and getting worse. Whether the institution wants to fly a banner over that performance is questionable, given the challenges ahead of more mail processing facility closures. Certainly neither NNA members nor USPS ought to sink money into a tracking system that provides no useful information. We would rather consider solutions that get the mail delivered on time."



## Finding joy in the holiday lights

And the Lord said, "Let there be light."

He didn't say, "Jim Plotts, it is your job to single-handedly put Christmas lights on every non-moving object on your block."

Jim's obsession with Christmas lighting is legendary. He puts lights where lights have never been before. He puts lights on tractors and trucks and makes their wheels appear to go round-and-round. He puts lights on bushes, fences, houses, trees and wheelbarrows. If the cats would hold still, they would be lit.

Our neighbors know they will have lights shining in their windows for precisely six hours every night. The photo-cell timer automatically turns our lights on at sundown and off six hours later.

Our musical tree, however, still has to be operated manually. Jim is so proud of that tree. He scored it on a midnight Black Friday shopping foray in Dallas one year. This tree has light bulbs that change color as they flash in

### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



synchronization with the music loop that plays Christmas music non-stop.

Jim is in charge of outside lighting; me, the inside. Right now, I'm having a hard time just getting two strands of lights to work on our tree.

-ob-

How do you herd a chicken? Very carefully, it seems.

Neighbor Carl called to inform us one of our chickens was hiding under a trailer on his lot and he needed us to come get our wayward hen.

While this weather has been so nice, I've been letting my little flock out of their coop during the day. I thought they had never wandered, but apparently I was wrong.

It's been fun to watch them scratch and peck. I even scatter feed on the ground for them. A side benefit to all their activity (besides naturally fertilizing the lawn) is they have also areated the entire back yard. I bet next spring we have the best grass we've ever had.

Anyway, back to our wandering clucker. Together, Jim and Carl "shooed" her back to our place, but she looked more than a little worse for the wear.

She was missing lots of feathers from her back and her head looked like she had been mauled. I'm guessing a stray dog caught her. She was happy to be home and doesn't seem too traumatized by her ordeal. I'll bet she doesn't wander off again.

The hens have been given a temporary reprieve from the stew pot. They're laying once again. Molting season must be over and they're getting back to their primary occupation: keeping us in eggs. Four eggs a day, however, isn't going to cut it, but it's a start.

## A penny saved is a penny earned, still true today

Until recently, I often stopped by the corner convenience store after work to treat my sweet tooth. From the time I was four-years-old and walked barefoot down to Vern Wagner's little general store, I've always enjoyed the wonderful taste of chocolate.

Today, I wind up plunking down nearly a buck and a half (\$1.50) for my favorite candy - either Reese's peanut butter cups or the mouth watering chocolate sticks. While this chocolate treat is every bit as good as any "Denver Sandwich" or "Cherry Mash" I ate as a boy, today's bar appears to be about half the size I paid one nickel for 50 years ago.

Now that I think about it, \$1.50 is much easier to come by today than a nickel was when I was a youngster growing up in the northwestern Kansas farm community of Seguin. Back then, men worked 12 and 14-hour days on the farm for as little as \$1 an hour. Dad talked about men working for 50 cents a day during the Great Depression when you could buy an acre of ground for about the same price you would pay for a five-stick pack of Juicy Fruit gum today.

For most people in this part of the

### Insight

John Schlageck



country, times were rough in those days, and they were ready and willing to work for darn near any price, just to keep bread on the family table.

Fifty cents for a day's wages went a long way toward buying food before World War II, my dad once told me. Recalling those days some 70 years ago, Dad talked about bacon selling for 15 cents a pound, eggs were a dime a dozen, Ivory soap sold at five bars for less than a quarter, butter cost 20 cents a pound and a large loaf of bread was two pennies.

Remember pennies?

They're something some people toss away today because they won't buy anything. Some people still pick up these discarded relics, adhering to the old adage, A penny saved, a penny earned.

Whether we want to admit it, or even

realize it, food still remains a good buy. Today, the average wage earner spends a much smaller percentage of his/her paycheck (approximately 10 percent) to buy food for the family. As a comparison, in 1933, this figure was more than 25 percent. Today the average family in the United States probably eats better than any time in this country's history.

Like food, clothing also costs little by today's standards. Seventy years ago, shoes sold for two bucks a pair, and you could buy a pretty nifty "goin'-to-church-suit" for less than \$5.

Dad had a brother and brother-in-law who owned a car dealership back in those days. I can remember them talking about a Model T with a sticker price of \$300 about the time their parents ushered in the Roaring '20s. A full tank of gas (10 gallons) sold for less than two dollars, a quart of oil cost three bits, and air for the tires was free.

What I wouldn't give to fill my vehicle up for even \$25 a tank today.

It's fun remembering days of yesteryear and comparing them to today. While a lot has changed, my sweet tooth hasn't.

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