

Be alert to media opportunities



**Philip
Dine**

At all levels of this union, there are letter carriers, local officers and national officers who understand the issues facing the United States Postal Service better than almost anyone—including most of the 535 lawmakers who exert control over the USPS.

That ability to express our message in clear and persuasive fashion, along with the local credibility you enjoy, is why your participation in getting the facts out is so important.

Today, I'd like to talk to you about seizing opportunities to do so.

What I mean by that is being alert to possibilities that could provide an opening. Beyond simply writing a standard letter or commentary piece and sending it in, we can benefit

by spotting opportunities that make our views timely—and hence boost their chances of being used by a given news outlet.

What follows is by no means an exhaustive list; rather it simply reflects the type of situations we should look for. Any others you think of—more power to you. And if you'd like to share them, we can make others aware of them.

- A misleading letter, story, commentary piece or editorial runs in the newspaper. We can set the record straight, and then add any parts of our message we can fit in.
- A positive letter, story, commentary piece or editorial runs. We can praise the author or newspaper, and then add whatever we'd like.
- Developments are not covered in a newspaper. For example, if a positive quarterly financial report from the USPS isn't reported, or a letter carrier rally is overlooked, we can put it before the public through a letter or commentary piece or by alerting a reporter. (So, whether something's good, bad or missing, there's an opening to weigh in.)
- You're in your car or relaxing at home and you hear a radio host mention the Postal Service. Or a caller or guest comments on the mail. Whether it's a positive comment or a negative one, an accurate idea or an erroneous one—it offers us a chance to provide listeners with our perspective. Call the station with a reaction. Or, if the format permits, offer to be a guest on a future show.
- You're looking at the local TV news, and there's an item about the Postal Service or the mail. Depending on what the news is or on your community's situation, you can likely offer the reporter valuable insight. Ask if they're interested in doing a follow-up

that would enlighten viewers. For example, maybe they've just mentioned the Internet's impact on mail volume—tell them about the surge in package deliveries because of online orders.

- You're watching a community cable station's discussion show, with a guest or a panel. The Postal Service comes up. Let the station know—in real time, if possible—what the facts are. Or, if the USPS doesn't come up—tell the host that this might be a good subject; it affects everyone, the conventional wisdom is misleading, and informing people could affect public policy.
- Something's in the news that you can relate to the Postal Service or letter carriers. Jobs—talk about the 7.5 million private-sector jobs that depend on a robust Postal Service. Hunger in America or cuts in food programs—mention the nation's largest single-day food drive. Homeland security—discuss the Cities' Readiness Initiative. Elderly residents—talk about the Carrier Alert program. Crime or public safety—mention what letter carriers do all over the country on a daily basis to stop crimes, put out fires or find missing children. Small businesses—discuss the importance of Saturday delivery. Veterans—mention that one-quarter of letter carriers are vets. Internet—talk about how skyrocketing online purchases are generating package delivery revenue for the USPS. Depending on the venue, voice your opinion or give a reporter an idea for a story.

By the way, newsroom phone numbers for a newspaper, TV station or radio station often can be found on their websites. If not, call the general number and ask to be connected to the newsroom.

If you'd like assistance with reaching a reporter, editor, producer or newsroom; with what to say; or with getting locally relevant statistics such as how many jobs in your area depend directly on the Postal Service, let me know. And, remember: Stick to our key points, and be positive and reassuring.

The message here is—be alert for opportunities and then seize them. Our jobs, and the Postal Service's future, may depend on it.

EDITORIAL STAFF:
Managing Editor Philip Dine
Designer/Web Editor Mike Shea
Internet Communications Coordinator
Joe Conway
Writer/Editor Rick Hodges
Editorial Assistant Jenessa Kildall

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