

# Letters to Santa and the U.S. Postal Service

## The Facts

### **Background**

As much as history reveals, the Postal Service began receiving letters to Santa Claus more than 100 years ago. However, its involvement was made official when in 1912 Postmaster General Frank Hitchcock authorized local Postmasters to allow postal employees and citizens to respond to the ever growing number of letters received every holiday season.

In the 1940s, mail volume for Santa increased so much so that the Postal Service invited charitable organizations, community groups and corporations to read and respond to the children who wrote letters to Santa.

Over the past 60-plus years, the program has taken on a life of its own. Today, cities around the country have hugely successful Letters to Santa programs working with recognized charitable organizations, major corporations, local businesses, postal employees and private citizens to make a difference in the lives of children from coast to coast.

### **101<sup>st</sup> Anniversary**

This year, 2013, the Postal Service is celebrating the 101<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Letters to Santa program as it continues to fulfill the dreams of children nationwide. More than one hundred years later, postal employees, volunteers and organizations remain committed to making children's Christmas wishes come true.

### **What We Do**

The Postal Service has Letters to Santa programs in operation around the country. In the vast number of locations postal employees respond to the letters by providing a written response signed by Santa. Other Post Offices work with local schools, municipalities and community groups who volunteer for the joyous task. Still other Post Offices work with established groups and charities who in kind respond in writing or by actually fulfilling the wishes of the letter writer. Each year, however, in select Post Offices the general public is invited to "adopt" Santa letters. In all locations where the public may adopt letters written to St. Nick, uniform security guidelines must be adhered to. Any member of the public choosing to adopt a letter may simply respond in writing, or he or she may choose to grant the wish — a decision completely left up to the individual Santa's helper.

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New York City's "**Operation Santa**" program is the largest public adoption Post Office in the country, receiving more than a half million letters a season. With that much Santa Mail it stands to reason they need the public's help. Every year the iconic James A. Farley Building on Eighth Avenue is visited by tens of thousands of people who come to adopt letters. A kick-off celebration is held, usually during the first week of December. The New York City program has changed very little since the 1940s when it was first opened to the public and continues to thrive much to the delight of both the writers and readers of letters to Santa.

### **Letters to Santa**

- Hundreds of thousands of children of all ages send letters to "Santa Claus, North Pole, Alaska" every year.
- Unless these letters contain a complete Alaska address, they remain in the area they were mailed.
- Postal "elves" go through the letters and separate those that wish Santa a happy birthday from those that express serious need.

### **Guidelines**

In 2006, national policy guidelines were created regarding the handling and adoption of letters addressed to Santa. These guidelines were designed to protect the children who wrote to Santa and mandated that individuals wishing to adopt letters must do so in person, present valid photo identification and fill out a form that includes the list of letters being adopted.

In 2009, the Postal Service changed the letter adoption process by redacting or blacking out all reference to the child's address and assigning the letter a number. Individuals interested in adopting letters go to the Post Office, select the letter(s) and sign the form. When the individual is all set to fulfill the child's wishes, he or she returns with the letter and/or item to be mailed and brings the items to a postal employee. The postal employee matches the number on the letter with the child's address and weighs the package. The individual pays for the postage. A Postal Service employee prints and applies a label to the package without the customer seeing the child's address.

### **Local Programs**

Historically, Post Offices around the country have partnered with various groups and organizations for charitable purposes and on community projects that have a positive impact on the community at large and on the residents specifically — our intent is to continue to do so now and in the future.



## People-Community-Social Responsibility

The Postal Service and its employees play important roles in communities around the nation. Postal employees live in the communities in which they work. Their children attend school there. They shop in the local stores. They eat in the restaurants. They actively participate in community business. It makes perfect sense for postal employees to want to help their fellow citizens, especially during the holiday season.

Through the Letters to Santa program, the Postal Service also helps to promote literacy. A letter to Santa is often a child's first written correspondence.

In addition to the Letters to Santa/Operation Santa program, the U.S. Postal Service is an essential part of the fabric of the nation. We always have been a welcomed and trusted part of the communities we serve. Here are some other examples:

- Every year, postal employees around the country go above and beyond their normal duty to save the lives of the customers they serve. In 2012, the Postal Service recognized 313 employee heroes.
- Postal employees pledge an average of \$38 million to the Combined Federal Campaign every year.
- The Postal Service and the National Association of Letter Carriers hold the nation's largest 1-day food drive. This year, 74 million pounds were collected. More than 1.2 billion pounds of food have been collected since it started in 1993.
- The "Have You Seen Me" campaign demonstrates the power of the mail — 151 missing children have been reunited with their families (as of December 2012).
- Sales of the Breast Cancer Research semipostal stamp have raised more than \$78 million in voluntary contributions for breast cancer research since July 1998.
- The Postal Service, the National Marrow Donor Program and the Be The Match Foundation created the Delivering the Gift of Life campaign 16 years ago. More than 58,000 postal employees and their families have joined the national donor registry and 82 life-saving marrow matches have occurred.
- Each year, the Postal Service sponsors National Dog Bite Prevention Week — a public safety campaign — to build community awareness concerning animal attacks.
- For the past seven years, the Postal Service was rated by the American public as the most trusted federal government organization, according to the respected Ponemon Institute.

