

# The day starts early, ends late, for postman

Angelo Buffone, a Eugene mailman, has been with the postal service for 10 years. He carries his load on his shoulders and begins the day at 7 a.m.

Buffone works the University's south side, carrying roughly 2500 pieces of mail and between 25-30 parcels a day.

Once he finishes casing and loading his mail, he clocks out and doesn't see the post office until after making as many as 777 deliveries. He describes his route as a "combination residential and business area," which means he covers individual homes and 36 apartment complexes. Most of the mail goes to University students.

Buffone says he enjoys the job, partly because "it is really interesting to get out and meet people," and partly because a job with the postal service means steady employment that pays well — for those who can get one.

If recent turnouts for clerk and carrier exams at Portland's Main Post Office are any indication, people who want a job like Buffone's will need time and patience.

More than 18,000 people are listed as potential qualifiers for approximately 400 openings on the Portland Post Office register, which is in the process of being updated due to retirements, deaths and in compliance with a three year review policy.

"The register holds as many names as possible," explains Ron Palaoro, a city letter carrier for Portland's Main Branch. He says the postal system requires updating to replace vacancies and to provide management with names of people who have successfully passed an entry level exam.

The exam tests memorization ability — like matching pairs of addresses and matching numbers and streets. The tests last 90 minutes and require a minimum score of 70 to gain entry onto the register. Disabled veterans have priority followed by high-point veterans and then the public, says Palaoro.



In Eugene, postal service personnel assistant Marlene Kuenher says taking the exam is one step toward landing steady employment.

"Once you get in through the entry level test," Kuehner says, "there are a lot of career opportunities." Starting pay for clerk carriers is \$9.72.

She cites examples of people eventually becoming postmasters of Oakridge and Bellingham, Washington after working through the rank-and-file system. Management level personnel all have risen through the stages of inter-postal system promotion and are rarely recruited from private industry, according to Palaoro.

But if a carrier transfers to another area, he takes the risk of starting over, says Phil Cain, a Eugene carrier substitute who recently left Fort Worth, Texas, where he held a full-time carrier job for nine years.

Cain says he is now number 22 on the Eugene substitute list and will probably sub for two years before landing a regular full-time route. Substitutes are guaranteed 20 hours of work per week; full-time carriers are guaranteed 40 hours per week.

Buffone says the postal system should give out more incentive awards to workers because, "the people here put

in a good hour's work for a good day's pay."

Buffone, one of 140 carriers in Eugene, received an initiative award over the Christmas holidays as a result of good response from customers along his route.

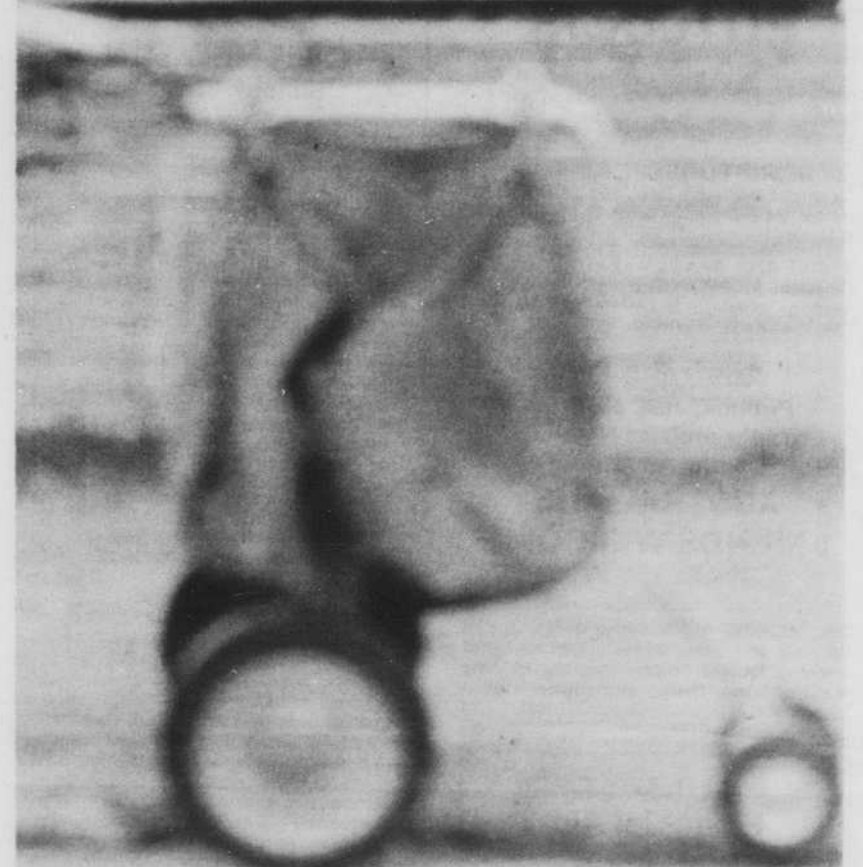
The public has a misconception of postal letter carriers and their jobs, he says. The bad image the postal service has received recently is the result of misleading information, such as a recent television program that showed carriers casing their mail at the rate of one letter every 10-15 seconds.

Buffone calls that a "negative portrayal" because it "creates images of postal workers taking life easy."

Palaoro says many people have asked him if employees receive "benefit packages, free postage and take advantage of postal hikes to offset their salary increases."

Another misconception involves the postman's supposed aversion to dogs and sometimes the job does entail a run-in with hostile canines.

"I've been bitten five times," says Buffone, adding that dogs don't bother him. "Now I carry a bag of bones with me and they are waiting. You learn to face up to a mean dog and they'll usually back down."



Phil Cain, a substitute mail carrier in Eugene, is shown here making his afternoon rounds. Potential postal workers must pass a 90 minute exam testing memorization and other skills before they are considered for the \$9.72 an hour starting pay as a mail clerk carrier.



Postal workers make hundreds of deliveries a day — often starting at 7 in the morning.



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