

Carriers and the mail make news online



The poster for the TV show

Mail-centered stories frequently appear on social media and online news sites. The following are a few that have come to NALC's attention recently. If you find a story you'd like us to consider featuring, send it to postalrecord@nalc.org.

'Mr Bates vs The Post Office' airs in the U.S.

In 1999, Britain's Post Office began using Horizon, a financial accounting computer system. Little did the state-owned private company's subpostmasters know that their use of the system would have dire consequences for their livelihoods, and for themselves, in the following decades. Their stories were dramatized in the TV program "Mr Bates vs The Post Office," which aired April 7 in the United States on PBS.

The local offices provide much more than mail services. They are often social hubs; offer a range of government services including financial, banking, and identification documents; and they, of course, accept parcels for delivery.

Subpostmasters are not employees of the Post Office, they are self-employed contractors, therefore liable for any lost money. So, when the computer system had a bug that showed thousands of pounds missing from many British post offices' accounts, but Horizon insisted there was no bug, the responsibility to pay back the lost money fell on the subpostmasters.

The four-part series featured the story of subpostmaster Jo Hamilton, who initially noticed a discrepancy equivalent to \$2,523. She didn't understand what the issue was, so she called the Horizon helpline and followed the company's instructions and in the process the discrepancy doubled. The

amount of money continued to rise, and Hamilton was eventually accused of stealing the equivalent of about \$45,000 from Britain's Post Office.

Hamilton was not alone in this; seven other similar stories also were featured in the series and there were thousands more British subpostmasters who underwent similar challenges. Over a 15-year period, a total of 3,500 subpostmasters were falsely accused, 700 were prosecuted, 200 went to prison and four died by suicide, according to *Variety*.

Another subpostmaster, Alan Bates, formed the Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance, and led a successful legal case against the Post Office on behalf of Hamilton and others.

Since that 2019 case, there have been no overarching court rulings to quash the wrongful convictions of the subpostmasters. However, in mid-March of this year—a few months after the show aired in the U.K.—British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak introduced legislation that would exonerate wrongfully convicted subpostmasters, according to the Associated Press.

Ghana debuts Africa's first crypto postage stamp

In a tweet, the Ashanti Kingdom in Ghana announced in early May that it had issued a new stamp honoring Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the current monarch of the Ashanti Kingdom. During his silver jubilee (marking 25 years), the stamp was unveiled. Not only will the stamp be available to purchase physically, but a digital twin crypto postage stamp can be purchased alongside it—the first of its kind in Africa.

Crypto postage stamps are a form of non-fungible tokens (NFTs), a



The unveiling of Ghana's crypto postage stamp

unique digital asset that cannot be replicated, according to *Investopedia*. So, each stamp has its own distinct identification code that's created from metadata and stored by blockchain, a decentralized system used to store data in blocks by using cryptography. There is potential for crypto stamps to be traded and collected like physical stamps are, as each crypto stamp is unique.

Many other countries have introduced crypto stamps, including the Faroe Islands, Bhutan, France, Austria and the Netherlands, as well as the United Nations.

The Faroe Islands, for example, came up with a particularly interesting way to get the public involved in their crypto stamps. They used the weather during the time that the stamps are activated to influence the design that appears on the digital version of the stamp. This allows the rarity of the stamps to not be pre-defined, making an equal chance of getting a rare stamp for its buyers, according to *Forbes*.

Although Ghana is not using the Faroe Islands' method for its stamp, the Ghana Ministry of Communication and Digitization hopes that the crypto stamp will help enhance Ghana's history through modern technology, according to 3 News.

Royal Mail adds some 'spice'

The Royal Mail "spiced" up its stamp selection by featuring Sporty, Baby, Ginger, Posh and Scary Spice on 10 new stamps to celebrate 30 years of the girl group the Spice Girls. The Royal Mail had never featured a pop girl

band on a set of stamps until now, and it is only the sixth time a music group has been featured.

The group formed in 1994 and sold the most records of any girl group with 100 million sales of only three studio albums.

The stamps include images of the group's most memorable performances from 1997 to 2012, including performances at the 2012 London Olympic Games, the 1997 BRIT Awards and a performance at the 2008 Return of the Spice Girls Tour at Madison Square Garden in New York.

In a statement to *Rolling Stone*, the Spice Girls said, "When we formed the Spice Girls, we couldn't have dreamt that 30 years later we would be the first female group to be dedicated an entire stamp collection; that's Girl Power!"

In this country, musicians have been featured on U.S. Postal Service stamps—including Elvis Presley, Patsy Cline, Bing Crosby and Billie Holiday. One thing these musicians have in common is that they have all been dead for at least three years—one of the criteria the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee indicates in their stamp subject selection criteria. The Spice Girls would not be eligible, as all five members of the band are still living. Additionally, stamp subjects must either be American or have had a significant impact on American culture, which would be up to the committee to decide.

Fifth graders give safety whistles to Massachusetts letter carriers

Amid violence toward letter carriers over the past few years, two Medford,



One of the new Spice Girls stamps

Online news (continued)



STUDENTS MAKE WHISTLES FOR MEDFORD MAIL CARRIERS

A news report about the fifth graders' project to distribute safety whistles to local letter carriers

MA, fifth graders, Savannah McLaughlin and Adam Costello, took it upon themselves to distribute orange safety whistles to 70 letter carriers in their community in mid-April.

On Halloween night in 2023, a letter carrier in Medford was attacked. So, the elementary schoolers wanted to do something

to make their local letter carriers feel a bit safer on the job.

The two fifth graders are part of an afterschool program at the Center of Citizenship and Social Responsibility, which helped them brainstorm the idea of helping letter carriers.

"If you ever feel unsafe on the job, blow this whistle," McLaughlin told the letter carriers, according to Boston 25 News. "They had no right to put a finger on him. Mail carriers are very important and deserve to be treated with the highest degree of respect."

USPS honors Betty Ford, Henry 'Hank' Aaron

The Postal Service honored Betty Ford in early April by creating a Forever stamp with a portrait of the former first lady. Ford, the wife of former President Gerald R. Ford, was known for her women's rights advocacy and her openness about her health issues.

During her time as first lady, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and

underwent a mastectomy. At the time, breast cancer was a taboo subject and due to her frankness about her condition, there was a rise in awareness; subsequently more Americans were diagnosed and received treatment.

Ford also frequently voiced her opinion on women's rights, which often were in opposition to her husband's stance.

"I do not believe that being first lady should prevent me from expressing my views," Ford said.

For more than a decade of her life, Ford had a substance use disorder from taking pain pills for a pinched nerve. She also acknowledged this issue publicly, eventually founded a substance use clinic and gave it her name, hoping to further destigmatize and raise awareness about the disorder.

Another major figure joining the Forever stamp ranks is Hank Aaron, a Major League Baseball legend who played from 1954 to 1976. The stamp marks the 50th anniversary of his record-breaking 715th career home run on April 8, 1974, according to an USPS press release.

To this day, Aaron has the highest number of runs batted in (RBIs), with 2,297 in his career. He still holds the career record for total bases at 6,856, nearly 50 years after he played his last game.

He played for three teams during his 23-year career—the Milwaukee Braves, Atlanta Braves and Milwaukee Brewers.

Not only was Aaron highly regarded for his athletic accomplishments, he also was admired for his dignity and character. Muhammad Ali said Aaron was "the only man I idolize more than myself." **PR**



The new Hank Aaron and Betty Ford stamps

