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GUEST VOICES *J. Ronald Carey*

Together we can save the USPS

We all know the U.S. Postal Service, or USPS, is in financial trouble. It's losing business because you and I use email and pay bills electronically. Still, we want our local post offices open; we want Saturday delivery; and we want the service — but don't fully use it. That doesn't make financial sense.

In the past, postal service has declined because of cost. For example, many towns used to have two-a-day delivery.

Now there is a greater threat. But together, you and I can keep our local post offices open. We can do that by increasing our usage — thereby increasing USPS revenue. Here is how:

- ▶ Stop using FedEx and UPS. They have captured the most lucrative part of the business, making a ton of money shipping mainly higher-priced packages, mostly to major markets. They are not in the public's business, such as charging

just 29 cents to ship a postcard from San Antonio to Fairbanks, Alaska. If delivering our mail were a dairy product, UPS and FedEx get the cream; USPS gets the sour milk.

We should drop the express companies like a bad blind date and demand that all shipments sent to us come only by the post office.

- ▶ Mail real letters and teach our children the value of hand-written thank-you notes. Get off the Internet. Sending email cards and letters requires little time or effort — and the receiver knows it. Grandparents do not put copies of e-cards on the refrigerator. But a hand-written note from a grandchild is there for months.

- ▶ Recognize that Saturday delivery must go. It is being maintained largely because of union and congressional pressure. It is a logistical burden scheduling employees who have a five-day

work week into six days. Tell Congress you accept giving up Saturday.

- ▶ Use the ZIP+4 code to speed processing. Put your full code on return labels to encourage others.

- ▶ Finally, be tolerant of "junk mail." Direct mail is a USPS cash cow and supports first-class mail.

Don't discourage the catalog companies. There is no need to respond to, or sign up for, all the time-share cruises or donate to the charitable causes and other inducements we know to be phony. But do not go on a "do not mail" list. Instead, keep the third-class service coming — and recycle it.

The USPS is vital. It can be saved. It is up to us.

J. Ronald Carey is an emeritus marketing professor at Our Lady of the Lake University. His opinions are his own.