

Check in the mail for 'Mailman Steve'

By Sarah Ovaska, Staff Writer



The former Raleigh mail carrier who became a cause célèbre this year for a public irritated by junk mail has received a surprise of his own in the mail.

A \$3,011 check came to his attorney's office to pay a court-imposed fine.

"I was shocked," said Steve Padgett, the former mail carrier from Raleigh convicted of delaying and destroying mail after years worth of undelivered junk mail from his Apex route was found at his home.

The check came from a Chicago-based Web site, www.thepoint.com, which encourages people to post causes to raise money for various issues to "make change happen." The money is sent only if enough people pledge money to push the issue

over "the tipping point."

This spring, postal inspectors discovered the junk mail piled in the garage of Padgett's Raleigh home and buried in his yard. All were third-class pieces of mail, including direct mailings and circulars that advertisers use to offer deals on pizzas, windows and oil changes.

Padgett pleaded guilty in August to the criminal charge in federal court. He didn't hold onto the mail as a personal stance against junk mail, but because he couldn't handle the growing workload and still give the personal attention to those along his mail route, he said.

He was cherished in the neighborhoods where he worked. Children called him "Mailman Steve," and he made sure packages didn't get left in the rain.

Residents of the Apex neighborhood where he delivered mail for years rallied to Padgett's defense, writing letters to the federal judge in his case saying that they didn't miss the junk mail and commending Padgett for his professionalism and kindness.

Padgett avoided a possible prison term of up to five years and instead was given three years of federal probation. He was also fined \$3,000 and told to do 500 hours of community service.

When news of Padgett's sentence leaked out in November, it ignited on the Internet and spurred water cooler conversations around the country. Irritated people from coast to coast saw Padgett as an opponent to the junk mail that collects in mailboxes around the country.

Padgett said he's been flabbergasted by the attention. He has fielded calls from producers at "Good Morning America," "Inside Edition" and public radio stations. David Letterman referred to him in an opening monologue.

Padgett turned down the requests to talk publicly until his interview this week with The News & Observer. He said he has to keep reminding people that he broke a law.

"I kept saying what I did was illegal, what I did was wrong," Padgett said. "It wasn't a Robin Hood story. It wasn't a protest."

But, he said, he understands the frustration with the fliers offering discounts on oil changes, pizza and window replacements.

He's not a fan either.

Want to learn more about how Steve Padgett is doing? Read the rest of the story here on newsobserver.com or in Saturday's News & Observer.

sarah.ovaska@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4622