

Postal employees stay on job long after most others retire

Several workers are in their 80s, 90s, have no plans to leave

By JEAN MIKLE • GANNETT NEW JERSEY • March 15, 2009

Edwin S. Oliver was 18 when he was hired as a temporary employee at the Manasquan Post Office, filling in for a letter carrier who had fallen and broken a rib. That was in 1954. That year, Dwight D. Eisenhower was president, Elvis Presley was recording his first records, and "The Tonight Show with Steve Allen" debuted on NBC. Oliver is still on the job, working as a window clerk in Manasquan. "I'll be 73 in June," Oliver said. "I have no plans to retire."



Edwin Oliver, 72 ,
at the Manasquan office.

Oliver is the longest-serving postal employee in Monmouth County, but his lengthy tenure on the job is not unusual in the Postal Service. There are more than 740,000 employees of the U.S. Postal Service, the work place of some of the longest-serving public employees in the nation, according to a Gannett New Jersey review of employment data. Approximately 5,000 have been on the job since 1969, and 202 since 1959, according to employment records. The longest-serving postal employee, a window clerk in New York City, was hired in 1944, but recently took sick leave.

The Postal Service has several employees who are still working well into their 80s and 90s, including a 90-year-old custodian in Queens, and an 89-year-old letter carrier in Birmingham, Ala., according to Gerald McKiernan, media manager for the United States Postal Service. "It's a good place to work, the pay is decent and the benefits are good," McKiernan said. "There is a generous holiday leave schedule, and in most places there is a good working environment." Manasquan Postmaster Bill Menture, Oliver's boss, agreed. "It's a rewarding job," said Menture, who has been working for the post office for 42 years. "If you like what you're doing, there is no reason to retire." He joked that Oliver will probably still be working at the post office "after I'm retired. He's an excellent worker. He always gives 100 percent," Menture said.

When Oliver began working in Manasquan in 1954, there were only two mail routes for regular carriers and two extra routes for auxiliary carriers, he said. Now there are 15 routes. "Postcards were a penny and it cost 3 cents to mail a letter," Oliver said. "Automation has been a huge change. Then, we did everything by hand. We used to 'pouch out' mail on trains. After we closed the windows at 5 o'clock, the mail had to be broken down, sorted, bag up and run down to the train station to be put on a train."

Postcards cost 27 cents to mail today, while a first-class letter costs 42 cents. Now mail is moved in large part by the 221,000 vehicles in the Postal Service's fleet, although mail is also transported by trains, planes, cars, boats, ferries, subways, helicopters, Hovercraft, and, in the Grand Canyon, by mule train. The average salary of postal employees is \$51,173, although that amount can be boosted by a cost of living increase for union workers and a Pay for Performance program that rewards superior work.

Postmaster General John E. Potter is paid the top salary, \$265,320. Total employee compensation and benefits, including retiree health benefits, were \$77.7 billion in fiscal year 2008, down from \$80.1 billion in 2007, according to the Postal Service's annual report. As the recession deepened and mail volume fell, the post office cut 50 million work hours in 2008, in large part by reducing overtime.

In February, the Postal Service announced that it had lost \$384 million from October through December, as mail volume declined by 5.2 billion pieces. The Service's Board of Governors projected a 12- to 15-billion piece decline in mail in fiscal year 2009, as economic conditions continue to be difficult. The Postal Service processed 203 billion pieces of mail in 2008.

The Postal Service, a quasi-independent federal agency since 1972, is funded entirely by revenues from postage. It previously was a department of the federal government. In recent years, the postal service has run a deficit, which in fiscal year 2008 reached \$2.8 billion. The Board of Governors projects that the deficit could be higher this year if the economy continues to be mired in recession.

The Postal Service has proposed cutting \$5.9 billion in costs through fiscal year 2010, including the reduction of 100 million work hours this year. The board also proposed cutting mail delivery from six days to five, although there are no plans to implement that proposal at this time.

"Much of our loss comes from mailings for the financial and housing sectors," Postal Service spokesman McKiernan said. "We reflect the conditions of the economy in general."

Source: DailyRecord.com