

# Mail, package delivery costly for procrastinators

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM  
STAFF WRITER

## PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Sending holiday cards and packages is as much an annual tradition as waiting in line, putting up decorations, eating too many holiday cookies and wrapping presents.

Another time-honored holiday tradition for some is waiting until the last possible minute to get those packages ready for sending, despite attempts and pleas from the nation's major delivery companies to do it early.

People who want to send packages to loved ones need to decide which company will deliver the gift and how much they're willing to spend to make sure it gets there on time — especially if they tend to procrastinate.

Some choices include the United States Postal Service, United Parcel Service and Federal Express. These delivery workers all become Santa's elves during the holiday season as they pile sacks of gifts in airplanes, ships and trucks and deliver billions of packages and letters between Thanksgiving and New Year's.

### Expected rush

The U.S. Postal Service is preparing for the rush by hiring 40,000 seasonal workers, opening temporary processing centers, using more planes and trucks, keeping extended hours and by heavily airing the "What's Your Priority?" advertisements for its flat-rate Priority Mail service.

This holiday delivery season will bring an estimated 16.7 billion pieces of mail into post offices, said Mary Ellen Hayden, marketing manager for the U.S. Postal Service Detroit district.

"We expect our holiday season to be a very busy one," Hayden said. "Our holiday really begins right after Thanksgiving."

Last year, the U.S. Postal Service handled an average of 100 million letters and cards per day between October and December. This year, an estimated 160 million cards and letters per day will be processed between Thanksgiving and Christmas. A 1-percent increase in cards and letter delivery and a 10-percent increase in package delivery is expected.

### Close to home

Marlene Bowers, postmaster for Farmington and Farmington Hills post offices, said advertising mail is getting very heavy, particularly from businesses and catalog retailers. Parcel post is also busy, with a lot of people getting packages ready for overseas mailing at surface rates.

"The package business is up right now," Bowers said. The UPS strike in August 1997 brought some additional businesses to the U.S. Postal Service, she added.

Farmington and Farmington Hills carriers are expecting to work additional hours to help with the holiday crunch, and some temporary employees are also helping out, she said. Larry Yavello, customer service supervisor for the Livonia post office, said there has been a particular rush on package mailings and catalogs. A crew of temporary carriers and clerks is coming on board to help out with the extra business, he said.

Though the Postal Service always encourages people to mail early, going in early the day to a post office isn't a good idea, he said.

"Mondays are always bad," Yavello said. Many people stop in first thing in the morning. It's better to wait until 9:30 or 10 a.m. if possible. The substitution in Livonia Mail at Seven Mile and Middlebelt is a good choice for those crunched for time, he added.

Joe Groff, Plymouth and Plymouth Township's postmaster, said his office expects a 10- to 20-percent increase in packages, a 10-percent increase in Priority Mail and a 1-3-percent increase in letters.

The employees are on a "voluntary overtime" status now, which will switch to "mandatory overtime" status at Thanksgiving.

Though it's a stressful time for postal employees, Groff said they still try to keep their spirits up. "Our employees are geared up," Groff said. "Whatever comes at us, we're going to get delivered."

This year, Plymouth postal employees are "adopting" families through the Salvation Army and are holding daily bake sales to raise money. Holiday parties also are planned.

Barbara Brinkley, customer service manager at the Redford

### AREA POST OFFICE BRANCHES

**FARMINGTON**  
31200 Secor  
(248)453-3429  
• Bulk mail acceptance  
• Passport processing

**FARMINGTON HILLS**  
32455 W. 12 Mile  
(248)324-3400  
• Bulk mail acceptance

**LIVONIA main office**  
11600 Merimont  
(734)951-5050  
• Bulk mail acceptance

**LIVONIA substitution**  
37500 Pennington  
(734)951-0987

### NOVI

14875 Novi Road  
(248)340-2109  
• Bulk mail acceptance

**PLYMOUTH**  
100 Pershing  
(734)453-3025

**PLYMOUTH TWP.**  
41526 Elgier  
(313)937-4300  
• Bulk mail acceptance

**REDFORD**  
12245 Beech Daly  
(313)937-4300  
• Bulk mail acceptance  
• Passport processing

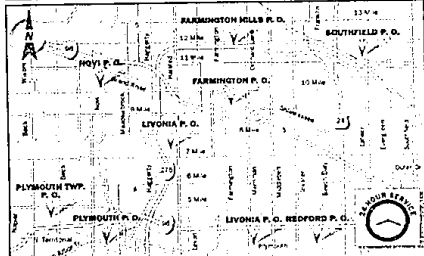
### SOUTHFIELD

22200 W. 11 Mile  
(481)368-2000  
• Bulk mail acceptance  
• Passport processing

**WEST ELMHURST (out of town)**  
71 E. Long Lake Road  
(248)332-6004  
• Bulk mail acceptance

**WEST WOODFIELD (out of town)**  
2201 Telegraph  
(248)332-6004  
• Bulk mail acceptance

**OTHER SHIPPING COMPANIES**  
UPS: (800)742-5877  
Federal Express:  
(800)453-3379



post office, said they've ordered more stamps and packaging materials as part of the holiday preparations. They are expecting about a 10-percent increase in mail and, like other local post offices, picked up customers from last year's UPS strike.

Because Redford's office is open 24 hours, it attracts people from all over metro Detroit. The best time to avoid crowds and lines is between 12-30 a.m. and 6 a.m., Brinkley said.

"For the most part, we're busy all the time because of our 24-hour status," she said.

One way the office boosts employee morale during the busy time is with its annual "12 Days of Christmas" celebration. In the 12 days before Christmas, the staff is treated to a variety of lunches, some provided by the staff. One day it might be a home-cooked turkey feast, another day it might be a deli tray.

"Every day we have something different to eat," Brinkley said.

Average mail handling for Detroit area post offices is predicted to be 15- to 17 percent

above the national average during the upcoming holiday season. Detroit is always a busy area for international mail, Hayden said. This year, 200 million holiday letters, post cards and packages are expected to travel overseas nationally.

Deadlines are in effect for surface deliveries to international destinations, including military addresses with APO or FPO designations. Customers should check those deadlines and customs regulations with the post office. Surface rates are cheapest and cover ship and vehicle travel, while "express" air rates are higher.

For those packages going to domestic places, Priority Mail typically takes two-three days. Quicker options are available for an additional charge. The Postal Service will deliver packages on Christmas Day.

The busiest mail day is expected to be Monday, Dec. 14, with an

estimated 280 million cards and letters nationwide canceled. Heavy business also is expected on Monday, Dec. 21. Customers wary of long lines might consider rescheduling their post office trips to other days.

Busy holiday mailers can use the Postal Service delivery service on stamps by calling (800) STAMP-24. New holiday stamp designs this year include a wreath, Madonna and child and a new 40-cent charity stamp with a pink ribbon design. The additional 8 cents goes toward breast cancer research. This is the first time the Postal Service has offered a charity stamp.

### Competition

Competition from other shipping companies hasn't hurt the U.S. Postal Service but has prompted them to make some changes, officials say. These changes include keeping some branches open 24 hours, making new branches more like stores and putting more advertisements on television and radio.

This year the slogan is "Fly Like an Eagle" and uses the Steve Miller song. Plans are also in the works to merge with 500 "Mail Boxes Etc." stores. At Mailboxes, which has stores in Livonia, Canton and Farmington, customers can send packages, buy packaging supplies, use mailboxes and make photocopies, among other things. Some branches have 24-hour-accessible mailboxes.

For people not on regular clocks, there are some area post offices open 24 hours. They are at:

■ 12245 Beech Daly in Redford Township

■ 1404 W. Fort Street in downtown Detroit

■ The air mail center in Detroit Metropolitan Airport (which is in a building separate from the passenger terminals).

For other information about the U.S. Postal Service, visit [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com) on the Internet.

### UPS is ready

Like the U.S. Postal Service, UPS, known for its brown trucks and uniforms, also expects a busy holiday season. UPS expects to handle 295 million packages domestically between Thanksgiving and Christmas, spokesman Steve Holmes said. The Atlanta-based company was formed in 1907 ships to more than 200

countries and territories worldwide.

The Detroit area is a busy one because of its heavy industrial manufacturing base, Holmes said. About 80 percent of UPS' business is commercial, with about 20 percent dealing with residential deliveries, Holmes said.

Some things customers can do with UPS delivery is track their shipments at any point and get fairly good estimates on when items will be delivered. At the company's Web site ([www.ups.com](http://www.ups.com)), customers can check the status of their orders. The company receives about 400,000 tracking requests daily through the Web site and about 1 million per day during the holidays.

"There's a trust in the brand," Holmes said of UPS. "Customers know it's going to get there and it's going to get there on time. The whole UPS system has always been set up on a day-definite delivery system."

UPS will increase its daily freight flights from 600 to 975 per day during the holiday rush.

Federal Express, a 25-year-old express overnight delivery company headquartered in Memphis, Tenn., coined the slogan "When it absolutely, positively has to get there overnight."

### FedEx prepares

The holidays mean big business for the company, which predicts it will see a 20-percent increase in deliveries between Thanksgiving and New Year's. On typical working days, the company delivers 3 million items. Federal Express prepares for the busy season primarily by hiring more personnel and adding more routes.

To prepare for the surge of parcels and letters, Federal Express will add more handlers and routes. The company stays competitive by offering money-back guarantees, according to company spokesman Corral Christian.

"If we miss our delivery commitment or we can't tell you the status of your shipment within 30 minutes of your call, you're entitled to a credit or refund," Christian said. Customers can track their shipments.

To find out more about shipping with Federal Express, visit the World Wide Web at [www.fedex.com](http://www.fedex.com).

# Hills residents, officials protest to Southfield council

BY SUZ DUCK  
STAFF WRITER

Southfield residents were joined by some of their Farmington Hills neighbors and city officials Monday to protest a proposed 24-hour, 7-Eleven convenience store at the southeast corner of 11 Mile and Inkster.

A decision was postponed by the city council on a site plan request by developer Thomas Denha, of Southland Corporation, pending a January meeting with Southfield city planner Nik Banda and residents.

Sidney Lantz, council president, voted against the delay. Nida Simons abstained because her husband's relatives were among those present at the meeting.

"We want to answer their questions without emotion," Banda said Tuesday.

### Legally correct

Legally, Southland Corporation cleared all the necessary hurdles, but residents hope that the company will, at least, agree to reduced hours of operation. Michael Schwartz is the petitioner's attorney. Ron Don, Thosco's is the architectural firm.

Southfield City Attorney John Beras said that an agreement on reduced hours would be strictly voluntary on the company's part. Plans call for removal of the Michigan National Bank building. The new store would be built on the site that is zoned for business.

"Some 300 members of the Cumberland Village Condominiums have filed petitions in opposition," Banda told the audience.

The Farmington Hills City Council approved a resolution at its Nov. 23 meeting opposing the establishment of that calls "out of character with the surrounding area which is business- and office-related and generally operates between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday."

Farmington Hills residents were in the majority of those who spoke at Monday's Southfield City Council meeting.

**■ 'Inkster Road has been maintained as a residential street on both sides from Eight Mile to 14 Mile Road. This proposal is out of character for that corner. Up to now, it has been a quiet corner. I understand the bird that you are in tonight.'**

**Aldo Vagnozzi**  
—Hills mayor

The property to the north is developed with an Edison substation. Property to the east and south are developed with a one-story office complex. Single family homes in Farmington Hills are to the west.

Residents on both sides complained about traffic and congestion. Some residents agreed to install no coin-operated telephones and that windows will have no signs.

Councilman Paul Condino predicted that few residents would frequent the store in the middle of the night.

### Open all night

"We are a 24-hour operation," said Mike Razler, Southland's real estate department representative. He added that 7-Eleven stores which operate with reduced hours are rare.

Trying to reach a compromise is the right thing to do, noted councilwoman Brenda Lawrence.

Farmington Hills city officials know Southfield has few options to deny the proposal but hoped for compromise.

"Inkster Road has been maintained as a residential street on both sides from Eight Mile to 14 Mile Road, said Farmington Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi.

"This proposal is out of character

for that corner. Up to now, it has been a quiet corner. I understand the bird that you are in tonight."

Vagnozzi urged reduced operating hours.

Ben Marks, a former Farmington Hills councilman, acknowledged that there wasn't much flexibility for Southfield city officials but "begged for flexibility" from Southland officials. "It doesn't make sense to be where you are not accepted," Marks said. "Reconsider and say, 'Hey, there's too much against us,' and withdraw this proposal."

Joseph Svoke, a resident of Church Hill Commons subdivision in Farmington Hills, said that banking hours are different than convenience store hours. He added that traffic congestion already exists on Inkster. "This would bring a far greater incident of accident and injury," Svoke said.

### Kids will go there

With the close proximity of bus stops, school children will take advantage of a quick run to the 7-Eleven store while waiting for buses, Svoke said.

There's already a 7-Eleven store at 10 Mile and Middlebelt in Farmington Hills and another on Franklin Road in Southfield, he said.

Sarah Manson, a 23-year resident of Cumberland Condominiums, asked who would police the area, and expressed a concern about litter and loitering. "This is not conducive to a residential area," she said.

Cheryl Sika, who serves on the Cumberland board of directors, said that this business is "not a good neighbor," if it doesn't limit hours.

Nancy Bates, mayor pro-tem of Farmington Hills, suggested that city council members and planning commission members should meet occasionally because of "common perimeters."

"Both of our communities would profit by this," Bates said.

Paul Blizman, vice-president of Forestbrook/Pebblebrook

homeowners' association in Farmington Hills, voiced that group's opposition. "I, for one,

will never shop this 7-Eleven," he said.

As the meeting proceeded,

Lantz limited the audience participation. "We don't have to go all evening," he said.

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Santa will be at Somerset North every day 'til closing. And for each child who visits, he has a special gift. A velvet pouch for three golden coins from Santa's treasure chest.

Children can use the coins for purchases at participating stores.  
Or tuck them away as mementos.

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