

Postal officials stump for stamp-hike support

By Wayne Peal
staff writer

Even though the price would rise a nickel, U.S. Postal Service officials are calling their proposed 30-cent first class stamp a bargain.

"I know people will complain, but they should realize this is helping make for a better, more efficient mail system," senior assistant postmaster general David Charters said Tuesday, during a visit to the Detroit area.

Aware the proposed 30-cent stamp is unpopular with many consumers, postal officials are hitting the road to explain why they believe the increase is necessary.

Charters' metro area appearance included an interview at the Observer & Eccentric, a luncheon meeting with 23 large scale mailers including the Big Three automotive companies, Michigan Bell and K mart Corp.

"WHAT WE'RE telling people is this isn't being done randomly," Charters said. "We do have a plan that will improve mail service for everybody."

The first step, he added, is balancing the postal service ledger.

Even though the postal service budget has produced a \$404 million surplus this far this year — and ended 1989 with a \$61 million surplus — rising operating costs are expected to produce a deficit of \$1.4 to \$1.6 billion by December, Charters said.

Rate increases are expected to increase post office revenue 19 percent, exceeding the combined inflation rate for the past three years. The proposed rates are expected to keep post office operating costs below the rate of inflation through 1995 — at least delaying one future increase.

The postal service generally raises

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— Anthony Frank
U.S. Postmaster General

its rates every three years, Charters said. The last increase was in 1988. If approved, new rates would take place in February 1991.

Rates are subject to approval by the Postal Rate Commission, an independent agency established by Congress.

In addition to balancing its books, the postal service has commissioned an independent study to determine how long it takes to deliver mail. "Even at 30 cents, postage is one of America's best buys, but only if we are providing good service," U.S. Postmaster General Anthony Frank said, announcing the rate increase proposal.

Discount plans for businesses are expected to help keep mail flowing rapidly, postal officials said.

At many modernized post offices, including the main branches in Detroit and Royal Oak, mail is sent to optical charter reader machines that add nine digit bar codes for rapid sorting, then sent to bar code sorting machines for final sorting.

"We're telling businesses there are things they can do — like pre-sorting and pre-coding — to keep costs down," Charters said.

By doing the work themselves, he added, businesses are also freeing up their own workers to process mail. Businesses could see their postal rates fall as low as 25 cents per item, Charters added.

In addition, some first class mail — roughly 6 percent of the total first

class volume, according to Frank — will be shifted from overnight to second-day delivery.

Despite postal service efforts, opposition to the increase exists.

"I'd say most of our consumers would be upset with an increase," said John Colella, owner of the Livonia franchise for Mail Boxes Etc. USA. The private firm, which also has outlets in Canton, Westland and Farmington Hills, provides many services commonly conducted in post offices — including selling stamps and providing postal boxes.

Private firms can help ease the nation's postal burden, Colella said.

"There was a time when the post office looked at us as the enemy," he said. "But now they see how we can work together."

Metro area post offices deliver a combined 10.8 million pieces of mail a day, or more than 3.2 billion pieces a year, according to post office statistics. More than 4.4 million people live in the metro region, including Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washington, Monroe, St. Clair and portions of Livingston and Lapeer counties.

Rate increases are also sought for second, third and fourth class mail. Increases are also sought for all specialty services, including special delivery mail, post cards and post office boxes.

First class accounts for roughly one-half of all mail shipped in the U.S., Charters said.

What makes an Irish poet tick?

What makes an Irish poet tick? Especially one who is a Nobel Prize winner and whom many critics consider to be the greatest poet of his time.

Neal Shine, Detroit Free Press columnist and OU professor of journalism, will bring to life the creative character and works of William Butler Yeats (1893-1939) in Oakland University's final Enigma of Genius lecture for the season on Friday, March 22.

Presented 7-9 p.m. at Meadow Brook Hall, the lecture series is cosponsored by Oakland's Division of

Continuing Education and the College of Arts and Sciences.

Because seating for the Yeats lecture is limited, advance registration is recommended. To register, call 370-3120, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays.

Born in Dublin, Ireland, Yeats led the Irish Literary Revival, a movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s that stimulated new appreciation of traditional Irish literature. In 1896, Yeats helped to establish the Irish Literary Theatre, which in 1904 became the renowned Abbey Theatre.

In 1923, Yeats was awarded the

Nobel Prize for literature. His most important works were published in Collected Plays (1952) and The Poems: A New Edition (1984).

Shine, retired senior managing editor of the Detroit Free Press, has captured many journalism awards.

The Enigma of Genius lecture program, designed to renew the liberal arts tradition of learning for one's own pleasure and education, consistently has drawn high enrollment throughout its premier year. The program will return for encore lectures in the fall.

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