

'Totally unacceptable'

S'fld postmaster promises to deliver mail improvements

BY ALICE COLLINS
STAFF WRITER

Southfield postmaster Michael Moran this week called the U.S. Postal Service's after-dark door-to-door mail deliveries "totally unacceptable" and promised that the situation would be eliminated after new letter carriers are hired.

"We're short people, but we're in the process of hiring 18 new letter carriers," he said. "We hope to have them all in place by the end of the year."

Moran acknowledged that the post office has been receiving complaints on the late deliveries, in some cases as late as 8 p.m.

Other residents have made their complaints to the city of Southfield, which, along with the Southfield Chamber of Commerce, has long pursued improved postal service. Many improvements had been achieved after Moran became postmaster in January and a Post Office Customer Advisory Council was established.

Moran assumed the Southfield position during a period of turmoil in the Postal Service

throughout the country, a period marked by deteriorating service, internal antagonism between employees and supervisors and, in extreme cases, violence.

Some of those problems were reflected in Southfield, which hit an all-time low in service to business and residential customers in 1991.

"The (advisory) council has been doing so many nice things, that's why we hated to see it slip like this," said Gerald Kuhn, co-chairman of the advisory council and executive administrative assistant to Southfield city administrator Robert Block.

"The city has received a number of complaints in regard to poor mail service which include everything from deliveries after 7 p.m. to wrong deliveries," Kuhn wrote to Moran early last month. At his own home, Kuhn said, he "had a wrong delivery every day for the last week. . . ."

"Late deliveries also concern customers," Kuhn said Monday, "because they're afraid something will happen to the mail they've

left in their box to be picked up."

"There had been some improvement in the last few weeks, but more is needed, Kuhn added.

Moran acknowledged that his original goal of delivering all of the daily business mail by noon and mail to all other customers by 3:30 p.m. has yet to be achieved.

"We're trying to provide the best service possible and I think we'll be able to do that soon," he said.

The Southfield post office serves Southfield, Lathrup Village and the Southfield Township villages of Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms and Franklin — one of the highest-volume delivery areas in Michigan.

Chamber of Commerce president Phillip Meagher said businesses continue to report late deliveries, but that the situation isn't as bad as it was in 1991-92. Businesses complain of it "on a hit-and-miss basis. When this happens to businesses, most of the time it means they can't get to the bank that day. We understand that this occurs mostly when there's a substitute carrier.

"We've had the problem in this building (the Crosswinds building on Northland Drive)," Meagher continued. "We've gotten it as late as 3:30 p.m."

"At my own home (in Southfield) the mail came sometime after 6 o'clock on the Friday after Thanksgiving. We didn't find it until the next morning so we don't know exactly what time it came."

John Reeves, past president of the Washington Heights neighborhood association, said his area was receiving its mail "at 7 and 8 o'clock, but it's improved some."

Lorraine McHugh, who lives on Spring River Drive, said her regular carrier "is always on time. But

when there's a substitute, we've gotten it past 6 o'clock."

"My sister lives at 12 Mile and Greenfield and she gets it late constantly," McHugh added.

The addition of the 18 carriers will bring the total number at the Southfield post office to 245. Moran said the hiring process is "very slow" because of the hiring requirements and extensive background checks initiated following incidents in Royal Oak, Dearborn and several cities around the country in which disgruntled employees attacked and killed co-workers and supervisors.

Among the service improvements made since Moran became postmaster are extended office

hours and easier telephone access. Customers can now order stamps by facsimile machine. If a customer places an order by fax by 9 a.m., the stamps will be delivered that day, Moran said.

The Southfield post office plans to start a "mis-delivery" program soon, he continued. When mail is delivered to the wrong address, the carrier gets a reminder card to carry with him.

Moran said the after-dark home deliveries create problems for carriers as well as customers. "We try to do indoor apartments last to avoid outside walking deliveries," he said. "When it is that late, we send out two on the walking deliveries, one to hold a flashlight."

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