

## The USPS and the World of Stamp Collecting

Even before many philatelists thought up the hobby of stamp collecting, it is rather obvious that the act of exchanging letters through a centralized system that would recognize stamps as payment to cover carriage costs would have to be put in place. The American Philatelic Society (APS), which is the biggest convention of philatelists and collectors in the entire world, is predated by the United States Postal Service.

For more than two centuries now, the United States Postal Service has delivered mail-letters and cards-in huge volumes to all its mailboxes situated in all of the states, including Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, and the American Virgin Islands. It serves 7.5 million customers daily through over 37, 000 postal offices, and providing employment for more than 700, 000 career employees.

While the numbers are overwhelming, the huge network of the USPS only means one thing to stamp collectors and philatelists-this means the issue of a huge volume of stamps with great variety delivered to millions of homes daily. To approximate more closely, the USPS delivers 212 billion pieces of mail on average to over 144 million houses.

The USPS caters to philatelists and stamp enthusiasts in other active avenues other than simply delivering letters to them. In fact, the USPS is the primary source of stamps that are continuously being collected by philatelists in the United States of America, and subsequently, the rest of the world.

However, the USPS and the stamps it issues every year is not the singular pulse of the staff of USPS. Instead, every year, the designs issued on USPS stamps beat the pulse of the entire nation, thus reflecting American history at its best. Every year, the postal service receives thousands of design proposals from Americans on thousands of themes that may be featured in stamps. Through what is known as the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC) goes over this huge volume of submissions in order to recommend to the Postmaster General educational and interesting subjects for consideration.

Because the CSAC employs no assistance or staff for its purposes, it takes a huge amount of time before a stamp is taken into regard. Subject submissions must be done in writing to provide each submission an equal opportunity of being reviewed and selected. A design proposed for a particular year must be submitted three years in advance of the proposed date of issuance.

If the stamp proposal meets all the requirements of CSAC, it may at the end be chosen as one of the subjects forwarded for the approval of the Postmaster

General. Otherwise, submissions may undergo to courses of action-either they will be rejected completely or put for future consideration. However, if the stamp is indeed chosen among thousands of submissions, it will be one of the 25 stamp proposals recommended to be made into commemorative stamps, alongside the extensive line issued by the Postal Service each year.

If the proposal is set aside for future consideration, the submission will be put into file for the Committee to refer to in the future for when the submitted proposal is relevant.

As for the translation of these proposals into designs, the Postal Service employs the services of trained stamp artists to bring these stamps to life.

These commemorative stamps, alongside the regular issue stamps of the Postal Service, are made accessible to the public and to the philatelists through the various USPS postal offices as well as the convenient USPS Postal Store. In the Postal Store, the general public is offered stamps for mailing and shipping purposes, for leisure purposes, for collecting, and for education.

Under the various items for collecting are the traditional first-day covers, commemorative panels, state quarters and stamps, and uncut press sheets. Non-stamp items include miniature mailboxes, which may be used to store stamps, lapel pins with stamp designs, as well as collecting supplies.

First-day covers are stamps attached to envelopes and are cancelled on the same day that they are issued. Commemorative panels are a number of commemorative stamps in an attractive layout, including information on the event, state, or person being commemorated by the stamp. Stamp quarters and stamps is, collectively, a portfolio containing a number of quarters of the state and some stamps featuring the state, alongside pertinent facts and information.

Alongside these collectibles offered by USPS, they also cater to, of course, the provision of the most basic and most important part of stamp collecting-the stamps. This would include 39-cent First Class stamps, the regular 37-cent stamps, additional stamps, priority stamps, and stamps in coils, panes, or stamp books.

At the end of the day, the USPS fuels the continually growing hobby of philately and stamp collecting. Through its help, Americans and enthusiasts worldwide are given access to a continuous supply of stamps, and are given assurance that the stamps will keep on reflecting the strong and vibrant American spirit.