

Rain, snow, sleet or hail: Know the rules of the U.S. mail

BY MICHELLE ARNTZ
Special to the Record-Eagle

Mailing holiday cards and packages should be at the top of your December "to-do" list.

An early trip to the Post Office will not only ensure that family, friends and military personnel will receive their Christmas greetings before Dec. 25, but it could also save you money in shipping costs. Having your parcel properly packaged and addressed will also save you time at the post office.

"In the interest of time, customers should have their packages pre-addressed and ready to go before spending time at the window. We suggest that a good packaging tape be used to secure your parcels. Scotch tape, string, and brown wrapping paper are discouraged as they do not adequately secure parcels," said Cynthia Walters, customer service supervisor at the Traverse City post office.

Holiday Read-Post boxes and padded envelopes, as well as bubble wrap, strapping tape and labels are readily available for mailers in postal lobbies.

"Customer traffic is at a peak on Mondays and Fridays," said Walters.

This year in Traverse City, both the Barlow branch and main post office have

installed an automatic postal center, accessible to customers 24 hours a day, who are using a credit or debit card to purchase business stamps or mail packages domestically.

Although domestic mailing rates apply to letters and parcels being sent to military personnel with APO/FPO addresses, delivery service time frames are much sooner.

The Postal Service suggests that items be in the mail no later than Dec. 11 to all military zip codes, with the exception of APO/FPO 093, which has an earlier deadline of Dec. 6.

If you need to mail later than that, Express Mail Military Service mail is available through the USPS with a suggested deadline of Dec. 20 for most bases.

Traverse City's two postal contract stations, Meijer and Glen's Chums Corner, do not handle international or military mail.

When re-using boxes, they should be in good condition and not have old labels on them or are not items that are non-mailable. Bleach and alcohol are just two examples of items that are banned from the mail in accordance with FAA, Postal Service and other federal regulations.

"A good thing for customers to do is to complete



Special to the Record-Eagle/Michelle Arntz
Rita Eastern, with granddaughter Isabelle, does a little early holiday mailing at the Traverse City Post Office. The U.S. Postal Service offers a number of deadlines to ensure your holiday mail reaches its destination on time.

their custom forms before getting to the counter so that they have the time to list all the contents in the box," said Walters.

Custom forms are required for all parcels weighing over a pound going to APO/FPO military addresses as well as parcels destined overseas. It is important for customers to be familiar with mailing restrictions that apply to these addresses. A parcel's contents must be listed in great detail.

"General listings such as 'food,' 'medicine,' 'gifts,' or 'toiletries' are not sufficient," said Walters.

Seemingly harmless items, such as hand sanitizer or anti-bacterial products,

contain flammable matter and are banned. Household batteries can be mailed to servicemen but the customer must specifically list voltage. No item should be mailed with the battery installed. Only non-aerosol toiletries are permitted. Alcohol-based products such as perfume, hair spray and aftershave are not mailable.

It is always a good rule of thumb to enclose an extra address label inside the package and to make sure that the contents fit the box.

"Fill the package with crumpled newspaper, shipping peanuts, or bubble wrap if necessary," said Walters.

A standard Christmas card

being mailed to residents of Canada and Mexico will cost the consumer 60 cents, while all other one-ounce cards will be delivered anywhere else in the world for 80 cents.

For cards and letters to reach their holiday destinations, they need to enter the mail no later than Dec. 13 to most countries. Parcels being sent Global Priority have a mailing deadline of Dec. 16.

Mailing restrictions vary from country to country so it is necessary to research if your gift is acceptable by the destination government. Ebay is a popular means to order items from businesses overseas. U.S. citizens must request at the onset that

mailers write the addressee's name and address on the parcel itself, not just on the custom form.

According to U.S. Postal Service spokesperson Linda Doran, this issue needs to be corrected at point of origin. She said that if all copies of the custom form are removed at a country's border, the address will also be removed if it's not on the box.

Letters to Santa Claus should be mailed no later than Dec. 15, so that the elves who donate their time with United Way's RSVP can get them to the North Pole for Santa to read.

For more, visit the Postal Service Web site at: www.usps.com

Playing Santa: Those who portray him try to uphold a high standard

BY JENNIFER TOWERLY
Copley News Service

Haley Armitage has flat-out refused to visit with Santa Claus for five years now, but the 7-year-old finally conquered the fear this Christmas.

"When she was little, Santa chased her," her mother, Anne Armitage of Morton, Ill., explained. "He was just trying to be nice, but I was like, 'Leave her alone. She doesn't want to talk to you!'"

Stephen Curtis was the first Santa Haley had encountered since that scare — and both Santa and child came through their visit smiling.

Curtis, 52, has been playing Santa informally since he was a teen. A professional clown who gets gigs as Santa each Christmas, he says playing Kriss Kringle isn't just a matter of ho-ho-ing.

"It's very hard to learn to be a Santa. There's not a lot of written material to help

you," Curtis said.

It helps that he looks the part, with a full white beard and mustache. He also fills out the costume nicely. But he also takes the time to learn what children like.

"I watch a lot more kids' TV than the average person," he said.

He enjoys children and says he's never had a bad kid, but there's an occasional child who makes him shake his head.

"I did have a little girl once and it was obvious she was getting what she wanted for Christmas," he said. "She wanted five Barbie castles, each sold separately. She actually said that, like a commercial. 'Each sold separately.'"

Dominic Eads is new at playing Santa. The 28-year-old was laid off his job and welcomed the chance to fill in when another Santa didn't work out. With less than two weeks on the job, he'd like to do it every year.

"I just have fun with it. I

think I'd do it for free. When you see that one kid that's so overjoyed because he can't believe it's Santa, it's worth it," he said.

Eads had a laugh when an 8-month-old baby took her pacifier out of her mouth to ho-ho-ho at him. And he was caught off-guard when a little boy who was about 6 wistfully remarked that even though he knows he can't have what he wants, he really wants his daddy back.

"I said, 'Where's your daddy?' and he pointed up to heaven. That was hard," he said.

Chris Kolowski thought of Santa when he wanted a really special marriage proposal for his girlfriend, Katie Crow.

Kolowski donned a rented Santa suit and put in a surprise appearance at a class Christmas party at Garfield Primary School in Peoria, Ill., where Crow was student teaching. He had passed out candy to the class and was approaching her to pull a

ring out of his bag and get down on one knee when she recognized him.

"Her jaw just hit the floor," Kolowski said.

Steve Spain, a costume store manager, sees all manner of Santa Clauses this time of year.

"A lot of these guys take

great pride in putting on the uniform, so to speak," said Spain, who used to play Santa for his own children. "You do feel when you're putting on the costume that you need to uphold a higher standard."

Christmas comes in second only to Halloween in

the costume business. Santa is the most popular, but he's by no means the only holiday figure sought after.

"You've got Mrs. Claus, elves, reindeer, snowmen, madrigals, Dickens-type carolers, Mary, Joseph and the Wise Men," Spain said.

The Pinery Furniture choices that make your home come alive

We are not just pine furniture anymore!

We have a vast selection of All Wood Furniture and Home Accessories.

Make you home beautiful with Treasures of Solid Oak, Maple, Cherry, Birch, and of course Pine Furniture.

Save 20% Off
Your Entire Purchase
(Excludes Finishing Services. Expires 12/20)
Minimum Purchase \$250.

Bedroom, Dining Room, Living Room and Home Office. Unique Gift Ideas, Wall Art, Vases, Lamps and Beautiful Accessories.

The Pinery
955 S. Airport Rd. • Traverse City
(231) 947-7363

11/25-778501-GG

BOYNE COUNTRY SPORTS

XMAS GIFT IDEAS

A < 8
GJ BA8: B?9
54??FE8:
ABJ % !
4??: B?96?BG '-A:
<F'ABJ '(# B99

=E: 8?@8GF
FG4EG ()
47H?G; 8?@8GF
9EB@) (

FCB6><A:
FGH998E
<784F
F64E9FZ: 4CFZ
GHEG?8A86>FZ
: ?BI8FZ: B: : ?8FZ
HA78EJ 84E
4A7J 4K8F
F6BGGCB?8F
BA?L % ! ,

F><C46>4: 8
>%B@A<&! (F><BE
FJ 88G?HI F><J G
5-A7-A: 4A7 F6BGGCB?8
E8: H?4E) &&
F4?8 & ,

6B@C?8C8
F4?B@BA
K6 C46>4: 8
E8: H?4E % ()
F4?8 %/#

; < ; DH4?<GL
=46>8CFZC4ACF
4A7 9?8868F
GB>88C'LBJJ 4E@
G; <F'6; E<FG@4F

5HEGBA
6EHMBE 5B4E7
4A7 6HFCB@ 5-A7-A:
E8: H?4E #
F4?8 & +,

VZ ^NZI MKQa6 ->Y' *q YYYwdaMWVSNd6 ->e -Y' Yj s
eJ VaVMKWVWfSQWVWz