

USPS Agrees to Cancel Hallmark Retail Program

The Postal Service has agreed to end a pilot program with Hallmark that permitted the card and gift store corporation to perform retail postal services.

“This is a significant accomplishment for the APWU,” union President William Burrus said. “The pilot program permitted 972 Hallmark Gold Crown Stores not only to sell stamps, but to accept mail.”

On Aug. 27, the last day of the National Convention, Burrus announced that he had been informed by USPS management that it would discontinue the program. A letter from the USPS vice president for Labor Relations on Sept. 10 formally notified the APWU that it was ending the pilot.

“I had written to Donald Hall Jr. [Hallmark’s CEO] and expressed our concerns about the pilot program,” Burrus said. “I asked him to reconsider the company’s decision to participate. Shortly after hearing from me, Hall responded,

indicating he was surprised to learn of our concerns. He said that he had contacted postal officials about them.”

Although postage stamps have been available in drug stores, contract stations, and numerous other commercial establishments for many years, “accepting letters and parcels over the counter is a different matter,” Burrus said.

“The Hallmark program would have expanded private postal services to a new level. We also had safety concerns: The Hallmark employees would not be required to follow USPS practices when accepting packages.”

This is the second time that the APWU has led a drive to end retail contracts with a major corporation. In 1989, when Sears embarked on a similar plan, the APWU responded with calls for a boycott of its stores and its credit program (including the Discover card), and the program was discontinued.

Postal Service to Pay Employees’ Share Of Health Premiums During Active Duty

The USPS has agreed to pay the employee’s share of health benefit premiums for those employees called to duty during the Iraq conflict.

“I applaud the sensitivity showed by postal management on this issue, and its support of the postal heroes who are defending our country,” said APWU President William Burrus.

In early August, after hearing from an APWU member who had received bills for his share of the FEHB premiums during a just-completed tour of active duty, Burrus wrote to Postmaster General John E. Potter. “The Office of Person-

nel Management had authorized federal departments and agencies to waive collection of health insurance premiums for employees on active duty,” Burrus noted.

OPM, however, required a special request from the USPS seeking to waive FEHB premiums for postal employees. That request was made in early September.

The APWU has now been notified that the policies and procedures are nearly finalized, and that a directive soon will be issued to USPS management. The Postal Service said that the APWU will be notified in advance.

APWU Election Ballots Mailed: Vote Count Begins Oct. 5

In a process to be completed Sept. 15, ballots for the 2004 Election of APWU National Officers were mailed today. Each member in good standing as of June 15, 2004, is to receive a ballot.

There are 30 different ballots, which will enable APWU members to vote for union officers in their areas and regions. For a ballot to be counted, it must be

received by the APWU National Election Committee in the designated post office box in Washington, DC, no later than 2 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 5, 2004.

For more details about the ballot process, visit www.apwu.org. A list of races can be found in the June 28, 2004, *APWU News Bulletin*, which can be seen online at www.apwu.org/news/nsb/index.htm.