

Following the Holiday Season, Mail Carriers Catch Their Breath, Push On

By William Meiners
Herald Staff Writer

The most wonderful time of the year is certainly the busiest for the United States Post Office. Consider some of their holiday numbers to follow and then maybe marvel at the fact that for the cost of a stamp, still cheaper than a gas station small cup of coffee, you can send your grandmother a thoughtful note anywhere in the United States. Even if she lives in Guam.

The USPS, according to its own literature, has been delivering some sort of holiday cheer for more than 235 years. Did you know nearly 18 billion (17.9 to be precise) cards, letters, and packages are delivered between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve? Throughout the year, the USPS processes an average of 528 million pieces of mail daily. That number jumps to some 560 million pieces during the holidays.

For a more localized perspective, walk a mile in Tim Palmer's shoes. But if you tag alongside him for his entire Ithaca route, you better wear running shoes, or a running shoe boot this time of year. Palmer's walking path puts him on pace for 10 to 12 miles a day.

A mailman for 31 years, as well as the onetime Ithaca mayor, Palmer can confirm the holiday weight to bear in his carrying bag. "You definitely can tell when it's after Thanksgiving," he said. "This time of year is pretty busy."

Just prior to Christmas, Palmer put in a 10-hour day delivering a slew of cards, letters, and packages. And new phonebooks to boot! He said two things that affect his time the most are the volume of the mail and the weather. At least prior to the new year, he had gotten a break on the cold front.

Yet that "neither snow nor rain nor heat" business is no mere talking point to the USPS, it's actually chiseled in stone

over a New York City Post Office. To be precise, "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

Though not an official motto, it does seem to be a tribute to American postal workers. The saying, however, is much older than our country, accredited to Herodotus, who wrote The Persian Wars. Apparently, according to a USPS historian, "During the wars between the Greeks and Persians (500-449 B.C.), the Persians operated a system of mounted postal couriers who served with great fidelity."

Greek antiquity aside, Palmer focuses on the task at hand of getting through the holiday season. A couple of Christmases ago, he said the holiday season meant two or three trips back to the office just to retrieve more mail for delivery. It now varies post office to post office, but Ithaca does not deliver for Amazon anymore. That alone lightened the load for Palmer and his colleagues.

What Palmer enjoys most about a job he's had for three decades is simply serving his customers. He's developed relationships with those folks along his route, particularly with the old and young among them. Little kids think it's cool when the mailman walks up to their mailbox, he said. With little faces pressed to the window, they often shout, "Hi, Mr. Tim!"

When it comes to some of the elderly folks, Palmer thinks of his own parents, currently in Florida. But if they lived here, and maybe lived alone, the mailman might be one of the few people they see all day. Especially these days. So he keeps an eye out for these neighbors, as well.

So it's those relationships that eases Palmer's route throughout Ithaca. Even on the longest days — and 40,000 steps (according to his Fitbit) just the other day. Luckily, in boots made for walking.



Tim Palmer, who has been an Ithaca mailman for 31 years, walks his familiar route on Tuesday. He averages about 10 to 12 miles a day.

Alma College's Martin Luther King Day Events Created to Celebrate and Reflect

By Tim Rath
Alma College Communications

Alma College will remember the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a week-long slate of events designed to celebrate and reflect on the concepts of safety and social justice, including a worship service, guest speaker, blood drive and more.

The week's activities are highlighted by "Transform the World: Creating Safety and Justice in a Polarizing World," a keynote speech

from author and essayist Candice Marie Benbow. On Monday, Jan. 17, classes are canceled for the day and Alma sports teams will not have practice.

"The Diversity and Inclusion Office's theme this year is 'Transform Yourself to Transform the World,' a quote attributed to the late activist Grace Lee Boggs," said Director of Diversity and Inclusion Donnesha Blake. "During the fall, our programming centered on self-transformation and during the winter term,

starting with MLK Week, our goal is to offer programming and educational experiences that allow our community to explore how they can transform the world.

"We recognize that justice, equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racist work is transformative for everyone in our community and that in order to advance these goals, we must continue to engage in self-work, community building, action and accountability."

Monday begins with a multi-denominational worship service, inspired by King's life, faith and legacy, led by college Chaplain Alissa Davis. The service includes student musicians, readers and speakers, as well as support and leadership from the Alma College associate chaplains. The 45-minute service is set to begin at 10 a.m. in Dunning Memorial Chapel and is open to the public.

The day continues with a blood drive, hosted by the American Red Cross, at the Stone Recreation Center. The drive, scheduled from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., is open to the campus community as well as the public to donate blood. Walk-ins are accepted, but registration is available as well, at redcrossblood.org/give.html/find-drive.

A lunch for Alma College faculty and staff, featuring a special menu in honor of King, will be held from 11:15 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Hamilton Commons.

Benbow will speak from 3 to 4 p.m. at the Oscar E. Remick Heritage Center for the Performing Arts, Presbyterian Hall. Benbow situates her work at the intersections of beauty, baking, faith, feminism and culture, giving voice to Black women's shared experiences of healing and journeying toward wholeness. She is an author and essayist who has been published by numerous magazines and journals, and has a book, "Red Lip Theology: Essays at

the Intersection of Faith and Black Feminism," coming out in 2022, through Convergent Books.

Benbow will speak on what it means to prioritize the safety of minoritized communities so that they might flourish and thrive. The address will be delivered both in-person and virtually. Registration is requested; those who register for the virtual event will be emailed the link necessary for access. Visit alma.edu/live/forms/486-1 to register.

"Candice Marie Benbow's keynote will kick off a series of conversations during MLK Week and winter term about how we can begin to transform our world into a place that is just and safe for everyone. We know that our polarized climate is one of our biggest challenges, so we are looking to her to offer practical strategies that we can put into action to create that safe and just world," Blake said.

On Tuesday, events continue with "MLK Talk Back and Action Lab," scheduled from 1:10 to 2:40 p.m. At the event, a panel of faculty, staff, students and alumni will offer reflections on Benbow's keynote speech and work together to co-create actions to foster safety and justice at Alma. The event is free and open to the public.

A film screening of King's most influential speeches and facilitated discussion will take place from 7 to 8 p.m. Tuesday. The event is virtual and open to Alma College alumni and current students; email Katie Crombe, director of alumni and family engagement, at crombekm@alma.edu for a Zoom link.

Wednesday will see the Hilson Poetry Slam, set for 7 to 8:30 p.m., at the Clack Theatre, in the Clack Art Center. Poets of all skill and experience levels will perform works centered on King's legacies, including activism, resistance, oppression, liberation, revolution and justice.

There will be an open mic session for anyone who wishes to perform; memorization is not required. The Hilson Poetry Slam is dedicated to the late Calvin Hilson '06, who started the tradition of hosting a poetry slam on Martin Luther King Jr. Day at Alma College, and tragically passed away in 2016.

On Thursday, a panel discussion and workshop will examine implicit biases in the field of healthcare and how they tie into health-related outcomes, including clinical judgment, decision-making and patient interactions. The event will take place from 7 to 8 p.m. at the Dow Digital Science Center, LL, and is open to the public. For more information, contact Karen Ball, Charles A. Dana professor and chair of the integrative physiology and health science department, at (989) 463-7127 or ball@alma.edu.

Friday's events include the MLK Silent March, scheduled for 4:45 to 5:15 p.m. at the rotunda in the Tyler-Van Dusen Campus Center. Student leaders, together with members of the public, will gather with words of reflection, then walk together, in silence, to the Wright Leppien Opera House in downtown Alma to commemorate social justice activists and advocates for their labor and the legacies they have left behind.

For more information, including how to nominate someone for the award, visit alma.edu/live/forms/489-1. Nominations will be accepted until Friday, Jan. 14.

This event is open to all Alma College students and employees. Registration is required; visit alma.edu/live/forms/479-1 to sign up.

Other academic departments, offices and student organizations at Alma College are expected to host additional events and tributes throughout the week. Students are encouraged to visit the events calendar at alma.edu for more information.

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