

3-29-02

Carmel residents adapt to mail delivery

CITY-FINANCED SERVICE MAKES INROADS WITH ELDERLY

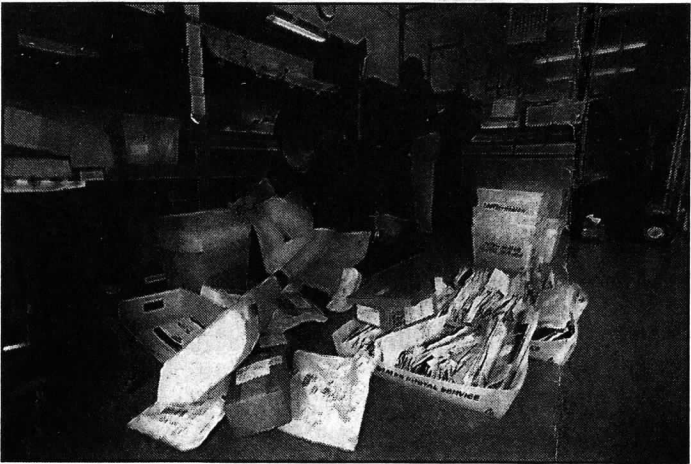
By **KEVIN HOWE**
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A home-delivery mail service that began July 1 appears to be resolving a longstanding quandary for residents of Carmel by-the-Sea.

The city prides itself on having no street addresses for most of its residents, who usually congregate at the Carmel Post Office downtown to receive and send their

mail. But not everyone is either able to or eager to venture downtown to get their letters and packages. With an aging population, more and more people find themselves unable to walk or drive, said Carmel mayor Sue McCloud. After much debate, the city decided to underwrite the cost of the delivery service.

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Gil Graham of the Peninsula Messenger Service sorts mail in the Monterey facility in preparation for delivery to Carmel residents.

Mail

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The city budgeted \$50,000 for the project, McCloud said, and as of the end of February — after eight months of operation — it had been billed about \$22,000 by the contractor, Peninsula Messenger Service of Monterey.

The city pays a fee of \$25 per month per customer, he said.

While the service is available to any Carmel resident, she said, Peninsula Messenger estimates that about 80 percent of customers physically need it.

The courier service neither picks up mail at the Carmel Post Office on Via Nona Marie, she said, nor delivers to the 120 households in annexed areas of Carmel which have street addresses.

"The service has been good," said Roger Hudson, who lives with his wife, Jacqueline, at Dolores Street and Santa Lucia Avenue at the south end of town.

Hudson, 81, has lived in Carmel for 19 years.

When he first moved to the city, he said, he and his wife got their exercise walking the 10 blocks to the post office on Fifth Avenue.

Now it's hard to even drive there, he said, especially crossing Ocean Avenue when tourist traffic is at its height.

Hudson said he'd like an earlier delivery time — his mail arrives between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. — and if no mail is delivered to his house on a particular day, the courier service doesn't

"We did lost luggage from the airport and all that, but there's little streets in Carmel I never heard of. The first week was an experience, but we're real smooth now."

Ron Campbell
Peninsula Messenger Service,
owner

come to pick up outgoing mail from his mailbox.

Peninsula Messenger Service collects the incoming mail at the post office six days a week and sorts it at its Ryan Ranch facility, said owner Ron Campbell, with its white delivery van setting out from there at about 3 p.m. to make home deliveries.

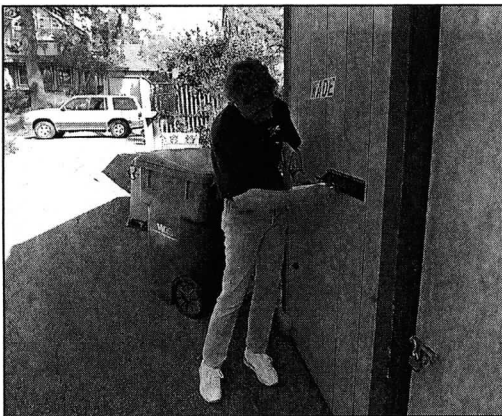
There are about 130 subscribers to the service, Campbell said.

"We started with 120, and we probably added about 20 since the beginning and lost 10."

Though he has lived in Carmel for 33 years and run the courier service for 30, Campbell said, finding houses by landmarks, physical descriptions and by the proximity to cross-streets in the city's often heavily wooded neighborhoods has been challenging.

"Nothing prepared me for this," he said. "We did lost luggage from the airport and all that, but there's little streets in Carmel I never heard of. The first week was an experience, but we're real smooth now."

Peninsula Messenger was chosen because it was already making deliveries in Carmel and



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Gil Graham makes a home delivery in Carmel.

its drivers were somewhat familiar with its quirky residential neighborhoods, said City Administrator Rich Guillan.

Cost has averaged \$3,000 to \$3,200 a month, he said. The highest billing in January was \$3,267; the lowest in November was \$3,062.

The council initially wanted to make it available to people in need, he said, "but then we got to constitutional issues, that if we offered it to one, we couldn't deprive anyone. The end result is that we have to provide it to anybody who requests it."

The city hopes, however, that the able-bodied will continue to go to the post office, he said.

Councilwoman Barbara Livingston has advocated passing a city ordinance that would specifically ban street addresses or mailboxes on public rights-of-way in the city. In a campaign

statement in her bid for election in the April 9 municipal election to unseat McCloud, Livingston has criticized the city's expenditure for home mail delivery as "controversial."

"If passed, such an ordinance "would make the annexed areas with street addresses nonconforming," McCloud said.

Home mail delivery to the disabled "is a simple matter of justice," said Councilman Gerard Rose, who is running for reelection.

Hudson, one of the residents who lobbied last year for home mail delivery, commented that when he asked all six City Council candidates at a forum earlier this week whether they'd continue to support it, all six said they would.

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