

CALIFORNIA

Dear USPS: This California town wants its post office back



Bolinas resident Enzo Resta peers inside the community's shuttered post office. "We really, really want to have this back," he says. (Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

By Hailey Branson-Potts
Staff Writer

June 10, 2024 3 AM PT

BOLINAS, Calif. — On the outskirts of this coastal village — just past the road sign telling visitors they are “Entering a Socially Acknowledged Nature-Loving Town” — a big wooden placard displays a set of hand-painted numbers. They are changed each morning.

“Days Without a Bolinas Post Office,” the sign reads.

On June 1, that number hit 456.

That’s how long it has been since the U.S. Postal Service was booted from its office in downtown Bolinas amid a fight with its longtime landlord.

In this artsy little town in west Marin County — a haven for poets and painters, writers and actors — the loss hit hard. The 1,500 citizens of ZIP Code 94924 have fought to get their post office back with their most cherished tool: creativity.

They have picketed with placards reading, “Real Mail Not Email!” They have marched in local parades dressed as letter carriers. They have [composed songs](#) and written poems and sent thousands of letters, in hand-painted envelopes, to USPS officials.

They even drafted their own plan for a temporary post office, offered to fund it, and sent it to Congress.

“It’s a very Bolinas approach, breaking through bureaucracy through art and culture and pleas,” said John Borg, who is helping lead the citizens campaign. “This has taken way longer than it should.”

The approach is quirky, but the loss is serious.



A sign at the entrance of Bolinas counts the days the small coastal town has been without its post office. (Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

Most people in this aging rural community abutting the Point Reyes National Seashore do not get home delivery. They relied upon daily trips to the post office for parcels, pension checks and mail-order prescriptions, not to mention the chance to catch up on the small-town scuttlebutt.

Now, they must drive at least 40 minutes round-trip, through the forest on Highway 1, to a flood-prone post office at a campground in the even smaller town of Olema.

Enzo Resta, a longtime resident and founder of the new Bolinas Film Festival, compared reaction to the loss of the post office with the so-called “hype cycle” around new technologies.

“There was the crash, where there was a lot of hope and indicators we would get it back — the peak of inflated expectations,” he said. “When it got pushed a little further, we kind of went into the valley of despair, and we’re just trying to crawl back out.”

The Bolinas post office shut down on March 3, 2023. It had occupied half of an unadorned single-story wooden building on Brighton Avenue — most recently shared with a liquor store — for six decades.

The USPS already was a tenant when Gregg Welsh, of Ventura County, acquired the building about 50 years ago. His family trust currently owns it.

The relationship between landlord and tenant soured long ago.



Most people in Bolinas do not get home delivery and relied upon daily trips to the post office for their parcels, pension checks and mail-order prescriptions. (Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

According to a statement provided by Welsh through his attorney, Patrick Morris, the USPS for years violated its lease, which required it to maintain and repair the flooring at its own expense.

The postal service, the statement reads, discovered asbestos in the floor tiles in 1998, but essentially kept it hidden from the landlord for more than two decades and did not post warning signs for the public or employees.

When Welsh visited the Bolinas post office in late 2020, the statement reads, he saw worn and broken tiles and exposed, deteriorating subfloor materials.

The landlord and the postal service tussled over who should pay for repairs and asbestos abatement.

The USPS lease, according to the statement, ended in January 2022, with the parties still arguing over the floor. The postal service continued to occupy the building, sans lease, as a “tenant at sufferance.”



CALIFORNIA

Looking to vacation on the California coast? Marin County just made it harder

May 24, 2024

In a February 2023 email to USPS officials, which Morris provided to The Times, Morris said his client had not yet evicted the post office, in part because he had not wanted to deprive Bolinas residents of postal facilities before it could find a new location. But at that point, Welsh had had enough. He demanded the post office vacate the building within a month.

Kristina Uppal, a Bay Area-based spokeswoman for the USPS, did not respond to questions from The Times about accusations made by the landlord or about the alleged presence of asbestos in the building. She said the USPS was “forced from the

old facility due to the unexpected termination of a lease,” but that there are no plans to permanently close the Bolinas post office.

“We are just as eager to resume retail operations in Bolinas as the community and provide enhanced accessibility such as expanding street delivery to alleviate any inconvenience,” Uppal wrote.



Bolinas residents sent more than 2,500 “art” letters with personalized appeals asking U.S. Postal Service officials to resurrect mail service in their town. (John Borg)

Residents want their post office back, but their trust in the USPS has frayed.

The dust-up in Bolinas comes as U.S. Postmaster Louis DeJoy, [appointed when](#) former President Trump was in the White House, is [under fire](#) for efforts to

consolidate postal facilities. In [a May letter](#), a bipartisan group of U.S. senators criticized his 10-year plan, Delivering for America, arguing that cost-cutting measures have degraded service and disproportionately affected rural communities.

Bolinas residents say they have had little direct communication from the USPS over the last 15 months. Bolinas, they note, had a post office [since 1863](#), but townsfolk were given less than two weeks' notice before it closed.

Their mail has been bounced around — rerouted first to Olema, then to nearby Stinson Beach [because of flooding](#), then [back to Olema](#). Sometimes, their letters were left in unsecured bins on outdoor tables.

The relocation has been more than just an inconvenience for the town's elderly residents, many of whom cannot drive. There is little public transit, and more than half the town's residents are 65 or older.

People began [reporting problems](#) getting mail-order medication soon after the post office closed, according to the Marin County Board of Supervisors. They also have struggled to get lab results and healthcare coverage updates.

Borg, 62, is a type 1 diabetic who had his insulin delivered through the mail before the closure. Now, he said, package delivery is so iffy that he drives two hours round-trip to San Rafael each month to pick it up at a pharmacy.



Bolinas' poets and painters have been integral to the town's campaign for a post office. Here, an artist who goes by StuArt, creates the sign that will count the days Bolinas goes without service. (John Borg)

Borg runs a small business, making stainless steel drinkware, and has had two five-figure checks for his company lost in the mail.

He said residents of the unincorporated town — which has no mayor or city attorney advocating on their behalf — had to [band together](#) to make their voices heard.

Appealing to the outside world is a tall order for a place so famously reclusive that, for years, a vigilante band called the Bolinas Border Patrol [stole road signs](#) on Highway 1 directing travelers into town. Once, when the California Department of Transportation tried painting BOLINAS on the blacktop, sneaky citizens promptly blacked them out with tar.

“We’re a small village that kind of likes to keep to ourselves and deflect attention and not be super profile. But we’re in the process where the town is changing,” said Borg, noting that a growing share of Bolinas’ limited housing stock is being used as second homes for the wealthy and [short-term vacation rentals](#).

“The one thing that holds this place together is the post office.”

There has been no viable commercial real estate in tiny Bolinas for the post office to move into permanently. And [a 1971 water meter moratorium](#) has effectively prohibited development for the last 53 years. The moratorium, which has been challenged and upheld in court, was put into place because Bolinas has a limited water supply, mostly coming from the Arroyo Hondo Creek in the Point Reyes National Seashore.

Last spring, residents drafted a detailed proposal for a temporary facility — a mobile office trailer on a parking lot next to the fire station — and offered to raise \$50,000 for its installation.



Bolinas residents note they were given just two weeks' notice that their post office — a fixture in town since 1863 — was closing. (Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

They sent the plan [to a supportive](#) Rep. Jared Huffman (D-San Rafael), who shipped it to DeJoy. A spokesperson for Huffman said his office has been in frequent contact with the USPS and shares the community's frustration over the slow process.

Uppal, the USPS spokeswoman, said the agency has “reviewed proposals” and “will select a site that best meets our operational needs and can provide continued service to the community long term.”

“I can confirm there is a potential option that is under review now,” she wrote. She did not provide details.



CALIFORNIA

There are no street addresses in Carmel-by-the-Sea. Some say it's time to change

Jan. 22, 2024

In his written response to questions from The Times, Welsh, through his attorney, said there has been discussion with USPS about moving back into its former building. No further details were provided.

For now, Bolinas residents continue to haul up to Olema — and to lionize the simple pleasure of picking up their mail locally. Or, as one local poet put it in an ode penned for a “Save the Post Office” rally:

*I have gossip to send to Tomales,
regrets to send to Limantour Beach.*

*But it's Bolinas — always Bolinas — I dream of finding
in the return address of a letter sent to me.*

More to Read

Carmel-by-the-Sea, a town with no addresses, says the time has come to add house numbers

July 20, 2024



Your package wasn't delivered? Try living at one of L.A.'s '1/2' addresses

May 26, 2024



'Continue a conversation' with the dead through this P.O. box in L.A.

Dec. 13, 2023





Hailey Branson-Potts

Hailey Branson-Potts is an enterprise reporter on the State Team who joined the Los Angeles Times in 2011. She reports on a wide range of issues and people, with a special focus on Northern California and the Central Coast. She grew up in the small town of Perry, Okla., and graduated from the University of Oklahoma.