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Jim Memmott came to the *Rochester Times-Union* in 1980 after nine years of teaching English and American Literature at St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y. He joined the *Democrat and Chronicle* in 1989. He has been a reporter, an editor and a managing editor, and now as a senior editor he is a columnist, reporter and editor. Married to Cindy Schmitt, he lives in Geneseo, Livingston County, and has two sons, a stepdaughter and five grandchildren. He also is an adjunct professor at the University of Rochester where he teaches courses in journalism.

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Retired letter carrier comes to rescue of mailboxes

(September 17, 2005) — For years, former letter carrier Jack O'Connor went mano a mano with defective mailboxes.

Some were leaky. Others harbored bees. Still others were rusty or tilting from an encounter with a car or a snowplow.

None of this was pretty, but what's a letter carrier to do? You gotta deliver the goods.

But now that he's retired, O'Connor, 55, has taken matters into his own hands and started Jack's Mail Box Repair, a one-man operation that fixes old mailboxes and installs new ones.

O'Connor, who lives in Rush with his wife, Bonnie, doesn't know of any other mailbox repair specialists in the area. But he says there is a market.

"You don't call a landscaper to fix your mailbox," he says. "You don't call a carpenter. There's a little niche in between."

The mailboxes O'Connor works with are generally those on a post near the street.

He'll make a better post.

He'll install the box, be it copper or metal, though never vinyl.

O'Connor hates vinyl mailboxes. They can't take our weather. So don't even think about it.

Sometimes, too, O'Connor will make new mail slots in a door for a homeowner's mail, the old slots being too narrow for today's daily avalanche of catalogs.

That avalanche is one of the many changes O'Connor saw in his 34 years with the U.S. Postal Service

The number of first-class letters has dropped dramatically — blame e-mail — while the amount of so-called junk mail has increased significantly.

O'Connor retired in June, having spent his last 14 years as a letter carrier in the Kilbourn Road neighborhood in Pittsford. It was a homecoming of sorts for O'Connor, as his grandfather once had a home there.

He developed a legion of admirers in Pittsford, many of whom came together for a retirement party in his honor.



enlarge KARIN VON VOIGTLANDER staff photographer
 Retired letter carrier Jack O'Connor, 55, works on a copper mailbox and wooden post in his garage in Rush.
Day in Photos

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"He was so popular and well-liked because he took a genuine interest in the people and families here," says Shelly Dinan, whose house was on O'Connor's route. "He gave a face, personality and name to the Postal Service. He wasn't simply 'the mailman.' He's 'Jack,' a great guy who happened to deliver the mail."

He was such a great guy, in fact, that he won over the neighborhood dogs.

O'Connor was bitten 14 times throughout his career, most often by poodles. Despite this, or maybe because of this, he always carried dog biscuits on his route, giving them to any and all canines.

"The Postal Service frowns on that," O'Connor says, "but I'd estimate 70 percent of the carriers carry biscuits."

O'Connor started working for the Postal Service while he was still attending East High School.

After graduation, he continued at the Postal Service until he went on active duty with the U.S. Navy in 1969.

He served in Vietnam from July 1970 to March 1971. After his discharge that month, he returned to the Postal Service here.

The stereotype of the disgruntled postal employee just doesn't fit O'Connor, though he has had to deal with it.

"When people learn you're a postal worker, they say, 'You're not packing?'" he says, raising his arms and stepping back as if in fear.

The father of four children ages 19 to 32, O'Connor uses his garage as his workshop.

But he's doing more than fixing and installing mailboxes in his retirement.

He works part time at Irondequoit Country Club in Pittsford; he plays a lot of golf; and he is still active in the postal workers union.

For sure, O'Connor misses his customers. "They were like family," he says.

But every once in a while people from the old route call with a postal emergency. O'Connor responds quickly, delivering the mailbox, not the mail.

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