

Nine-digit zip code to be voluntary

Postal official visits, talks numbers

By REBECCA STRINGER

Staff Writer

"It's no problem," said Postmaster General William Bolger about the proposed nine-digit zip code when he was here Jan. 8 to view the Philatelic Library, part of the Special Collections in McDermott Library.

"Right now, we still have 3 or 4 percent of our mail going without the five-digit code and we will be asking people to add the four other digits voluntarily."

The postmaster general noted that 80 percent of all mail the U.S. Postal Service handles today comes from business. "Business uses computers and will have the ability to implement the use of the extra numbers. What we'll do to make it attractive for companies to use the nine digits will be price incentives.

"You can't expect people to make an investment into something like this without receiving a return on their investment. We're not trying to impose numbers, but want to rely on automation for processing of letter mail so that we will have cheaper rates and better processing over time," he predicted.

"It has taken us from 1963 until today for 97 percent of our mail to include zip codes and mail will not be refused by the postal service if zip codes are not included," Bolger noted.

Bolger's primary purpose in coming

to Texas this month was to attend the Postal Service Annual Board Meeting in Austin where the fiscal year 1980 was scheduled for discussion.

"We operated in fiscal 1979 in the black," Bolger said. "Originally 1980 was predicted to end with a "\$.2 billion deficit, but I forecast not more than \$600 million and we did much better than that.

Since 1970 when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Postal Reorganization Act, the U.S. Postal Service has operated as a "business-like" government agency and has modernized mail handling techniques. Further, the postal service eliminated politics from the selection of postmasters and Bolger is only the second career postal employee in two centuries to rise to the rank of postmaster general.

A native of Connecticut, Bolger went to work for the U.S. Post Office as a clerk in 1940 and became postmaster general in 1978. Today, he directs 30,000 post offices and 650,000 employees delivering 100 billion pieces of mail each year, and he is proud of the strides which the postal service has made.

"We're doing a better service job than we did ten years ago. While our rates have gone up, it's been at a lesser rate than inflation. Our productivity of the aggregate has increased over 30 percent in the past ten years.

"We handle almost 300 million pieces of mail a day and people expect to take us for granted, as they should. But," he added, "if a letter, parcel or even a bill doesn't arrive, people get disturbed

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U.S. Postmaster General William Bolger tells reporters the postal service is in shape. (Photo courtesy of Richardson Daily News)

People should take service for granted

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about it. I don't blame them. They have a right to take us for granted. Three hundred million pieces of mail a day with a one-percent error equals three million errors and 99 percent non-error is an acceptable margin anywhere."

The U.S. Postal Rate Commission will decide by Feb. 21 whether to recommend that postal customers pay more than 15 cents for stamps. Bolger believes a decision to increase the rate is justified.

"With our present rates, we're the lowest in the world with the exception of Canada which is subsidized 28 percent while the U.S. Postal Service is subsidized only 4 percent by taxpayers.

"We don't want to be increasing postal rates any more frequently than every two or three years and prefer that it be less frequently despite inflation. The last increase was three years ago," he noted.