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Interview with Danna Bosche

Sarah Bush

Danna Bosche

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Interviewer: Sarah Bush

Interviewee: Danna Bosche

Date: January 30th, 2012

Place: Gambier Post Office

Sarah Bush: Ok. Could we start by having you state your name and today's date?

Danna Bosche: My name is Danna Bosche, and it's January 30th, 19-, 2012. Sorry.
[laughs]

SB: That ok! Great. And how long have you been the postmaster here?

DB: I came here in 19-, no, 2008. So going on four years.

SB: Ok, that's how long I've been here too [laughs]!

DB: Yeah, I know, I saw that the other day, I said "oh, we came the same time!"

SB: That's cool. Were you a postmaster somewhere else before you came here?

DB: No, I was a financial, well it's called activity-based costing analyst, I was a costing analyst in Washington, D.C.

SB: Oh, cool, that's where I'm from!

DB: Oh yeah?

SB: Yeah, I'm from Maryland.

DB: Yeah, worked at L'Enfant Plaza.

SB: Ah, cool, right downtown. Great. So what does being a postmaster involve, like what kinds of things do you see here in your day-to-day work? In terms of, like, community interactions-

DB: I see a lot of students interacting with professors, and people will meet up and they'll go out to lunch, and they'll catch up, oh I haven't seen you in a while. It's a good way for professors to keep in touch with students they no longer have or are trying to help. It's a good way for the community to be involved with the students and vice versa because it's intermingled territory, it's a good way for the people to interact too. And, um, we, uh, you know up there on the bulletin boards, students, like if they're graduating, they will put up notices of plays, and you know, exhibits, concerts, that they community can come and see. I take those in to my husband, drag my kids in. They have a good time.

SB: What do you think the post office, like the function of the post office serves for people who aren't necessarily connected to the college, just people who live in Gambier.

DB: This is, we don't have delivery in the city. In this village. So they get free mailboxes, like what they students have but theirs are free because they live here and we don't have door-to-door delivery. WE do deliver out in the rural areas. And they come in here and it's basically like a community center. People will meet here and then all of them will meet up and they'll decide to go to lunch together, or they'll make an appointment to go to the KAC or something like that. So I'm guessing there's probably a little more interaction, either that or less, you know, takes away from phone calls and texting, so face-to-face, which is actually better, I think.

SB: Yeah. So you see that as being more, do you see that as being more important, kind of, than cell phones?

DB: Well, yes, I do.

SB: Yeah. What do you, uh, um, I guess, what makes Gambier, the Gambier post office different from other post offices in cities or maybe other towns in Knox County?

DB: Well, anytime you have a small village like this and the people have to come, you get to know them. So if something comes up and it says, we has something that said "Aunt Lizzy, Uncle Terrell, Susan, and Jane," and we knew who it went to. Whereas if you went to a larger facility where everyone has street delivery or has a regular P.O. box in Mount Vernon, they may or may not know that person. And we know people, we get mail, oh they moved to so-and-so, give it to that person, they'll get it to them. So we're able to get mail forwarded to people when it's incorrectly addressed, when it's been years since they've been here. Because the personal knowledge of the clerks, and because when people come in you put a face to a name and you learn these things. Our one clerk here, he not only knows almost every single person that lives here, he knows their birthdays. So the come in and he'll wish them happy birthday. It's a little more personal.

SB: What, um, what would happen if the post office, if this post office just disappeared? Can you explain the kind of void that would be missing in this community?

DB: Well, for them to get their mail they would probably go to Mount Vernon, if for some reason- just for the record, this one's not slated to close. We're one of the few in that nation that actually make a profit. Ok, so, I don't say that going anywhere. And that's largely due to the presence of the college and their mailings through us. But say um they decided to consolidate us to Mount Vernon because it's the largest, closest facility. Then the people will get mail service out of there and if they want to mail something they would have to go here, which would be very inconvenient. All the people around here, they don't drive- they walk everywhere, they bike everywhere. I can see them maybe opening a place to sell stamps, well they already do that at Kenyon, at the bookstore, so they might add a couple extra services there, basic stuff. And, you wouldn't have the students interacting with the villagers because I would imagine the college would open their own

mailroom. Then, if they set up their own mailroom, I would imagine, speculation of course, that they would staff that with students. Or somebody, somebody. It would be a good work-study type thing. But they're not going to, he's gone, who was a former student, because that's knowledge that's just from years of, being here. Whereas students would be here a maximum of four years, they would get to know people there, but if they left the knowledge goes with them. So, but there's enough ways of record keeping that it could work, but it would just be different. It wouldn't be as personal I don't think, and things are pretty impersonal as it is, so I kinda like that.

SB: Yeah, sort of going off of that, what makes the postal service, like, having the mail a special thing versus email or other ways of getting in touch with people?

DB: Well, you don't hear people saving emails and opening them up years later, you know. I mean, it might happen now, but when I go look at my birthday cards or cards my kids have given me, I don't look at their emails, I look at the handwritten cards they wrote as children, or things they mailed me from their school projects. It's more, when you actually see handwriting it's like seeing the person's face because that's unique to them. I mean, anybody can type in font and make it fancy or plain or simple or whatever, anybody can do it, whereas your script is yours. And when people write on paper a lot of times they'll think a little more because they only have so much space and they don't want to have to cross it out if they're using ink pens, so I feel you get a more thoughtful note or letter. I don't know, but they call it the mail moment when you go to your mail box and you open it up and there's something besides a bill, it's like, oh cool, I go dadada. I don't normally see that reaction on an email. Oh, so-and-so emailed me. Whoopadoodoo. That didn't take a lot of effort or time or thought.

SB: That's good. So I know that Brinkhaven is one of the post offices in the county on the list to close potentially in May. And, I was over in Brinkhaven, like a week or so ago. Um, in a place like Brinkhaven, which is also a very, very small town, what kind of effect would that post office, have, of it closing, on the town?

DB: Jane could best answer that for you. But right now they're an interim route, which means their mail starts here, carrier stops there and picks it up, for the delivering goes on. That one's very easy to absorb into, you know, send it all out to the opposite start. But as far as public interactions, I'm really not familiar with that office as I've didn't hire the lady that replaced Jane, Jane would be a good one to talk to.

SB: Ok. So what are some of the threats as we kind of go into the future in this?

DB: The current threats are dropping volume of first class mail. Of course email had a lot to do with that, although I'm not really quite so convinced of that, simply because I don't think a lot of young people were taught to write a thank you note. I don't blame that on anybody, but that's just the way things have gone. Online bill-paying, though, has hurt, but by the same token, shopping online has helped. This last Christmas a lot of the vendors offered free shipping, 27% increase in online sales, we were slammed. And one of our larger customers is UPS and FedEx. Amazon, you order stuff on Amazon, Amazon

gives it to UPS, UPS says you know we're not going to drive all over Gambier countryside, we'll just pay the post office a little bit and give it to the carrier who goes out there anyway. SO that was actually a boon to us. And we've shared airplanes with them for years at Christmas. It's called co-opetition.

SB: That's so interesting. I didn't know that. What do you think about the importance of having a post office in a building? Like, what do you think this building adds to the Gambier post office?

DB: This is actually eligible for historical register. What does it add? Character. Like your fictitious painting up there. It wasn't- did you read that- it wasn't dramatic enough that he was standing on a stump, so they said put him on a horse, so they did. And that actually wasn't under the public works project, that was under the fine arts, which was a different division. At the time, thought, the building was part of a public works that provided work to people back in the Depression. And this build in I think 1942, but I just rehabbed a house, so maybe I'm getting those mixed up. But it provided a lot of work for people here. We used to actually have somebody, according to records, as the boiler stoker, you know they had boilers and they had to stoke them. It also served as a fallout shelter.

SB: Is it still down there?

DB: Mmmhmm.

SB: You seem to really love the post office, going by the history-

DB: There's a lot of history here, and I know a lot about it. You need to like your job if you're going to be doing it for any length of time or you need to find a different occupation. But I started carrying mail way back when. And then I worked y way up to D.C. Then I decided I was going to get married, and he lives here, so I transferred my way around to there. But I'm glad I did, I told the mayor when I came here, he swore me in, I said this I going to be my retirement job, because I like talking to people and getting to know them. Did you ever watch the old show Cheers? Everybody knows your name? Just like that. So it's kind fun. After living in D.C., you know that, everywhere you go you don't know anybody, you're anonymous. And here that doesn't happen, it's, like when I went to Krogers, people came up and talked to me, like, oh, ok, I have to learn to do this. But it was fun, I'm glad I did it.

SB: So, as the postmaster, do you work out in the windows?

DB: Yeah. A lot. Well, lunch relief, usually, when it gets busy. I only have two part-time clerks, but we're open from, I have to have somebody here at 6:30 in the morning to 5 at night six days a week. So, yeah, sometimes, how come you don't have somebody up here, well, I have to let them eat lunch, you know. So we just kinda shuffle it around.

SB: What happens at 6:30 in the morning?

DB: Our truck is here at six. At 6:3 we start separating and sorting mail.

SB: Ok. Wow. That's a lot to do.

DB: Yes. But it's a lot better, when I came here they were doing everything by hand. And having, I told you I took my way around to get here. I worked at the plant there for a couple years as an operations sports specialist means I wrote software programs for the machines, so I knew it was out there. So I got a lot of the stuff is done automated, so when it gets here it's like in order. And a couple people got upset when I told them that I drop a letter for Gambier in here and it has to go to Columbus to come back, but yeah it does, because instead of me casing it, and then taking it to box section and putting it wherever it goes, it comes in a tray already done in order. Well that will take too long. Well, I'm sorry, you can bring it to me and I'll walk it over there, and it'll be gone for six months, and oh. It was just the thought. But a lot of changes from behind the scenes, and I don't think there were any perceptible interruption of changes, at least no one's voiced it to me yet.

SB: So what are the seasons like, you mentioned how it's different when we aren't here.

DB: Oh, it's crazy. A lot of offices, you budget your hours per week and of course Christmas is a heavy one. Everybody who lives here goes away. I mean, the students are gone, the faculty leaves, we may have some residents, here, but that's our break. Whereas everybody's busting behind because they're very, very busy, it's slow for us because most of the people are gone. And time that are typically slow for other people, we're busy. Our busy time is May, all the students are leaving and mailing things home. August, when they're coming aback, bringing everything back. Other big days are Valentines Day, Halloween, because mom and dad send goodies to their kids. Right before break, and right during semester break when you're studying, packages of goodies for those long nights come from home, we see a little rise there. In the summer it's very slow compared to the rest of the year, but that's when we catch up on, little projects during the year we put them to the side, like we get the new, all the student who have left we remove their names, and all the students coming in we get all the boxes renumbered, re labeled, we get all the keys out for the college, get those ready. Different little things like that in preparations for the fall.

SB: Ok. Great.

DB: What else can I tell you?

SB: Let's see, um, that covers pretty much everything. Is there anything else we haven't touched on- do you live in Gambier?

DB: I don't, I live in Mount Vernon, but I could walk here. I mean, I'm like the last house in Mount Vernon. I'm closer here, I'm like two miles. I'm right here. I come here, my mail comes here, I'm trying to get my husband to move his mailbox over here. Our

mailboxes are actually cheaper here than Mount Vernon, it has to do with price of housing and some kind of formula that even though I've seen it I don't understand it. The only other thing is, we try to do things here to help the community. They had a GOBA (Great Ohio Bike Association) ride the first year I was here. We set up a little mail station, stand down there, and we had special cancellations for the riders to come through and had a "Great Ohio Bike Association" and the date and that, so they could write cards and let them mail them out right there. This year we worked with the college, they asked us to stay open late on a Saturday because all the students were returning to school, so we stayed open for about three hours. She and I came in on our own time, we volunteered, because the kids need bed sheets and they know mom and dad mail the bed sheets they get here on Saturday they can't check in 'til three, we're closed, and they can't wait 'til Monday, so we stay open to let them pick up their stuff. We used to have passport fairs, but now I think we've got, I've got that down so I've got the list out there and people can just come in as needed and not wait for one specific day. The college used to take the photos, I guess their camera broke or they decided not to do it, so now we take the photos for people. I can't think, well, we like to give out candy. Christmas, Valentine's Day, we were talking about that earlier.

SB: Are all post offices open 24 hours, the lobbies?

DB: No. No. It depends on the neighborhood. Mount Vernon's is. I used to have one in downtown Tampa that I ran, and I had a 24 lobby, but it, because of the economic circumstances and homeless people and things going on, I didn't mind them sleeping in there, it's just when they needed to use the facilities they're wasn't one available. So we ended up having to lock that one from like 7 at night to 7 in the morning. So it depends on where it is.

SB: So that was a decision that was made by you?

DB: Well, me and my bosses, but yeah. There are just certain things you have to work around. And that office we actually, I cut down, I didn't do Saturday because it was a downtown business area. So I cut out the Saturday window, but was able to extend it on Wednesday, so it was actually a little better for people who had businesses there, they could get there after their regular business hours. So there's some flexibility, but because of logistics getting from point A to point B to hit the airplanes to make the runs, you have certain time frames. Why do you close at 4 o'clock? Well, because I have to get my deposit done, I have to get my mail on the truck, it comes picks up here, goes to Mount Vernon, picks up, consolidates mail from all these little offices there, it goes to Columbus, it has to be processed through and on the planes tonight, so it can be at the next place tomorrow morning, so they can process it and get it out on the routes. So it's a huge logistical, I don't know. It's really cool. But you have to be into that kind of stuff. But there are, you know, we push it sometimes. Last year, year before, people came in, May, they had busses out there, I'm like, if you're in line, fine. I had to stop people at the door, I said I can't take anybody else because I have to get this stuff out. But if you can wait, I'm going to close out my drawer, get it out and open it up as the next day, and it will go out tomorrow. If that's ok, I'll get it out tomorrow but I can't get it out on today's

truck because we're out of time. And we had a couple people stay for that, they didn't care as long as they didn't have to take it on an airplane or the bus. So I guess that's something we do, and like occasionally people will come in and knock on the door, can you get this for me, can you get that for me, and I just think, you know, are you going to go down to the bank and knock on the door because you forgot to get something, or. But if it's something we can do. Sometimes we can't, unfortunately, they want to pick up a package, and once we shut our computers down we can't scan them. But if it's something that doesn't need to scan we can take care of that for them. I've sold stamps and let the money sit in there for the next day.

SB: So going back to something you said awhile ago about knowing people and their boxes and stuff, so if you wrote someone's name and 43022 could it in theory get to them?

DB: If it's a resident, yeah, 99% of the time, if it's a resident who's still here, yes. That happens a lot. And you actually see students who says Joe Smith, P.O. box blank, Gambier Ohio, and the college provides us a list of boxes and that's the last thing we do, we'll look them up. Everything that's properly addressed gets done first, and then we'll go through the things we'll have to look up and find people. And on any given day we'll have a stack.

SB: That's so interesting, that's neat.

DB: I mean, in theory we should kill it, kill it meaning undeliverable as address, insufficient address. But we have enough resources, if we know where it goes we will get it there. And I don't think most offices are like that.

SB: Great. Alright, well thank you so much.