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Temptation Didn't Stamp Out Mail Carrier's Integrity

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A nother routine mail pickup on an icy night in Spokane. That's what Chris McIntosh thought, lugging a basket of envelopes out of the last squatty steel mailbox on his mid-town route. Then he carried the basket to the back of his truck and he gasped.

"I saw all this cash, checks and loose coins scattered everywhere," says McIntosh, 28, who has worked less than two years for the U.S. Postal Service. "The most money I've ever had in my hands."

There, strewn along with the mail was \$172,000 and change, all told. Intended for a bank deposit, the unsealed envelopes of money were mistakenly dumped in a postal box by a salesman for the Allied Security company.

McIntosh remembers picking up one check for \$55,000.

"My brother made an offer for \$54,000 on a house," he says. "I remember thinking, 'Wow, he could have bought it with this check alone.'"

A larcenous fellow would pocket the cash and toss the paper down the nearest sewer grate. A more brazen thief could open an account with the checks and then withdraw the loot before hopping the next flight to Maui.

Not Chris McIntosh. "I'm not perfect by any means," he says. "But character, to me, is doing what's right when no one is watching."

This former member of the U.S. Air Force is a refreshing change from the common perception of mail carriers.

Go ahead, say the words: "postal worker."

If you didn't just think of some psycho pumping lead into terrified co-workers, you probably conjured up the image of that plump weasel Newman on TV's "Seinfeld" or boobish blowhard Cliff Claven of "Cheers."

McIntosh is hopefully closer to the norm.

His heart hammering like a punk drummer, he drove straight to the post office annex, summoned a manager and said, "Count it. I want a receipt."



Postal Service workers are still abuzz about McIntosh's Nov. 20 haul. Waylaid bank deposits are not an uncommon thing to find in a mailbox, but this is by far the biggest dollar amount found in Spokane by a long, long shot.

It's amazing the kind of weird stuff people dump into mailboxes, says Elaine Van Horn, a claims clerk at the Liberty Park station.

Postal workers have pulled out beer bottles, half-eaten plates of spaghetti and specimen jars full of urine.

"We actually recovered a full set of false teeth in a box," she says. "Some people I work with put it on top of my can of Coke."

An artificial leg was found crammed into a Spokane mailbox. In Seattle, a mail carrier opened a box and was nearly bowled over by a frenzied housecat.

The strangest find in Spokane?

A hard plastic sex toy, says customer services supervisor Carol Stauffer. The Postal Service, she adds, does its best to reunite lost items with their rightful owners but in this case "nobody would touch it."

Calling McIntosh an "extremely fine and moral young man," his boss, Hazel Elliott, nominated him for an achievement award.

And that would be the end to a happy story were it not this shameful postscript that has Elliott and Stauffer and McIntosh shaking their heads:

Not one lousy word of thanks has come from Allied Security officials. The Postal Service contacted the company the following day. Controller Jeff McGillivrae recovered the money and then turned on his heels and left.

"Probably because it's so embarrassing," says McGillivrae of his social lapse.

Too bad. McIntosh's honesty saved this company from an accounting disaster.

Sorry, Jeff, but embarrassment is no excuse for behaving like an ingrate.

Is there a donkey in the house?

Animal breeder Bob Baker heeded my call Thursday and supplied three miniature donkeys for the "Bethlehem Revisited" Christmas pageant. "We're hee-hawing with joy," says Carol Voogd of the gift." The free interactive drama continues today (1-4 p.m.) and Monday (6-9 p.m.) at the Crescent Court in downtown Spokane.

Hey, what's that on your shirt?

Don't forget to enter the 12 ugly ties of Christmas contest. Send entries to the Spokesman-Review, W. 999 Riverside, Spokane, WA, 99210.

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