



By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

Jerry Lines has sorted a lot of mail during his 40 years of service at the Imperial Post Office. With the exception of six months, he's been in the same location since he graduated from Chase County High School in 1973.

Lines applied for a part-time clerk position shortly after taking the civil service test the summer after graduation. He began work Oct. 27, 1973.

At that time, Postmaster Mac McConnell had five clerks working for him. Now, it's just Lines and one part-time non-career clerk.

Lines was a clerk for five years, becoming Postmaster in January 1979. In addition, he served as officer in charge in Valentine for three months in 1996 and in Gering for three months in 1998.

Aside from the number of his staff, the biggest change over 40 years has been automation, Lines said. "When I first started, letters came in bundled with rubber bands, and we sorted them by box section and routes," he said.

Now, 95 percent of the mail comes in by delivery point sequence and routes come in order for the carrier, with the North Platte office doing the sorting.

In addition, in 1973 there was no UPS or FedEx, so the post office handled all parcel delivery. "That's gone down considerably," Lines said, but the number of parcels has increased recently due to orders made on-line. There are about 100 parcels per day handled by the Imperial Post Office.

Back when the 58-year old started, bookkeeping was done by hand, with each stamp sold noted in a ledger. Now, it's computerized.

Probably the biggest challenge the Postal Service faces, Lines said, is financial.

"We're mandated not to make money but we need to break even," he noted.

He said e-mail has considerably decreased the amount of mail people send, especially in the past two years. Christmas cards, followed by Valentine cards, used to be "huge" volume holidays for the post office, but that letter volume has dropped considerably, he noted.

Lines has been very active in the National Association of Postmasters. He served as state president two years, secretary-treasurer seven years, editor for six years, national regional editor of the magazine for two years and was national vice president from 2007-08.

He was nominated for a National Press Association award by The Imperial Republican, and received the state, regional and national awards in 1998.

Lines will receive a pin and certificate for his 40 years of service. Will he try for a 50-year pin?

"My retirement is in the very near future," he laughed, "probably after the first of the year."