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COMING SOON TO A THEATRE NEAR YOU

Holiday mail pushes volume to all-time high

From Associated Press reports
 CHARLESTON, S.C. — Recession or not, people are sending cards and letters at a record pace this holiday season.

As the U.S. Postal Service braces for the busiest two weeks of the year, letters to Santa and to troops in the Middle East are helping push mail volume to an all-time high.

The Postal Service expects to deliver four billion pieces of mail this holiday season. It delivered 3 billion pieces a year ago.

An estimated 120 million pieces of the increase represents mail to troops deployed as part of Operation Desert Shield, said Paul Griffo, a spokesman for the Postal Service in Washington.

Next Monday — the Monday before Christmas Eve — is traditionally the single-busiest day of the year for the mail carriers, he said.

Gary Johnson, the head of city operations, said mail volume is running 13 percent ahead of last year.

About 5 to 7 percent of the increase is attributed to letters to the thousands of troops from the state deployed as part of Desert Shield. The rest is a general increase in mail volume, he said.

There are 19 red boxes around the area for Christmas cards only.

Putting mail in the special boxes speeds delivery.

That's because optical scanners used for sorting mail don't work on Christmas cards. The devices, which can read addresses on 36,000 pieces of mail an hour, have problems reading Christmas envelopes which might be green, red or another color, Johnson said.

There are also four red letter boxes where children can drop letters to Santa. Those who do will receive a post card in return from the North Pole.

No stamp is required to write to Claus and some children get their orders in as early as September, Johnson said.

There are similar programs around the nation, Griffo added.

They're usually run by local officials in conjunction with community groups.

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