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## **National Postal Museum Announces New “Behind the Badge” Exhibition** *Exhibit To Showcase the U.S. Postal Inspection Service*

“Behind the Badge,” a dynamic new exhibition opening June 27 at the Smithsonian’s National Postal Museum, will showcase the work of one of the nation’s oldest federal law enforcement agencies. The United States Postal Inspection Service dates to 1776, when Benjamin Franklin first sent a surveyor to investigate the fledging nation’s mail routes for efficiency and security. While post offices, postal employees and mail are common sights across the country, Americans may not realize that behind each is a network of U.S. postal inspectors working to keep the mail safe and empowering consumers to protect themselves and prevent crimes.

The exhibit offers visitors the opportunity to learn more about this little-known agency through some well-known cases that crossed their desks. Postal inspectors play a key role in restoring mail service and returning a sense of normalcy to communities shattered by natural and man-made disasters, from floods and wildfires to industrial explosions and terrorist attacks.

“When people think of the term ‘first responders,’ they may not realize that postal inspectors are part of that equation,” said Allen Kane, director of the museum. “From 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina to Superstorm Sandy, some of the first boots on the ground were those of the dedicated men and women of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.”

Many people may be familiar with the high-publicity cases involving postal inspectors from the late-20th-century Unabomber to the October 2001 anthrax mail terror attacks. What many Americans may not consider is that the vast postal network, which reaches every home and business in the country, is often a tempting target for criminals. Postal inspectors work hard to protect that network, postal employees and the people who use the mail. When necessary, they collaborate with other law enforcement agencies—from local police departments to Interpol—to investigate crimes involving the mail, post offices, postal employees and postal customers.

Visitors to the exhibit will encounter a dramatic scene dominated by a mobile command center vehicle. These high-tech vehicles are fully self-contained units—with power supplies, communication equipment, emergency gear and forensics lab materials—and can be easily dispatched as needed to locations anywhere in the United States. They can support a variety of investigations, such as suspected dangerous mail, and provide mail-screening protection at national events such as the Super Bowl and political conventions.

The exhibit interweaves historic and contemporary cases that examine the wide range of work done by inspectors. Through a series of videos, postal inspectors, forensic analysts and postal police officers share their stories of life “behind the badge.”

The exhibit showcases an important part of the mission of the Postal Inspection Service—protecting the American consumer from fraud. “While arrests are always an effective deterrent to crime, we’ve found that educating consumers about fraud is a key component to preventing them from becoming victims of scams,” said Chief Postal Inspector Guy Cottrell.

Visitors will have opportunities to learn how to spot fraud and other mail scams, not just for themselves, but on behalf of family members who may find themselves face-to-face with opportunities that are just “too good to be true.” As exhibit curator Lynn Heidelbaugh notes, “postal inspectors remind us that we can all be partners in prevention by learning to protect ourselves from scams, identity theft and other postal crime.”

The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation’s mail service and showcasing one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of stamps and philatelic material in the world. It is located at 2 Massachusetts Avenue N.E., Washington, D.C., across from Union Station. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). For more information about the Smithsonian, call (202) 633-1000 or visit the museum [website](#).

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