



“Networking a Nation: Star Route Service” Opens Feb. 21 at National Postal Museum

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Ever wondered how a letter gets delivered in the depths of the Grand Canyon or the snowy Alaskan tundra? A new exhibit at the Smithsonian’s National Postal Museum sheds light on the complex transportation web used to move the mail from one point to another. “Networking a Nation: Star Route Service” opens Feb. 21 and features a full-size Freightliner Columbia heavy-duty truck cab-cutaway, allowing visitors to gain a new perspective on transportation from behind the cab’s steering wheel.

Over 150 years ago, postal officials tried a new approach to expand the nation’s mail service. The Post Office Department hired contractors to serve the new routes and allowed them to use any form of transportation to carry the mail. Snowshoes, mules, canoes, trucks, dogsleds and stagecoaches are just a few of the ways mail has been carried across America’s valleys, mountains, river and highways along this network—known as “Star Routes”—ever since.

“Star Routes” got their name because legislation establishing the new mail service called for contractors to carry the mail with “celerity, certainty, and security.” Weary of repeatedly writing these words in ledgers, postal clerks substituted three asterisks “* * *” and the phrase “Star Route” was born. “Star Routes” were renamed “Highway Contract Routes” in 1970, but they are still known by their original name today.

Support for “Networking a Nation: Star Route Service” was provided by Alan Ritchey, Inc. and Freightliner Trucks.

Alan Ritchey, Inc. began in 1963 as a family business and has its roots in mail transportation and agriculture. Today, ARI is comprised of three diversified divisions: Postal Operations, which includes transportation and logistics support, Agribusiness and Construction Support. In 2005, ARI postal drivers were on time 99.6% of the time and traveled over 38 million miles.

[Freightliner Trucks](#) is a division of [Freightliner LLC](#), headquartered in Portland, Ore., and is the leading heavy-duty truck manufacturer in North America. Freightliner LLC produces and markets Class 3-8 vehicles and is a company of [DaimlerChrysler](#), the world's largest commercial vehicle manufacturer.

About the National Postal Museum

The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation's mail service and showcasing the largest and most comprehensive collection of stamps and philatelic material in the world. It is located at 2 Massachusetts Ave. N.E., in the Old City Post Office Building across from Union Station. The museum is open daily, except Dec. 25, from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. For more information, visit the museum's Web site at www.postalmuseum.si.edu.