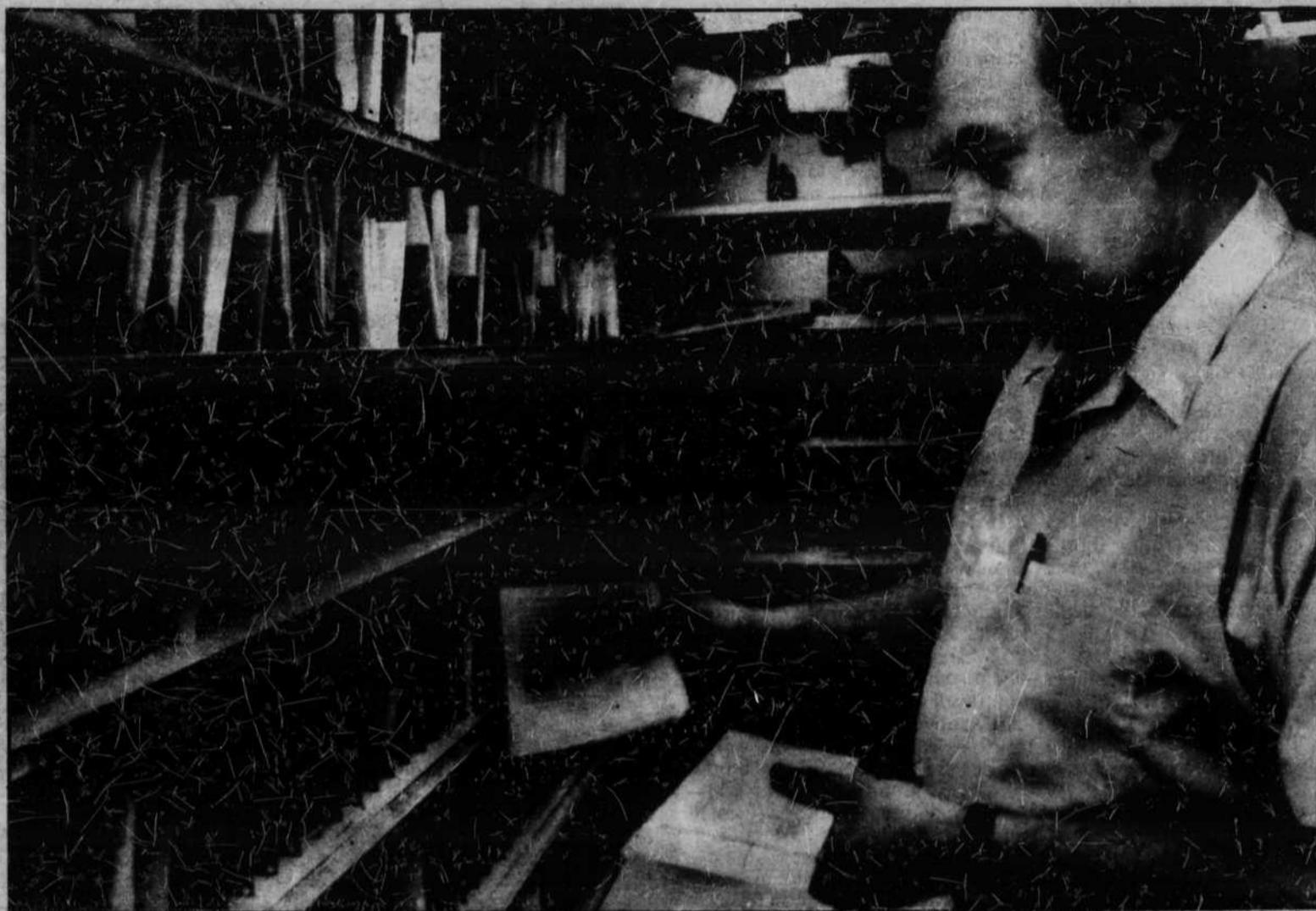


diversions

Who are the people in your neighborhood?



William Lauer/Daily Nebraskan

Mailman Larry Abels sorts university mail before starting his route.

Editor's Note: This week's theme is "Who are the people in your neighborhood." Reporters and photographers teamed up with mailmen, policemen, garbage men, firemen and newspaper carriers for an hour or two to a day. The stories are the reporter's experiences.

By Mark Lage
Senior Reporter

Letter carrier Larry Abels has battled sleet, snow, dogs and other postal myths to get the mail through for about 12 years now, and for the last 1 1/2 years he has brought mail to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus.

Abels said the campus route is quite different from most others because the volume is much higher and much of the mail is delivered in large sacks.

"Most carriers know pretty

much everyone on their route," Abels said. "But it's a little tough for me because there are so many students on campus."

Abels said that there are generally two types of routes -- "walking" and "mounted." But, like any good rule, this one has an exception, and the campus route is it. Abels spends most of his time driving the mail truck, he said, but gets out to walk while delivering to the fraternities and sororities.

Abels' day begins at 6 a.m., when he clocks in and begins "casing" the mail. The mail comes to each route, then is sorted by the separate carriers, based on the order in which they will deliver it. Also sorted out are "flats" -- magazines, large manila envelopes, etc. -- and accountables -- postage due, registered and foreign mail. "Casing" usually takes as much as 3 1/2 hours before the mail can be delivered, Abels said.

He heads for his campus route

first, and this usually takes him about two hours to complete, he said. Abels said his campus duties have given him a close-up view of UNL's parking problem.

"The parking is ridiculous," he said. "I really feel for the kids sometimes."

Somewhat surprisingly, football Saturdays are usually a little bit easier for Abels than normal days.

"I try to start a little early," he said. "But since they don't allow parking on 16th Street, it's a little easier for me to get around."

Abels' last campus stop is Selleck Quadrangle, and after that he heads to his other route -- the Gaslight trailer court -- which takes him another 1 1/2 hours, he said. Then it's back to the main office to turn in the "accountables" paperwork and take care of mail addressed to non-existent places.

According to Abels, the dog-besieged mail carrier is one myth that is very closely tied to reality.

"Most of the carriers have been bitten by dogs," he said. Himself included.

"Once, really, but real close a second time," he said. "We have a spray that we carry, and that usually seems to deter them," Abels said. "But a few of them seem to like that stuff."

Besides, Abels said, most of the bites come from dogs that come up from behind.

"I've read that dog bites are down in the postal service," Abels said. "A lot of people joke about it, but there can be some pretty serious injuries out there."

"Some routes are notorious for dogs, and people try to get off of those as soon as possible," Abels added.

Abels is changing routes himself this week -- tomorrow will be his last day on the campus trek.

"It's the big sacks, mostly," he said. "They get pretty heavy, and I have a bit of a back problem."