

# Industry's Voice for Postal Reform

Gene Del Polito holds a doctorate in audiology. His hobby is his computer and the Web. And he is president of the Association for Postal Commerce, which represents a diverse membership on postal matters.

"Communication has always been important to me," he said.

Most recently he has been communicating with anyone who will listen about the urgency of reforming the U.S. Postal Service, which he believes has become a drag on American commerce.

"The main point on our agenda is to keep the mail as a viable means for transacting commerce," Del Polito said.

The Arlington, Va.-based association represents 350 companies, about 70 percent of all those in the country who use advertising mail.

"We believe mail is part of the American infrastructure and that the purpose of the infrastructure is to facilitate commerce, not impede it, as the Postal Service is doing today," he said.

Del Polito, who has testified before Congress and is a considerable presence on the Washington, D.C.-area postal scene, argues that the Postal Service can no longer operate effectively under the 1970 Postal Reorganization Act.

Over the past three decades, much in the economic world has changed, Del Polito said, and the Postal Service does not have the structure or flexibility to adjust.

"The Postal Service needs to be reformed so it operates as a real business," Del Polito said. "Now it operates as an insulated, protected system. If it were competitive, it would seek to minimize its costs and maximize its gains. But now it has no incentive to minimize its costs."

And its gains — namely revenues from postage rates — are controlled largely by forces outside its control.

Del Polito joined the Association for Postal Commerce 18 years ago, when it was called the Third Class Mail Association, as chief executive.

"When I first joined, it was concerned almost exclusively with third class, or standard, mail," Del Polito said, referring to the Postal Service's designation for circulars, direct mail and other advertising mailings. "But over time as the industry evolved and the Postal Service itself changed, we became aware of the fact that you can't just lobby one class of mail because our members mail across all class lines. We needed a solution that works well for everyone."

The name changed two years ago.

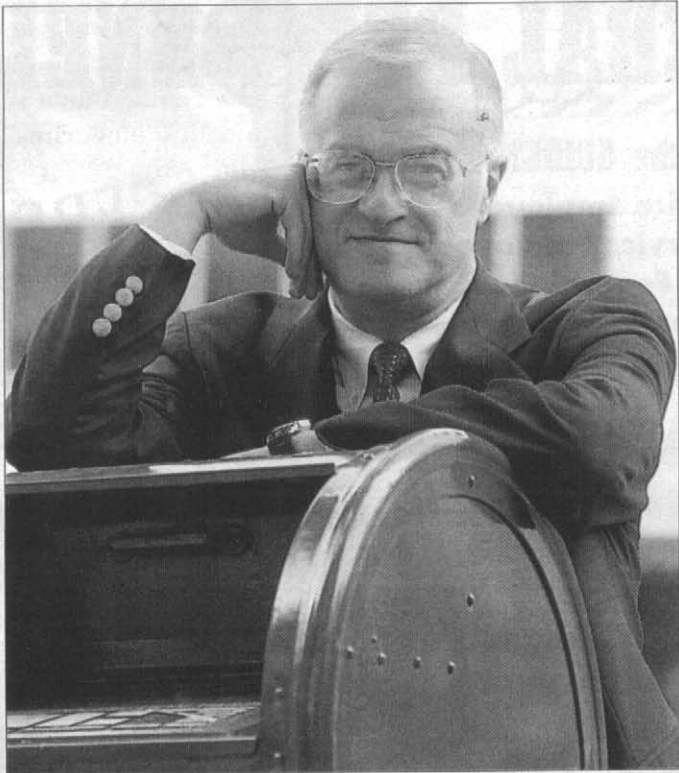
Founded in 1947, the association includes printers, letter shops, paper companies and stationery manufacturers. It has an annual budget of about \$1.2 million and a staff of four.

"Over the 18 years I've been here the standing of the association has grown greatly," Del Polito said.

"People recognize that we are serious and that we are a straight shooter."

Heading a group devoted to postal commerce is hardly something Del Polito planned early in his career.

A native of Bloomfield, N.J., he received an undergraduate degree in speech



FEDERAL TIMES/WARREN ZINN

"The Postal Service needs to be reformed so it operates as a real business," says Gene Del Polito, president of the Association for Postal Commerce.

pathology and speech communication from Montclair State College in New Jersey before receiving a doctorate and a master's degree in audiology and speech science from Purdue University.

For a brief time Del Polito was assistant professor in the surgery department and head of the audiology department at the Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. But he soon was on his way to Washington to work with the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association as audiology program director and then went on to head the Washington office of the American Society for Medical Technology.

"After I was with them for four years I looked for my own association," Del Polito said.

He found it with Postal Commerce. While he has been there, his work on behalf of those who use the mail has been recognized widely. He has received the association's Lee Epstein Award for outstanding service, the Mail Advertising Service Association's Miles Kimball Award for his work on behalf of the mail advertising and marketing industry, and the Greater Washington Society of Association Executives Monument Award for excellence in communications.

His pastimes track his vocation. "My

## IN PROFILE

**Best management advice received:** "Listen to your members, and deliver them what they demand."

**Career highlight:** "Creating an awareness of the need to revise our postal laws to better serve our nation's needs in the decades that lie ahead."

**Worst part of your job:** "Watching people leave your association — no matter the reason."

**Aspect of the U.S. Postal Service most in need of reform:** "The incentives that underlie the USPS need to be restructured to transform the Postal Service into a profit-maximizing, cost-minimizing competitive enterprise."

**Part of the job that came as a surprise:** "The importance of the postal system to the American economic infrastructure."

hobby is my computer and the Web. Our Web site was the first in the postal world, and we pioneered the use of the Web within postal trade organizations."

Dan Davidson