

Postal routes to grow

DeWitt postmaster to have rural carriers serve some city homes

By John B. Albright
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DeWITT — After taking mail from his lock box in the post office on North Bridge Street, John Spoelma of Washington Street took time to talk with neighbor Bob Davis, who was passing through.

"It usually takes me forever and a day to get away from here, because we just kind of visit," Spoelma, 71, said as he leaned on the open door of his Pontiac Bonneville near the postal facility's front door.

Cars were pulling in and out by the curb, and lobby doors were swinging as box holders, their keys at the ready, went in and came out with clutches of mail.

"It's a kind of meeting place, especially when it's nice weather," Spoelma said. "We get a lot of the oldtimers that come here to talk."

DeWitt is one of several small Lansing-area communities that don't have in-town delivery of mail. Residents pick up mail at the post office.

But a new postmaster in DeWitt plans to have rural carriers drop mail to some of the city's homes and businesses that they pass on their way to the countryside.

Postmaster Jim Van Pelt, 54, formerly of Owosso — where the mail does go through to city addresses — said he was unable to persuade his bosses in Grand Rapids this week to add a city carrier at DeWitt.

But Van Pelt said that by spring he'll split the current nine rural routes — serving a total of 4,778 addresses — into 11 smaller ones and tag into them deliveries for



GREG DeRUITER/Lansing State Journal

He delivers: Jim Van Pelt is the new DeWitt postmaster. He plans to increase the number of motor routes, so some customers won't have to stop at the post office to pick up mail.

some of the along-the-way places inside the city.

And, he'll install:

■ A free-standing case of 60 lock boxes in the lobby, in addition to 764 boxes there now.

■ Two more carriers' sorting stations in the 32-year-old postal building.

"The biggest problem right now in DeWitt is that it's growing so fast," Van Pelt said, referring to the scores of new houses springing up in DeWitt Township. "Everywhere you drive around here, there's a subdivision going up."

About 70 houses will rise this year, township Assistant Planner Doug Riley said, compared to 74 last year, 81 in 1993 and 73 in 1992.

The counts were 49 in 1991 and 46 in 1990.

The township surrounds DeWitt,

a Clinton County city of 3,964 people, west of U.S. 27, eight miles north of Lansing.

"One of the main complaints is that people are getting their mail so late in the afternoon," Van Pelt said. "By cutting the routes down in size, the carriers will be able to get out earlier and make quicker delivery."

After Postmaster Kevin Harry was sidelined by a 1993 heart attack, the DeWitt Post Office was headed in succession by Officers in Charge Bob Stephens, Ron Hopkins and Jim Meadows.

Van Pelt started here Jan. 21, having been customer service supervisor at the Owosso Post Office.

He's commuting from his Owosso home but expects to move to the DeWitt area. A daughter, Jennifer, is a senior at Owosso High School.

The Van Pelt file

■ Name: Jim Van Pelt
■ Occupation: DeWitt postmaster

■ Personal: Age 54, married, three children

■ Education: Owosso High School graduate, attended Northern Michigan University

An Owosso High School graduate himself, Van Pelt began his postal career as a carrier in 1965.

Harry, 43, at home in Lansing as he recovers from heart-transplant surgery, said he's asked to be assigned to work in an area post office.