

Park Tower Profile

Pete Zastrow: No Ordinary Mailman

by Bob Shamo

With an uncommon education, career experiences and outside interests, our own Pete Zastrow is really quite an extraordinary fellow. We sat down to talk the other day in the mailroom at the end of his work day.



Pete has worked for the Post Office for 35 years, the last five of which have included service to our building. Typically, his day begins at 7:30 am at the Uptown Branch on Broadway. By 9:30 am he's finished sorting and heads out to deliver. Doing Balmoral Avenue first – the old fashioned way, walking with a shoulder bag – he arrives here around noon, drops off packages in the receiving room, then proceeds to the mailboxes where he does the lower floors first. By mid-afternoon he has finished with the upper ones and heads back to the Uptown Branch for a 4:30 pm check out .. and another day is done.

Pete was born in New York City, grew up in Kentucky, and attended Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. While at Dartmouth he joined the campus ROTC unit (Reserve Officer Training Corps), whereby he received basic military training and a four year active service obligation as a commissioned officer following graduation. In Pete's case, that service was deferred for eight years while he pursued graduate work at Indiana University. At IU he earned a master's degree, worked as a teaching assistant, and went on to complete the course work for a PhD in English literature. Also during that time he taught as an adjunct professor at Thomas More College, just across the Ohio River in Kentucky.

But the army would wait no longer, and in 1969 Pete began active duty in Vietnam. Rising to the rank of Captain, he commanded a company of 100+ soldiers in the First Cavalry Division Air Mobile tasked with defending Saigon from infiltration by the North Vietnamese. "Saw a whole lot more combat than I wanted," said Pete, and then went on to describe the next chapter in his life.

Shortly after leaving military service, Pete became active in Vietnam Veterans Against the War. VVAW had recently staged its march on Washington where 1200 vets had thrown away their medals. John Kerry was an early member and had drawn attention to their cause in testimony before Congress. So VVAW became Pete's passion. For the next 28 years he did every job that needed doing, first as a volunteer in Cincinnati, then here in Chicago as one of the organization's six national coordinators. He resigned from that position in 2000 but continues to be active in the organization.

Even for its national officers, VVAW provided little more than communal housing and a small stipend for food. So while serving that organization, Pete also took on paid work. In 1979, the year he came to Chicago as a national coordinator, he signed on with the Post Office (USPS). His first assignment was as a temp employee at the O'Hare sorting facility and shortly after, full time here at the Uptown Branch.

Pete and his wife have three sons, two of whom live in Chicago, the other in San Diego following service aboard a U.S. Navy submarine. Longtime interests include reading and music. The latter finds expression in the work Pete does week-ends at Great Lakes Naval Training Station, where he provides music for Catholic masses. He selects and teaches the music to two choirs, one of which comprises energetic young men and women who are completing their eight weeks of boot camp.

As we wrapped up our interview, I asked Pete if he enjoyed his hours here at Park Tower. Yes, he said, particularly when residents smile and say hello, and he listed a few pointers: New residents might introduce themselves when Pete's here early in the afternoon, or at least leave their names in the new mailbox. Inform him when gone for extended periods so he can set their mail aside. And make sure that mail in and out of condos like ours has the unit number as part of the second address line (eg, 5415 N. Sheridan Rd, #XXXX).

Finally, he said, remember that postal work is exacting, that most mail persons are cordial and try hard to get it right. And so it is. Thanks, Pete 📧

To read one of the many papers Pete wrote, in collaboration with others, about the Vietnam War and the mission of the VVAW, go to www.ptcondo.com/ttref

THE CLEANING GUY

EDGEWATER, CHICAGO IL
weekdays & weekends
windows, households, laundry and pet services
excellent references

Jose Hernandez
773-827-6304