

RURAL MAIL CARRIER DRIVES A MILLION MILES ACCIDENT-FREE

by Bailey Darrow

Rural mail carrier Milton Ashburn delivers mail to Glenna Vincent at her home in Silver Point. Ashburn was recently honored by the postal service for 30 years of service and driving one million miles accident-free. Ty Kernea | Herald-Citizen



Postmaster Tim Knipp, left, presents mail carrier Milton Ashburn with his Million Mile Award. Ashburn has worked for the postal service for 30 years and has driven one million miles with no accidents.

PUTNAM COUNTY — Milton Ashburn remembers his first Thanksgiving as a mail carrier on the rural western end of Putnam County.

It was shortly after he took over the route in November of 1983.

“The day before Thanksgiving, I pulled up to this lady’s mailbox. She had her flag up, so I stopped,” Ashburn recalls. “I opened it up and there was a plate with foil over it with turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, green beans, corn and rolls. I never will forget that.”



Now 30 years later, Ashburn has traveled more than a million miles without being involved in an accident, serving people along the route who have become like a family to him.

“Everybody that is on my route is just about like a family,” he said. “When you have done this for 30 years, they are your family.”

Recently, Ashburn was presented the Million Mile Award, making him one of only a handful of route drivers in the

state to receive the award for driving accident-free. With more than 5,000 drivers in Tennessee, Ashburn considers this a pretty big accomplishment.

“The 30 years is good, but the million miles is just about unbelievable,” Ashburn said. “We travel some dangerous roads. A lot of the reason I have been so lucky is the guys with the Putnam County highway department keeping the roads in such good shape and keeping them mowed back.”

Ashburn’s route covers the Silver Point and Center Hill Dam areas.

When Ashburn started, he drove 125 miles each day, delivering to 478 boxes. Today, his route has shrunk to cover 102 miles, but reaches 518 boxes.

“When I first started, there were 15 stores in Silver Point where you could buy a cold drink,” Ashburn said. “Now there are only two.”

He has seen many changes during that time, from children growing up to changes in the way people use the postal service.

“When I started, stamps were 20 cents each,” he said. “Now they are 46 cents. They have only gone up 26 cents in 30 years.”

But the cost to fuel his truck, which he has gone through about 13 of over the years, has risen more dramatically, going from an average of \$7 a day to \$27 to \$30 a day now.

“When I started carrying the mail, I had to sell a lot of money orders because people would pay their bills with money orders,” he said. “I would write money orders out, take their money, give them a receipt and take their bill and money order and send it in. I haven’t written a money order in years.”

Ashburn also sold a lot of stamps from his truck when he started, allowing people to leave money for their postage in the box. If they needed change, Ashburn would just leave it in the box for them.

“A lot of these people, the only person they ever see is the mailman,” Ashburn said.

Even now, Ashburn is a staple in the Silver Point community, helping his customers with more than just the mail. There is one box along his route that sometimes has a gas can sitting next to it. That’s Ashburn’s sign that the older lady who lives there needs gas for her lawnmower. So, he picks up the can, fills it for her and brings it back after his route.

From time-to-time, she will leave the lawn mower sitting there, an indication that it needs repairs. So, he will pick it up and drop it off with a repairman, bringing it back when it is fixed.

He has changed tires for people, boost dead car batteries, get up cattle, look for lost dogs, fix TV cables and a long list of other duties that go outside his job of delivering the mail.

“It is unreal what I have had to do,” Ashburn said.

But he is glad to and knows that for some of the people on his route, he is their only connection to the outside world.

In 2007, he was delivering mail when he noticed two feet sticking up out of the ground. When he got a closer look, he realized that it was a man who had fallen into a drainage ditch. The man had been there for an hour and a half when Ashburn came along and pulled him out.

One afternoon, he noticed smoke coming from a home where he knew a handicap girl lived. He called 9-1-1 and walked around the house calling for the girl, but he could not find her. Ashburn watched as the roof of the home collapsed in the fire, crying because he thought she might still be in there.

“I know her. I see her everyday,” he said.

The girl wasn’t home after all. She had gone into town.

“When I got off my route I went back, and you talk about giving a kid a hug, I gave her a hug.”

He doesn’t hesitate to call authorities when he sees strange cars in driveways or suspicious people around.

“The mailman is the watchdog of the community,” he said. “Some people don’t realize that. They see every thing every day. They see strange cars, strange people and they watch about your stuff because they know

everybody's pattern."

He has been shot in the face with water pistols by neighborhood kids, provided ammunition for rubber band guns for children playing outside and had dogs bite holes in his tires, but he has also received countless Christmas presents, thank you cards and kind words as well.

"I have made a lot of great friends over the years and have been to a lot of funerals," Ashburn said.

For many years, one lady on his route left a dried apple cake for him in the box each year at Christmas time.

"It is little things like that that people do that makes it worth it, because people appreciate what you are doing," he said.

As the holiday season gets into full swing, Ashburn will deliver about 50 packages and nearly 2,000 pieces of mail a day.

And he knows all of his customers by name.

"I don't go by addresses, I go by names. The UPS guys sometimes stop and ask me where an address is, and I ask 'Who is it? Ask me the name, not the address. I go by names.'"

It is an honor, Ashburn said, to be given the Million Mile Award. There have been a few close calls, but he is looking forward to at least 10 more years as a mail man, hopefully accident-free.

"I have just been lucky to be able to drive a million miles and not have a wreck," he said.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 28 November 2013.

MILTON JOE ASHBURN, was a grandson of Lee P. Ashburn & Pearl Avo Carr.

***Jesse ASHBURN**, b. 9 July 1857, TN – d. 2 June 1941, s/o Emanuel Ashburn & Milly Stephens Baldwin.
Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life

***Martha Ann (Randolph) ASHBURN**, b. 3 May 1857, TN – d. 9 May 1926, d/o Lancaster Randolph & Rebecca Sherley.

Rest, mother, rest in quiet sleep, While friends in sorrow o'er thee weep

Lee Princes ASHBURN, b. 20 May 1888, TN – d. 30 January 1943, s/o Jesse Ashburn & Martha Ann Randolph.

'A friend to his country and a believer in Christ'

Lee P. Ashburn md on the 16th of July 1916, DeKalb Co., TN to Pearl Avo Carr, b. 17/20 July 1890, TN - d. 20 March 1918, d/o Winfield Scott Carr and Nancy Martin Carter. They had 1 son. Pearl Avo (Carr) Ashburn's death record states she was buried in Maynard Cemetery, DeKalb Co., TN. Father: Scott Carr and Mother: Nancy Carter.

(Tennessee State Marriages: Lee Ashburn married 16 July 1916, DeKalb Co., TN to Pearl Carr).

US Census 1900 –Civil Dist. 8– DeKalb Co., TN

Dwl: 216 Family: 219

Ashburn, Jesse Head 43 M W b. July 1857 M (23 yrs. md) Farming TN TN TN

Ashburn, Martha Wife 43 F W b. May 1857 M (23 yrs. md) (11 children born, 9 children living) House wife TN TN TN

Ashburn, Sam Son 17 M W b. July 1882 Single Farm laborer TN TN TN

(Sam Ashburn md Mattie V. Carr)

Ashburn, W. A. Son 15 M W b. September 1884 Single Farm laborer TN TN TN

(William Arthur Ashburn md Minnie Bell Burton)

Ashburn, Luann Dau 13 F W b. November 1886 Single House cook TN TN TN
Ashburn, Lola Dau 11 F W b. May 1889 Single House cook TN TN TN
Ashburn, Lee Son 11 M W b. May 1889 Single Farm laborer TN TN TN
Ashburn, Bettie Dau 7 F W b. May 1893 Single TN TN TN
Ashburn, Dee Son 4 M W b. August 1895 Single TN TN TN
Ashburn, Oval Son 2 M W b. March 1898 Single TN TN TN

US Census 1910 Civil Dist. 8, Austin Rd., DeKalb Co., TN

Dwl: 38 Family: 38

Ashburn, Jesse Head 52 M W M (32 yrs. md) Farmer General Farm TN TN TN
Ashburn, Martha Wife 52 F W M (32 yrs. md) (11 children born, 9 children living) TN MO VA
Ashburn, Albert W. Son 25 M W Single Rural Carrier Rural Route TN TN TN
(William Albert Ashburn md Minnie Bell Burton)
Ashburn, Luann Dau 23 F W Single TN TN TN
Ashburn, Lola B. Dau 20 F W Single TN TN TN
Ashburn, Lee P. Son 20 M W Single Farm laborer TN TN TN
(Lee Princes Ashburn md Pearl Carr. DC# 3322, Putnam Co., TN)
Ashburn, Bettie J. Dau 17 F W Single Farm laborer TN TN TN
Ashburn, Allie D. Son 15 M W Single TN TN TN *(Allie Dee Ashburn md Boda P.)*
Ashburn, Oval Son 13 M W Single TN TN TN

US Census 1920 Civil Dist. 13, Silver Point Rd., Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 2 Family: 2

Ashburn, Jesse Head 62 M W Married Farmer General Farm TN TN TN
(Jesse Ashburn, s/o Emanuel Ashburn & Milly Stephens Baldwin. Jesse Ashburn, (1857-1941)
Ashburn, Martha Wife 62 F W Married TN MO VA *(Martha Randolph, (1857-1926)*
Ashburn, Luann Dau 32 F W Single TN TN TN
Ashburn, Lee P. Son 30 M W Widow Farmer General Farm TN TN TN
(Lee Princes Ashburn md Pearl Avo Carr. DC# 3322, Putnam Co., TN)
Ashburn, Oval Son 21 M W Married Farm Laborer TN TN TN
Ashburn, Nola L. Dau-in-Law 17 F W Married TN TN TN
Ashburn, Mala? (sp) Grandson 2 6/12 M W Single TN TN TN

*Read more about the history of Putnam Co., TN & its people at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>