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JAFFREY

Count him in

Post Office boxholder travels to Keene to get census form

By PRISCILLA MORRILL

Monadnock Ledger-Transcript

JAFFREY — A couple of weeks ago, when Rob Stephenson still hadn't received a 2010 Census form, he began to wonder why.

"I'm sure there are people out there wondering where their census form is," Stephenson, a Jaffrey resident, said Friday. "Everybody should have received it by now if they were going to be getting it by mail."

Stephenson said he inquired with his postmaster, who informed him the U.S. Census Bureau did not send census forms to post office boxes.

"I would not have pursued this except that I'm going away for a couple of months," Stephenson said. He wanted to be sure he did his part to provide accurate population counts for Jaffrey.

"For anybody interested in politics, it's how they determine Congressional districts," he said.

Worried his household wouldn't be counted, Stephenson said, he searched the Bureau's website for answers about what to do if you are a post office box holder. Not finding any relevant information online, he called a customer service phone number and was told not to worry because a census worker is sent to any household that doesn't respond. When he said he wouldn't be home, he was told he could pick up a form at Brewbakers, a coffee shop in Keene.

Stephenson found the display at Brewbakers last week, he said, and he filled out the form and mailed it in.

But the situation left him a little perplexed. Why would the forms be left at a coffee shop and not the library or post office? What is the rationale behind not mailing census forms to post office boxes? And, why does the Bureau mail postcards to post office boxes?

"I just find the whole thing inexplicable."

Rob Stephenson
Jaffrey

through Wednesday and, upon giving their physical address, can request that a form be sent to their P.O. Box. It isn't too late to mail in a census form, but by the end of the week households will likely end up on a list for census workers to visit, he said.

"We'll send people out in the evenings, weekends and during the day if we have to," said Horgan. "We'll have dozens of people in each community doing that work."

Horgan said a coffee shop is a good place to reach college students who are often difficult to track, he noted. The only difference between the Be Counted forms at such locations and forms mailed to physical addresses, he said, is that they don't have pre-coded addresses on them.

A report dated April 17, 2003, at the Bureau's Web site, reported a high turnover rate for post office box addresses and problems associated with sending forms to them.

"In research conducted for this evaluation, discussions with postal staff indicated that P.O. boxes often have a high turnover rate and are sometimes immediately reissued to a new renter, when the previous renter closes the box," the report reads. "The unintended recipient factor can negatively affect the accuracy of administrative record census by potentially undercounting or double counting individuals at addresses in the final consolidation and tally."

At the Bureau's website, those who have not received forms are encouraged to call the Questionnaire Assis-

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But the situation left him a little perplexed. Why would the forms be left at a coffee shop and not the library or post office? What is the rationale behind not mailing census forms to post office boxes? And, why does the Bureau mail postcards to post office boxes notifying people of part-time jobs available, but not census forms?

"I just find the whole thing inexplicable," he said.

On Monday, Mike Horgan of the U.S. Census Bureau's regional office in Boston said forms are not mailed to P.O. Boxes because the census is a geographical population count.

"We want to make sure we tabulate people in the communities where they live," Horgan said. "There's no way we can keep track of post office boxes and tie them to a physical address."

Post office box holders, he said, can call the Questionnaire Assistance Line

**Rob Stephenson,
Jaffrey**

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At the Bureau's website, those who have not received forms are encouraged to call the Questionnaire Assistance center at 1-866-872-6868, which will remain open through July 30, or to expect a census worker's visit.

The forms cannot be filled out online.

In addition to determining the number of seats a state has in the U.S. House of Representatives, responses to the census — to which every household is required by law to respond — will also determine how much federal funds a community is to receive for such things as hospitals, job training centers, schools, public works projects, emergency services and senior centers, according to the Bureau's website.