

# Hers is a mail world

By MARY LOUISE BIRKS  
Times staff writer

When 29-year-old Debbie Bigos started as a letter carrier in Toronto nearly four years ago, she was something of an oddity.

There were only 20 female letter carriers in Toronto at the time. Her biggest problem then was the reaction of fellow workers who felt her presence "inhibited them."

That's changed, too. Today, at Mississauga's postal station A where Bigos works as a supervisory letter carrier, doing vacation relief in the summer and inside work in the winter, 15, of the 60 letter carriers are women.

And why not?, says Bigos. It's a good job, it pays well and the hours are terrific, especially for working mothers, says Bigos.

A working day that leaves her more time for her two children — 12 and eight — is what attracted Bigos to the letter carrier's job. Her day starts at 6:30 a.m. in the station where she sorts her mail, and "ties it out" (tying it into little bundles for delivery). It's trucked to the "drops" (green boxes dotted along the routes).

The carriers leave the station at 8 a.m. they can walk or take the bus free of charge, to their routes.

An average morning delivery takes between 2½ and three hours.

Bigos estimates the average "walk" (route) has about 400 points of call.

It's back to the station at 11:30 a.m. for a half-hour lunch break before the afternoon routine.

Official quitting time is 3 p.m.

Starting wage for a letter carrier is \$8.45 an hour with three weeks' holidays after six months' service. Bigos says letter carriers work hard for their money.

Toting a full 30-pound mailbag three to five miles a day is character-building if nothing else, says 117-pound mail carrier.

Like her co-workers, she's prone to the letter carriers' woes — cold feet in winter, hot feet in summer, and sore feet and backache anytime.

What sustains her on the days her body rebels is her belief that hers is an essential service. It's easy to be proud of what you do if the public appreciates it, says Bigos.

People contact is an integral part of the job.

"This is the type of job where you get to know your people very quickly by name," says the Folkway Drive resident. "And the nicest part of the job is that people are always happy to see you. Everyone likes to get mail and even if you're bringing them their bills, they'll make a joke of it. Ordinarily, they probably wouldn't speak to just anyone on the street but to a letter carrier, that's different."



MORRIS LAMONT/THE TIMES

Debbie Bigos says postal work is ideal for mothers

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