

LOOP NORTH NEWS

Streeterville



World still has place for postcards

A Streeterville company has found a new market for old-fashioned postcards.

By Don DeBat

21-Feb-16 – Every home has a mailbox. Usually it is stuffed with credit card offers, utility and cable bills, offers for auto and life insurance, and plenty of junk mail.

But every few months, a check arrives from someone who owes you money, or a letter or unexpected hand-written invitation comes from someone you really care about.

Millions of people have their eyes glued to tech devices these days, but there still is room in this crazy world for reading a few simple words written on a love note or a postcard that is delivered by the U.S. Mail.

Last week, everyone from Millennials to Baby Boomers and Depression-era retirees were elated to receive a valentine.

"I was surprised and happy to get a valentine greeting this week from an old beau," said an 85-year-old North Sider with a twinkle in her blue eyes.

This writer's "house of cards" can be found in a giant glass bowl in the family room filled with a year's worth of birthday congrats, holiday greetings, Father's Day and Mother's Day cards. Because they express simple messages of greetings of friendship and love, we just can't bring ourselves to throw them away.

That's why this Old School columnist was intrigued when he learned about smART postcards Inc., a Streeterville-based postcard company that creates engaging graphic materials designed to stimulate and entertain preschool children – age 3 to 5 years.

Preschoolers today are "almost universally exposed" to expensive mobile devices – from smart phones to tablet computers, according to a recent study in the journal *Pediatrics*.

But shockingly, some Millennials admit they have never purchased a stamp and mailed a letter in one of those rusting blue mailboxes that seem to be disappearing from street corners everywhere.

Despite these disturbing trends, **Kathleen Hess**, president of smART postcards, believes in the tried-and-true concept of sending postcards to preschoolers through the U.S. Mail.

smART postcards was conceived to engage Hess' grandchildren, Anna and Klaira, and introduce them to a visual world based on her design knowledge. When Anna was three years old, Hess started mailing weekly, colorful and visually interesting postcards, addressed directly to Anna, and then discussed the cards in weekly follow-up long-distance phone calls.

Initially, Hess purchased individual cards at museum shops and greeting card stores, a task that became more difficult when pursuing a specific theme such as the alphabet, colors, or counting. This eventually led to the creation of smART postcards, a portfolio of her own graphic images to share with others.

Hess has created three series of 4 x 6-inch picture postcards designed for preschoolers that illustrate the alphabet, colors, and counting. She offers a total of 51 colorful photo postcards which place familiar subjects in lively and artful graphic compositions.

The postcards illustrate 26 letters from A to Z, a dozen colors from hot red to cool blue, and numbers to help young children learn to count from one to ten.

To add to the stimulating experience, the word for each number or color is printed on the back of the card in five languages – English, French, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese.



The photography was done mostly at Chicago-area locations, including Lincoln Park Zoo, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, and Brookfield Zoo.

Utilizing the U.S. Mail as a delivery system for the postcards is a key part of the preschooler's experience.

"Children enjoy receiving mail in their own name, as a regular event," Hess said. "This can foster self-identity and self-worth."

"An unexpected graphic image, when coupled with verbal descriptions in multiple languages, introduces children to a global outlook, which nurtures literacy, comprehension, and reasoning," noted Hess, who outlined details of the three series of postcards...

Alphabet. This set consists of 26 photo postcards illustrating the letters A through Z. Each of the cards offers a delightful visual experience that places familiar subjects in lively and artful graphic compositions.

A photo of three red apples, one with a bite out of it, is on the front of the *A* postcard (right), with a block letter and the word "apples" printed on the back of the card in English.



Colors. Twelve postcards illustrated by familiar subjects represent beige, black, blue, brown, gray, green, orange, pink, purple, red, white, and yellow. A photo of three blue balloons is on the front of the *Blue* postcard, and the word "blue" is printed on the back of the card in the five languages.

Counting. Ten postcards represent numbers 1 to 10. The photo of the hand in the familiar thumbs-up position is on the front of the *No. 1* postcard, and the word "one" is printed on the back of the card again, in the same five languages.

The 26-card Alphabet series is priced at \$15.95. The 12-card Colors series sells for \$8.95. A 10-card Counting series costs \$7.95. A set of all three postcard series retails for \$27.95. All Internet sales include free shipping.

● Website: smART.postcards