

# Newspaper carrier job has its rewards, perils

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You pull out the tightly bound parcel of papers from its plastic sack and watch the colourful goodies unfurl: sales flyers, special offers and community stories delivered right to your doorstep.

Or maybe you frown because the parcel landed in a driveway puddle. Maybe your favourite store flyer is missing or maybe you didn't receive your paper at all and that's messed up your shopping or weekend plans.

Do you curse the carrier? Call to complain?

Or do you spare a thought to what it takes to get your paper and flyers to your door — especially in these dark, dreary days of December?

What it takes is a lot of teamwork, youthful enthusiasm, organization — and it doesn't hurt to have a pair of good, weather-proof boots.

Before you set this newspaper aside to leaf through your flyers, take a quick peek at the journey it took to get to your door.

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It's one of those cold and wet early winter days that chill your bones.

The subdivision in north Richmond Hill is quiet and lifeless-looking, but behind one of those closed garage doors is a hive of activity. Matthew, 11, and Dylan, 10, have their own little assembly line going.

The Melnychenko brothers work quietly and quickly.

With a stack of water bottles and two upturned buckets as his "desk", Matthew acts as foreman, sorting through seven stacks of flyers, preparing his parcels for delivery.

Behind him, Dylan rolls the parcels with elastic bands, dad keeping a watchful eye in the background.

Jeff Melnychenko is happy his sons want to be carriers, something he did as a boy, too, teaching him much about life and hard work.

Of course, back then it was the daily paper and he had no days off except New Year's and he had to collect subscription money (and it was always a blizzard and uphill both ways, he adds with a laugh).

The boys pay no attention to his reminiscing. They've got jobs to do and it has to be done quickly tonight — there's hockey practice later.

They've been doing this for over a year, delivering to 109 homes, and neither rain nor sleet nor snow stops them from getting the papers out.

Of course, there have been some sketchy weather days, especially last year when the ice turned one neigh-



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Brothers Parker and Tristin Cespite (above), with dad, Joe, and mom, Mary, sort through flyers inside their home. Matthew, (below, left) and brother Dylan Melnychenko organize flyers and papers in their garage.



STAFF PHOTO/KIM ZARZOUR

bour's front porch steps into an awesome slide.

It takes the brothers up to three hours to sort the flyers, count and wrap them and deliver, starting as soon as they're home from school.

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It means they can't enjoy video games Thursday nights, but it's worth

it. Matthew proudly points to the BMX bike in the garage his earnings helped him buy.

With the weather and holiday sales making papers thick and heavy, this is the toughest time of year, but the boys take it in stride.

"We just power through it," Dylan says with a grin.

A few miles to the north, in Newmarket, the DeBeer family is also hard at work.

Paper assembly takes place in the main living room, a busy, family-friendly place; phone ringing, cookies baking, dog doing its thing in one corner, pet turtle in another, and in the centre three girls sorting weekly flyers.

As for most carrier families, this is day two of sorting. Extra holiday

flyers make more work, and it can take even longer when they have to be squeezed into bags to protect against the weather.

Today they're assisted by their friend Juliana, a frequent guest and ready helper.

With the short days of December, they try to start deliveries before the roads get dark and busy with commuters' cars driving home.

This has been a family affair for several years, beginning with Nicole, who delivered from Grade 6 until she reached Grade 10 and passed the torch on to younger sister Hanna.

Now that she is tall enough to reach the mailboxes, Kristen, the youngest, is keen to take over.

Homes are a little further apart here in northern York Region. They are grateful to neighbours who keep driveways clear of ice and front entryways well lit. A dark house can be intimidating, their mother, Judy DeBeer, says.

In the dimming light the girls fan out onto the cul de sac, dog Sam traipsing alongside in the blowing leaves, as familiar with the routine as the sisters. Streetlights flick on and a few neighbours reach out their doors to take the paper and say a quick hello.

All three girls recommend this job — not just for the spending money, but the activities offered to carriers such as movie nights and reward points.

For the DeBeers, it has been bonding time and even though Nicole has "retired" to attend college and work other jobs, she still helps out in a pinch, as does their father on Sundays when they have homework to do.

"It's taught them work ethic and gets them out in the fresh air," Judy says, "a chance for some chit chat and a little exercise."

In Oak Ridges, the Cespite brothers are just beginning their careers as carriers and they're brimming with enthusiasm.

Tristin, 12, explains with pride how he has earned 1,000 points in the six months since he took on this route, part of a Metroland program that rewards young carriers for such things as community service, good grades and zero lates at school, praise from customers and collecting newspaper bags for re-use.

The first few weeks were a scramble because their swimming lessons were scheduled for Thursday nights

## GOOD TO KNOW:

- Each week, York Region Media Group newspapers are delivered to more than 300,000 homes, from condominiums to farmhouses.
- 25 drivers start delivering flyers to carrier homes Tuesday; newspapers are delivered to carriers Thursday between 5 a.m. and 3 p.m.
- More than 4,000 carriers have until 7 p.m. Thursday to deliver papers in normal weather conditions.
- Most carriers are students aged 10 to 14 who do their routes after school; adult carriers, many of whom are stay-at-home parents or seniors, may start deliveries early Thursday morning
- Mid November to Christmas is the busiest time for carriers, (papers can weigh 7 lbs each) with April and back-to-school days second busiest times.
- Delays can happen due to weather, machine breakdowns, delays in flyers/papers arriving at the warehouse; even a carrier's mom or dad detained on way home from work.

and dad, Joe, got stuck with the job. With his bad knees, it took two hours to sort.

Now they're careful to keep that night free and have a sorting system that takes just 20 minutes, the entire family working together in their cozy family room, with pizza dinner as their weekly reward.

Today, Tristin is showing younger brother, Parker, the ropes. The 10-year-old has just been hired as carrier; he's keen to save up for an iPadAir2 64G.

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But there are other rewards, Tristin says: the neighbours who make a point of saying thank you and praise them for being on time, and a brotherly competition to beat delivery records.

While the boys see the fun in the job, their mother, Mary, reminds them customers come first. She, too, likes to spread her flyers on the table to comparison shop and she likes it when they arrive dry, and on time.

"I tell them you could do a good job, but why not do a great job?"