



## Not at This Address

At first it didn't seem like a big deal. A half dozen emails citing problems with delivery of the fall 2009 issue of *Sooner Magazine*. We hear that frequently. Of the 204,000 alumni on the University data base with supposedly valid addresses, approximately one-third make some sort of change each year—name, residence, marital status, additions to the list, deletions from the list, home address preferred—no, make it the office. Sooners, it seems, are a fluid bunch.

But as the number of complaints grew, by email, regular mail and telephone, we determined that there was something crazy going on. These people were not concerned that their addresses were wrong—the addresses were fine—but the name on the magazine label wasn't theirs. And it wasn't just a few, or a few hundred; a majority of the 44,000 donors and members of the Alumni Association who receive the magazine appeared to have the same problem. Thinking their situation was unique, a good many of them contacted us, all day, every day for weeks.

Most of our callers rightly deduced a computer glitch, which turned out not to be an internal one within the OU Foundation or the University but rather originating with an outside vendor that our longtime contract mailing service hired to ferret out undeliverable addresses. A number of readers thought we had completely fouled up their giving records, possibly affecting their tax returns—or even worse their qualification for athletic tickets; a few merely felt unrecognized and unappreciated; and a couple were just plain mad at us.

The mailing service felt so badly that this snafu had happened on its watch that it sent an apology postcard to the entire mailing list—which was a good thing, but did alert a number of read-

ers that they had not received a copy at all. Hence another wave of concerned messages.

The situation was not without its benefits, however. Never before have we had such direct contact with our readers, who for the most part are pretty good-natured folk. A lady from Florida con-

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fessed that she did not know that this unknown man was living in her house, but she was going immediately to look for him. She also wondered if we were trying a new form of social networking. An alumna in Duncan had recognized the name on her magazine and redelivered it to that fellow, who then took his mislabeled copy to another Duncanite, aged 90, whom he knew would be missing her *Sooner Magazine*. The originator of this round-robin ended up without a magazine and asked for a replacement.

An astonishing number of readers went to great lengths to find the correct addresses for the persons listed on their magazines and either remailed the errant copies or forwarded the corrections for our records. Several parents updated the whereabouts of their recent graduate children; others let us know of alumni deaths.

A reader from Houston asserted that she and her husband had lived at their address for 20-plus years—and now some fellow they didn't even know was trying to "take their spot." Another hoped that we would correct "Mr. Smith's" address "so that he may live in his own house and not crowd into mine." One graduate was inspired to write a letter to the editor bringing his classmates up to date on his life since 1942; several had story ideas for future issues.

A touching note from Bob Knoblock, a Texas-Okie and proud of it, expressed appreciation for all that his OU education has meant in his life—being able to participate in so many architectural projects, to educate his two daughters and, "the best gift of all, my first wife Pat Boulton, Class of '56, who died in 1987." Alice Dodge Wallace, from her retirement community in Boulder, reminded us that she and the eight surviving members of the 1941 Mortar Board still keep in touch via a round-robin letter that has been going for nearly 70 years.

The publications staff—all two of us—had some fascinating conversations, in my case with some classmates I hadn't spoken to since our long-ago graduation. Almost all the communications we received, spoken or written, ended with a compliment about the magazine and why it was important for them to continue receiving it—preferably under their own name.

Finally it occurred to me to check my personal issue of the fall 2009 *Sooner Magazine*, the one that comes to my home but is never read there. Flipping it over, I saw to my delight that the address was perfect—name, street number, city, state and ZIP code—just as pristine as God and the U.S. Postal Service had intended. What a relief. I just hate it when someone gets my name wrong.

—CJB