

# Turmoil at the Aptos post office

By SUSAN FERRISS

Problems that have been brewing over the last year between workers at the Aptos post office and the branch's controversial postmaster appear to be getting worse.

On Tuesday, a group of employees at the Aptos branch were informed they will either be fired or put on suspension by Postmaster Carol Clyde, who accused the workers of violating the service's behavior code and talking with persons outside the system's inspection service during an internal investigation.

The disciplinary actions are the latest round in an ongoing battle at the Aptos office that has pit Ms. Clyde against clerks and carriers and residents of Aptos who are dissatisfied with the branch's service.

So far, several employees told the Register-Pajaronian, two letter carriers have been given notices of termination and three have been suspended for two weeks. The five were part of a group of 10 Aptos workers who signed letters to postal inspectors and to the public, charging that Postmaster Clyde mistakenly threw away several thousand fliers from Hartnell College in Salinas. The employees said they drew up the complaint because they understood that by law the mail should have been delivered or the college contacted and told the fliers had insufficient address information.

The fliers apparently had only addresses and no names on them.

Ms. Clyde said she could not discuss details of the disciplinary actions she has proposed, saying only that the employees' "course of action reflects negatively on the others (at the post office)."

"The majority of the employees are dedicated" to the postal system, she said. "There are a

few individuals who are unhappy (at Aptos).

Carrier Dwayne Walker, an 11-year employee at Aptos, said he initiated the action to contact the Postal Inspection Service and ask for an investigation of Ms. Clyde's order to throw away the Hartnell College mail.

"I thought it was my official

Clyde fired and suspended the workers in retaliation for their move to have her conduct investigated and because of ongoing tension between her and the employees.

Aptos clerks and carriers have filed at least 60 grievances with their unions since Ms. Clyde took over as postmaster last August, charging

---

*Postal workers have filed at least 60 grievances with their unions, charging that the postmaster disciplines workers unfairly.*

---

duty as a (union) shop steward" to report that mail had been thrown away, said Walker, adding that he is "expecting" to get a notice of suspension from Clyde.

Walker said that in addition to a letter to inspectors, another letter describing the incident was drawn up by one of the employees and somehow reached an Aptos post office patron.

The workers "violated some rules and regulations" by writing the letter to a patron, said William Lawrence, postmaster of San Jose and the regional manager who recommended Ms. Clyde for the position as Aptos postmaster. "There was a letter sent to the public by the people," and the firings and suspensions "involve" that letter, he added.

Lawrence said that Postmaster Clyde contacted him after the mail had been thrown away in error. "It was a mistake; we admitted it and we didn't try to hide it. It was handled the way it should have been," he said.

Aptos employees and carrier and clerk union leaders interviewed said they believe Ms.

that she disciplines workers unfairly.

One of the carriers fired Tuesday said that she — the carrier — and other employees may "fight this through our union and possibly through our own attorneys." The carrier, who asked not to be named, said that she was told that the letter to patrons seriously damaged the "integrity" of the Postal Service.

The carrier said that she believed that the Aptos branch's "integrity was already in question" at the time the Hartnell mail incident was revealed to the public.

Since Ms. Clyde took over as postmaster, customers have complained repeatedly to Postal Service administrators and Congressman Leon Panetta that their mail is delivered hours and sometimes days late.

Some residents are apparently circulating a petition calling for the replacement of Ms. Clyde. Last spring, the Rio del Mar Improvement Assn. met with Ms. Clyde to discuss complaints about mail service. "We have seen no improvement" since then, said Ray

Garcia, the group's president. He added that he thought the Aptos branch does not have "the friendly atmosphere it used to have."

San Jose Postmaster Lawrence defended Ms. Clyde, calling her a "very competent woman" who is not responsible for some of the difficulties in mail delivery recently. He said that this area has been troubled by an uncommonly "high workload" in the last six months, and that the Postal Service is attempting to overcome the problem by hiring more employees at Aptos.

According to postal workers' union representatives, the turnover rate at Aptos has risen dramatically since Ms. Clyde took over in August. Nearly half the workers at Aptos have left their jobs because of pressures, or have been fired or asked to be transferred, according to Joseph Beggs, president of the American Postal Workers Union for Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties.

"None of the employees wanted to leave," Beggs added, saying that jobs in Aptos have always been considered "plum positions." As for the recent disciplinary actions, Beggs said "this is the way she (Ms. Clyde) responds to everything." Beggs said the postmaster "is not capable of handling" employees, and has "mistreated them badly" since she took over.

The union president and several workers said the postmaster harasses workers, and refuses to talk directly to them before issuing them formal warnings that remain in their personal folders for at least two years.

Letter carrier Walker said one worker pinched his thumb in his jeep while on the job and was issued a warning charging him with an "unsafe act of inattention."