

Holiday time, hectic time, at Shorewood's Mail Boxes Etc.

By Robert McGuire
Staff Writer

"We do a lot of packing," said John Rogga, manager of the Shorewood location of Mail Boxes Etc.

It's the understatement of the holiday season. Rogga is standing in a sea of packing materials facing what would qualify as Hercules' 13th task — the four weeks before Christmas at a business specializing in packing and shipping.

It is before the deluge, early in the morning a few days before the official shopping season begins. Most people don't yet have any gifts to ship. Rogga is breaking down boxes, getting supplies in order, hiring college students for temporary help.

Rogga will indeed be doing a lot of packing.

"During about the two weeks before Christmas, this place becomes a madhouse," Rogga says calmly.

"There's nothing even close to it. Thousands of boxes go out of here. You know how it is at Christmas. People wait too long."

But how long is, too long? Well, United Parcel Service just faxed Rogga a "caution." Waiting until after this Monday is pushing it.

Christmas is on a Wednesday, so a lot of people will go shopping on Sunday, Dec. 22, and figure they are doing OK. If you're sending the gifts out of town, however, forget it. After the 21st, all bets are off.

Rogga, a Shorewood resident, is managing the store for his son Brian Rogga, who retired from the legal profession to open a Mail Boxes Etc. in Brookfield. He opened the Shorewood franchise in a former Domino's Pizza place at 4230 N. Oakland Ave. in 1992.

The Shorewood location usually has three full-time employees. To handle the December crush, they've hired another eight to help out the next few weeks.

Said the elder Rogga of the decision to open a Mail Boxes Etc. in Shorewood: "The big reason is location, the fact that there is parking.

It's easy on and off.

"(We) have the ability to ship it all, big and small. That's our motto."

In fact, as he talked to a reporter, Rogga was puzzling over the best way to ship a futon mattress and frame for a customer.

They don't promise to ship it all for less than a fortune, but they will ship it.

Case in point: One prospective customer wanted to mail his motorcycle to his new home across the country rather than drive it. Rogga checked it out and found a way to do it — through motor freight in a very big crate — but the customer decided he would be better off selling the Harley here and buying another one after the move.

"Primarily, we can investigate any option and get some answers for the customer," Rogga said.

The customers who do take up Mail Boxes Etc. on their services ship everything from care packages for distant college students to computers to pricey artwork.

The company might want to modify the motto to "we ship it all, big and small, anywhere." Destinations of packages Rogga has shipped include Africa and Russia. As a constant reminder of the world at large, wall clocks behind the counter tell the time in Tokyo, Honolulu, Moscow, London and Milwaukee.

While the bread and butter of the operation is packing and shipping, the business has several sidelines, including private mailboxes. Rogga says Mail Boxes Etc. has different rules than the post office about how long they will hold packages, so small businesses and traveling salespeople find it more convenient to have packages sent to private boxes at Mail Boxes Etc. than to their homes or a post office box.

They also have a photocopy machine and a fax service, and sell stationery, office supplies and greeting cards.

Perhaps if you're in there late next week you can buy a card to include with the gift you're sending: "Sorry this is late, but . . ."