

Keeping stamp collecting alive



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By [Karen Pearlman \(/staff/karen-pearlman/\)](/staff/karen-pearlman/) | 1:42 p.m. May 24, 2016 | Updated , 1:49 p.m.



Stamp collector Don Chafetz shows off his stamps passport book, the book contain special stamps from stamp shows he has been to. May 11, 2016. Photo by David Hodges.

El Cajon — Longtime stamp collector Donald Chafetz is a little concerned about the future of postage stamps.

Linn's Stamp News, the world's largest newsmagazine for stamp collectors, estimates that more than 5 million people in the United States collect stamps.

But the 77-year-old New York native poses an interesting query: How many letters did you receive today with a real postage stamp on them?

Chafetz then went to the mailbox at the Fletcher Hills home he shares with his wife of 54 years, Betty, and displayed four pieces of mail, none of which had a stamp.

"Not many people are using stamps anymore," Chafetz said. "Stamp collecting is not what it was."

Evidently, however, there is still enough interest in philately that local, national and international stamp shows are still regularly happening. San Diego has a Philatelic Council and an annual San Diego-based Sandical stamp show.

Chafetz, an active member in the Philatelic 25 Club of San Diego, has been selected as a speaker and exhibitor at the 2016 World Stamp Show in New York City that will take place from Saturday through June 4. Chafetz is the First Vice President of the Society of Israel Philatelists, a group that focuses on Judaic- and Holy Land-themed postal items.

At this year's show, Chafetz will share an exhibit that will include a Holocaust Stamp Project put together by children from a Massachusetts school; synagogue postmarks from around the world; and a baseball-themed page featuring three Jewish ballplayers, Barney Dreyfuss, Lipman Emanuel Pike and Moe Berg.

He will also share an exhibit on printed matter from The Holy Land sent from the Middle East 1879 through 1948 to places around the world.

Chafetz also will give two lectures. One of the talks will share tips on how to be a published author. He said he hopes to encourage more people to write for his journal. The other lecture will be about how to be an editor.

The show is expected to draw at least a quarter of a million people at the Jacob Javits Center. The United States hosts the world stamp show every 10 years. This year's World Stamp Show will feature more than 200 sellers and buyers of philatelic material, stamp auctions and more than 4,000 competitive exhibits and collections.

Chafetz keeps his stamp collection in his own special room upstairs at his home.

In addition to a few photos of his two children and two grandchildren, the room features an old machine that once sold 5-cent and 10-cent U.S. stamps "in Sanitary Folders," and nearly 50 books filled with historic stamps from around the world. From this room he edits a quarterly journal by the Society of Israel Philatelists, called "The Israel Philatelist."

"It's a clutter room," Chafetz said of the space he created for himself, a space where he has spent about five hours a day since 2003, when he was named editor of the journal.

"My wife said, 'Don't do it,' " he said. "So of course I did it."

Most of Chafetz's time is spent putting together the journal and updating its online presence. His efforts with "The Israel Philatelist" recently placed 10th out of 33 entries in a German literary competition held in Monaco. It has also won a gold medal in the American Philatelic Society literature competition.

Chafetz, a retired engineer for Exxon, started collecting stamps in Buffalo, N.Y., when he was 11, by default. A cousin lost interest in her collection and passed it on to him.

Chafetz became intrigued with the stories behind stamps and found himself looking into postal markings, the history of printed matter on postal covers and cards, advertising pieces and all types of postal materials from around the globe.

While in New York, Chafetz will meet with members of the Executive Board of the Society of Israel Philatelists. He will present a marketing plan he hopes will help pique interest in stamp collecting.

Although the speed of communication is faster these days with the Internet, the downside is that personal mail is rare. Hobbies like stamp collecting have suffered. Chafetz said he has a plan, much of which includes adapting to the online world where eBay has become the local stamp store.

He said the group must target pre-teens by way of games and cartoons and millennials through YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.

"We are looking for the next generation who will be interested in ... our collections," Chafetz said. "We are looking for collectors who will carry on the work we and our predecessors have accomplished."

He also has a plan for the 40- to-60-year-old market. He believes that age group is the primary target market, those who are familiar with stamps and may have some nostalgia associated with stamp collections from their youth.

"Collecting stamps gives me a purpose," Chafetz said. "It's been good for retirement and it helps me keep in contact with people all over the world. Now I'm trying to spread the knowledge."

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