By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

Changes in flat rate shipping along with a new Express Mail envelope are coming in January, according to a recent news release by the U.S. Postal Service.

An overall price change of 3.5 cents for Priority Mail will take effect Jan. 2, 2011.

Additionally, new prices for Express Mail, Global Express Guaranteed, Express Mail International, Priority Mail International, Parcel Select and Parcel Return Service will become effective at that time.

Also on Jan. 2, a new Express Mail legal-sized envelope (15x9.5) will be available for the same price as the flat rate envelope for Express Mail.

There will be new Priority Mail Flat Rate envelopes ushered in with the new year also.

The legal flat rate envelope (15x9.5) for Priority Mail and a 12.5-inch by 9.5-inch padded flat rate Priority Mail envelope are both priced at $4.95.

All six types of flat rate Priority Mail envelopes will cost the same as the regular Priority Mail envelope which is $4.95. This includes the gift card, window and small envelopes for flat rate.

“The Postal Service continues to offer the best combination of value and shipping solutions in the market,” said Paul Vogel, president of mailing and shipping services. “These new products will provide simple solutions to a dynamic marketplace.”

A “hold for pickup” service, which is a popular option available only for Express Mail at the present time, will be extended to Priority Mail and First-Class Mail commercial parcels in the new year.

Customers who use USPS-approved vendors can have their packages held at the post office for pick up rather than having them left at a recipient’s address.

Parcels can then be picked up anytime during regular hours at a time convenient for the recipient.

A new pricing schedule for boxes will take effect in the retail post offices.

A new priority rate box will be available for shippers mailing regionally based on the concept, “if it fits it ships,” available in two sizes for commercial base and commercial plus customers.

Another innovative product available to commercial plus customers in January is Critical Mail. It will offer fast, consistent service for sensitive documents, such as event tickets, identification cards, etc.

Customers can track the mail and receive free delivery confirmation, along with being offered insurance.

Visit www.usps.com/prices for a complete listing of all 2011 prices.