

Proud TO SERVE

“I’m just glad I happened along at that time.”

—Branch 583 letter carrier Bob Kissling, on finding a collapsed customer who had fallen off the roof of his home



Ponce, Puerto Rico Branch 826 member Gilberto Orench-Vargas helped save a drowning toddler on his route by performing CPR.

Many people hear the word hero and think of fire fighters, police officers or soldiers. But some also think of another person in uniform: their dependable letter carrier.

Across this nation, letter carriers are often the first to discover people in need due to medical emergencies, accidents or fires. The following reports are offered to honor the actions of those carriers whose quick thinking and speedy reactions have saved lives, averted disasters and spared others from harm.

CPR revives ‘dead’ child

A frantic woman running out to the street from her residence screaming alarmed carrier **Gilberto Orench-Vargas**. The woman was yelling about her child, “He drowned! He is dead!” The carrier stopped his LLV and went to the house to see what was happening. He found the child’s grandfather weeping as he held the limp 2-year-old, who had been pulled unconscious from a backyard swimming pool.

Orench-Vargas asked the man to hand over the child and proceeded to administer CPR, a skill he had learned when he was in the military. The child, blue in the face, did not respond initially. Undeterred, the Ponce, Puerto Rico Branch 826 member continued his life-saving effort and eventually began to

detect signs of life from the boy. The family had called 911, but after a long wait for an ambulance that never arrived, they whisked the child to the emergency room themselves.

Only carrier hears plea after man falls from roof

Lorain, Ohio Branch 583 member **Bob Kissling** was filling in on an injured colleague’s route when he heard a call for help as he approached a house. Whipping out his cell phone, he headed toward the back of the home, the source of the plea. Rounding the corner, the carrier discovered William Rupp, an 84-year-old customer, spread-eagle on the ground, unable to move after tumbling off the roof where he had been working on some tar patches.

The carrier first made sure the man was fully conscious and breathing without difficulty, then called 911 to summon help. Rupp was transported to the hospital, where doctors found he had several broken bones and a torn shoulder ligament. Before Kissling came along, Rupp had been calling for help from someone inside the house, but apparently no one could hear him over a football game on TV.

“I’m just glad I happened along at that time,” Kissling told *The Norwalk Reflector*. “It makes me feel good that he’s still alive.”

As Erwin Tan was making his daily rounds on a 101-degree day, he heard a loud grunting noise coming from inside a house. The Tracy, California Branch 2854 member called out to the patron, “Dave, are you OK?” In return, he heard a muffled response: “Side door.” Tan walked around to the side door and entered, finding the customer, who suffers from partial paralysis, face down and in severe pain. His face and chest were bruised from landing on an electric fan, and he was dehydrated. He had apparently fallen in the middle of the night while walking from his living room to his bedroom and had been lying on the floor, since then unable to get up. Tan tried to help him sit up, but wasn’t able to move him. He gave the patron water and after calling 911 the 23-year postal veteran stayed with the man until paramedics arrived to take him to the hospital. “Anybody would have done the same thing,” he told *The (Stockton) Record*. “I don’t want to be called a hero. It’s just part of being a mailman.”

When carrier Gary Lush saw that his customer had not picked up her mail in a couple days, he went to the door to check on her. He found her injured on the floor with what turned out to be a broken hip. She had been lying on the floor for two days. Lush immediately called 911 and got his customer the necessary medical attention. The De Land, Florida Branch 2591 member also had been recognized a few months earlier for his role as a crime-fighter. When he became suspicious of certain packages, he notified inspectors, who discovered the parcels were carrying drugs. Lush was commended for helping to make the De Land community a safer place.

Delivering mail one day on the route he has worked for 15 years, **David Howe** noticed that one of his customers, a 53-year-old man, was apparently having a heart attack. A friend of the customer was nearby but being handicapped and in a wheelchair, was unable to assist. Howe, a Ballwin, Missouri Branch 5050 member, quickly called 911 and waited until medics arrived to transport the man to the hospital.

Northern Kentucky Branch 374 member **John Smith** keeps an eye out for his customers. Delivering the mail one day in Maysville, he heard a woman’s cry for help as he approached a house on his route. He knocked on the front door and identified himself. She again cried out and told Smith the door was unlocked. The carrier entered the residence and found the customer on the floor unable to get up after a fall. Smith asked if she needed medical attention, but she said she only needed assistance getting up and moving to her chair. He waited with her for a while to assess her condition before returning to his route and made sure to check up on her later. Just two days later, as Smith was approaching another patron’s steps, he could see a woman lying on the floor. He entered the house and asked her if she needed medical help, but she said she wasn’t hurt, just simply could not get up due to her age and weight. Smith recruited a neighbor’s assistance and together they lifted her from the floor into her chair. Again, the carrier made sure to check on his grateful customer before he ended his day.

Making his usual rounds, Cedron Webb came upon the victim of a shooting lying on the ground, bleeding. Webb controlled the bleeding and kept the victim calm until paramedics arrived. The emergency medical personnel expressed their appreciation to the Baton Rouge, Louisiana Branch 129 member for his help.

While delivering mail at a residence, Dayton, Ohio Branch 182 member **Anthony Sams** heard a customer call out for assistance. Knowing the man’s condition, the carrier thought the customer, Scott Brownley, might be having a diabetic seizure. Sams called 911 and then stayed with Brownley until medical help arrived. In fact, Brownley had suffered a mild stroke and credits Sams with saving his life.

Carrier Kaleb Miller saw a customer walking her dogs down the street in a neighborhood on his route. Suddenly, the woman became tangled in the leashes and fell in the middle of the road. The dogs ran away, and Miller rushed to pick her up and

carry her to the side of the road. She fretted that her leg was broken, but after a quick check, the letter carrier determined it wasn’t. After rounding up the dogs, the Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member stayed with the customer until she felt good enough to move then finished his route and went home without saying a word to anyone about his good deed.

Brian Robinson was delivering his route one Monday when he came across a customer’s mail that hadn’t been picked up over the weekend. Newspapers were accumulating as well. Since he knew the customer lived alone and had no family in the area, Robinson began checking with the neighbors to see if anyone had seen her recently. No one had, so the Cleveland, Ohio Branch 40 member and a neighbor pounded on the door. When there was no reply, they called police. Officers soon arrived and broke in, discovering the woman on the floor upstairs. She had fallen on Friday and couldn’t move. Because of her position in the house, Robinson and the neighbor would not have heard her response to their knocks, so their intuitive decision to call the authorities was a critical one. After a stay in the hospital, the customer went to a rehabilitation center to recover.

Northfield, New Jersey Branch 903 member **Joseph Bancheri** was delivering mail on his route when he saw a customer removing shrubs in his yard. The man did not look well and was sweating profusely. Bancheri helped the customer into the house, then wet a towel and placed it on the man’s head to cool him off. When the man passed out, the carrier called 911 and remained with the patron until emergency assistance arrived. Bancheri secured the man’s house and garage and went to a neighbor’s house to find a phone number to contact the customer’s wife. The man was found to be suffering from heat stroke and heat exhaustion. “I’m so grateful that Joe came along when he did, because I don’t know where I’d be today without his help,” the customer wrote to the postmaster about the NALC member. “He’s a very caring man and went above and beyond his duties to help me.” ✉



St. Paul, Minnesota Branch 28 member Clayton Bleske's persistence led to the discovery of an elderly diabetic customer who had collapsed in his basement.

STEVE WILLIAMS' 84-YEAR-OLD PATRON had fallen in her front yard and couldn't get up. Despite her screams and waves to passing traffic, no one saw or heard her until Williams passed by on his route. The New Castle, Delaware Branch 4015 member helped the woman to her feet, escorted her back into her home, and sat her by a phone while he called for assistance. Once he was assured help was on the way, he began tending to her injuries, which included what appeared to be a fractured wrist. The patron's daughter wrote a letter to the local postmaster, saying Williams "went above and beyond in taking care of my mother, and I will forever be grateful to him for his caring actions."

WHEN SOUTH FLORIDA BRANCH 1071 member **Frank DeYoung** hadn't seen a certain customer in three days, he grew extremely concerned, so he went to the condo manager to request that she unlock the man's front door. When they went to check on the customer, he was discovered lying on the floor in a semi-conscious state. The carrier was commended for his alert concern for his customer's well-being.

CLAYTON BLESKE WAS ON HIS route and noticed that, for several days, an elderly patron had not picked up his mail and diabetes medication he had delivered. When there was no answer after he rang the bell, Bleske went to speak with a neighbor, who said he had not seen the customer. The two checked with other neighbors, who reported that they had not seen the man, either, so they contacted police. The customer was found in his basement, having collapsed earlier. Bleske, a St. Paul, Minnesota Branch 28 member, was credited for his vigilance that may have saved the man's life.

DELIVERING HIS ROUTE ONE morning, **Eric Simmons** found an elderly customer lying on her driveway, badly cut after a fall. Thinking she was unconscious,

he quickly made a call to 911. The woman, however, was awake and, to his surprise, asked Simmons to help her up. The St. Louis, Missouri Branch 343 member cautioned her to remain calm and not to get up in case she had any serious injuries. The carrier stayed with her and comforted her until help arrived.

ON A VERY HOT SUMMER DAY, TIDEWATER Virginia Branch 247 member **Lorenzo Gaines** was carrying his route when he noticed an elderly customer, Mr. Merrill, whose wife was trying to support him and get him into the house. Merrill was suffering from heat stroke and unable to support himself. Gaines carried the man inside and got him something to drink while Mrs. Merrill called 911. The carrier waited with the couple until he was sure the situation was under control, then continued his route. Mrs. Merrill wrote a letter of appreciation, saying, "Mr. Gaines is an exceptionally fine and friendly postman and, on this occasion, he saved my husband's life. We are extremely grateful to him."

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA BRANCH 9 member **David Kiefer** attempted

delivery of mail to 73-year-old patron Mary Gibson two days in a row, but got no response. Knowing Gibson had medical problems, Kiefer grew concerned and summoned an apartment manager. They entered the apartment to find the elderly woman on the bathroom floor, bleeding from a head wound and unable to get up. She had been there for three days. The carrier stayed with his customer until more help arrived.

ACCUMULATING MAIL WAS THE telltale sign for carrier **Elizabeth Bradt** that something was amiss with her elderly customer. She contacted her postmaster and then called 911. When the police checked out the home, they found customer Sam Trubia on the floor, where he had been for two days. Authorities credit the Rochester, New York Branch 210 member with saving the man's life.

AS CARRIER ALVIN RICHARDSON APPROACHED the house of his customers, the Liefs, he saw a few things out of kilter and he began to worry. The garage door, normally left open, was closed. The shades in the house were drawn and the previous day's mail was still in the box. Richardson knocked on the door and called out, but he heard no response. The Tidewater Virginia Branch 247 member checked the front door and, finding it unlocked, called out to his elderly customers again and entered the home. Upon opening the door, he discovered Mr. Lief, who appeared to be deceased. He hurriedly asked a neighbor passing by to call 911. He next turned his attention to finding Mrs. Lief, whom he knew was bedridden. He found her in one of the bedrooms, conscious but in serious condition. Richardson stayed at the house until emergency personnel arrived and he was assured his customer would be OK. Paramedics estimated that Mr. Lief had been dead for several days and his wife might have suffered the same fate had it not been for the letter carrier's care and concern. ☒

Seizure victim revived before paramedics arrive

Carrier Technician **Marlon Douglas** was walking toward a house on one of his routes, about to put the mail in the box, when he heard a scream. Abruptly, the hysterical patron came running out, relating in a jumble of words that her boyfriend was having a seizure and not breathing. She had called 911 and a rescue squad was on the way, but the situation was critical.

Moving quickly, Douglas entered the residence and found the man, David Young, lying face down on the floor. Moving furniture out of the way, the carrier saw that the man was clearly unconscious and turning blue. Douglas rolled Young over and turned his head to the side to make sure the airway was clear, but he couldn't detect any breath or heartbeat, so he started performing CPR. Young began breathing on his own in less than a minute, just moments before paramedics arrived to take over.

Douglas, a Toledo, Ohio Branch 100 member, returned to the post office after finishing his deliveries and did not mention his heroic act to anyone. The next day, the regular carrier learned of the deed from

neighbors and took word of Douglas's life-saving adventure back to the station.

Bright flames, thick smoke prompt carrier to go to church

Bright flames and thick black smoke pouring out of the top eave of a church immediately caught the eye of carrier **James Patrick** as he was walking his route. Turning back toward the Johnstown, Pennsylvania borough building he had just passed a block before, he yelled for someone to call 911—then he entered the burning building.

The rectory adjacent to the church was dangerously engulfed in flames, but neither Pastor Robert Hall, who suffers from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, nor his secretary, both inside, were aware of the threat. Once he was alerted to the fire, Pastor Hall began trying to put out the fire in his bedroom, but the letter carrier told him, "Father, you have to get out—the whole roof is on fire," and led him to safety outside.

"In this day and age when people don't want to get involved, I want to say thank you to your employee for going the extra mile," Hall wrote to the Postal Service. Because of the Johnstown Branch 451 member's action, everyone made it out of the building safely. ☒

Carrier **Clay Austin** was instantly concerned when he spotted a small child playing by a very busy street. The Clarksville, Alabama Branch 3692 member stayed with the child, who had slipped away from home, until police could arrive to wake the child's parents. Austin is credited with helping to avert a tragic accident.

Brian Spence was delivering mail when he was approached by county police officers and shown a picture of a man who had just robbed a local Target. The carrier said he had not seen the suspect, but would keep an eye out. Several hours later, while delivering mail, he was approached by a man who asked if he had a cell phone he could borrow. Spence told him he did not have one, and kept on with his route. Shortly after, he realized that the person was the robbery suspect. The Long Island Merged, New York Branch 6000 member drove his LLV to intercept police officers who were cruising the area and

reported he had seen the suspect. From Spence's lead, the police were able to track the man down and arrest him.

Carrier **Jula Valdez** was alarmed by the sight of a 3-year-old child running down the street by himself. She pulled into a nearby elementary school lot to call the sheriff's department for help while the school principal took after the child in an electric cart. The fast-moving child had run off from a nearby preschool, but was soon safely reunited with his parents. Valdez, a Garden Grove, California Branch 1100 member, was commended for her vigilance and quick response.

When **Richard Mahon** saw that a customer was in possible danger, he stepped in to

help. John Fales, a blind Marine Corps veteran, did not know his whereabouts when a cab driver abruptly ordered him out of the taxi before driving him all the way home. Mahon calmed Fales and ensured that he made it home safely. Fales, president of the national Blinded American Veterans Foundation, wrote to Postmaster General Jack Potter to commend the Silver Spring, Maryland Branch 2611 member for the assistance Mahon had given him. ☒

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

As carrier **Stephen Duffy** moved from one delivery to the next, he developed a sense that something was wrong at the previous home. A dog inside had been barking more than usual, and there was a faint odor of smoke. Duffy went back and rang the doorbell. The dog was still barking, and the carrier definitely smelled smoke. Looking through the window, he saw flames rise above the kitchen stove, so he grabbed his cell phone to call 911. Fire fighters promptly answered the call. Duffy waited at the scene to direct them to the right place. Homeowner Ron Francis, who was not home at the time, credits his longtime letter carrier with saving his house, his dogs and his family's belongings. "It would have gone up in total flames. The fireman told me that 90 seconds more, and it would have caught more than the countertop and (burned) up the whole house," he told the *Idaho State Journal*. "He literally saved our house." Duffy, however, credits the dog for drawing his attention. "This is probably one of the wildest things I've ever seen," the Pocatello, Idaho Branch 927 member told the newspaper.

While delivering the mail, Greater East Bay, California Branch 1111 member **Glen LeMaster** saw an unusual cloud of smoke. Growing concerned, he drove to the top of a hill and saw a grass fire along the hillside. Knowing this was the same area in Oakland Hills where a devastating wildfire occurred years before, LeMaster called 911 right away and soon heard sirens. Responding fire fighters were able to extinguish the blaze before it could spread.

Southwest, Minnesota Branch 2939 member **Jerry Schlager** was on his route when he came across a burning house. Knowing that the resident worked out of his home and seeing a vehicle in the garage, the carrier knocked on the door and then checked it, finding that it was locked. Just then, the windows at the back of the house

"This is probably one of the wildest things I've ever seen."

—Branch 927 letter carrier Stephen Duffy, who was tipped off about a fire at a patron's house by the family's dog

blew out, and Schlager grew even more alarmed. He immediately called the sheriff's department, and the fire department came immediately. The authorities said the cause appeared electrical and, in another 10 minutes, the whole house would have been engulfed. After his part, Schlager continued on with his route and never said a word when he returned to the office, with his good deed only revealed later by others.

When carrier **George Kustka** saw a building on his route on fire, he rushed to help rescue a family from the burning structure, including carrying a wheelchair-bound elderly woman to safety. The Boston, Massachusetts Branch 34 member then called 911 to alert authorities to the blaze. Kustka was credited with possibly saving the family members' lives.

Smoke erupting from upper apartment windows caught the eye of **Jeffrey Myers** as he went along his route. The carrier quickly knocked on the residents' doors to make them aware of the danger. After fire fighters arrived, Myers

heard the sound of a dog coming from one of the smoke-filled apartments. The Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Branch 84 member joined forces with a fire fighter and the two crawled into the apartment on their hands and knees—and successfully rescued the animal.

Entering a building on his route to deliver mail, **Herbert Foertsch** smelled something burning. He went up to the second floor and notified one of the secretaries at a dentist's office. He then took it upon himself to contact the police and waited for their arrival. When the carrier re-entered the building with the police, they realized the situation had grown worse—smoke was now visible in the hallways. The fire department was called and the building and other adjoining buildings were evacuated. The furnace had evidently malfunctioned, resulting in carbon monoxide and smoke being released in the building. The Hudson Valley Merged, New York Branch 137 member was credited with helping to save the building from major damage and preventing the loss of lives.

Seeing smoke and flames coming from the front porch of a customer's home, carrier **Phillip Combs** ran to knock on the door and alert those inside. Since he knew the customer worked nights and slept during the day, he wanted to be sure he alerted his patron. When he got the owner's attention, the two were able to douse the flames with a garden hose before the fire could cause major damage. The fire had apparently started when chemicals on plastic shelving unit somehow ignited. The customer thanked Combs, and reported the Omaha, Nebraska Branch 5 member's good deed to the post office, saying, "I hate to think what could have happened if Phil hadn't noticed the fire early on and alerted me." ☒