

# Proud TO SERVE

**M**ore than being in the right place at the right time, letter carriers have a real willingness to help. These stories recognize carriers who went above and beyond to help those in the communities they serve.

## Toddler swept to safety

Sometimes, a letter carrier has to temporarily block a lane of traffic to make a delivery. Patty Arismendez, on the other hand, wound up using her vehicle to hold up traffic in a busy intersection in order to make a very special pickup.

Arismendez, an eight-year carrier and member of Bakersfield, California Branch 702, was driving to the next segment of her route when she spotted a toddler wandering onto the roadway ahead while cars continued to whiz by.

The letter carrier immediately stopped her vehicle, jumped out, and made a beeline for the baby standing in the street. Arismendez swept the child up in her arms and as she carried the little girl back to the security of her LLV, she could only get the tot to say one word: "Mama." After the LLV was safely moved out of traffic and parked, the letter carrier climbed out and scanned the streets in all directions, but "Mama" was nowhere to be found.

"What was really scary is that intersection is on the edge of town," Arismendez recalled, "and even if the baby had not been hit by a car, somebody could have kidnaped her."

Fortunately, it didn't take the letter carrier very long to reunite the child with her mother, who lived in a nearby house. Arismendez then returned to delivering her route. If a postal manager's daughter-in-law had not witnessed the whole episode, the letter carrier's actions might have remained her little secret.

"Letter carriers are always alert and aware about what is happening on their routes," the modest Arismendez later remarked. Besides, she said, "it feels good to help people."

## Brutal burglars spooked

A violent home invasion was cut short thanks to letter carrier Jeremy Negley, whose timely arrival spooked the perpetrators. All seemed routine as the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Branch 500 member delivered his route, but when he approached the house of one of his customers, he was startled to see several strangers suddenly flee the property. Inside the home, Negley found a woman, shaken and badly injured. He immediately called the police, then comforted his customer until help arrived. While the letter carrier waited, he learned that the woman had been the victim of a burglary that turned into a brutal robbery—one of the robbers had struck her in the face several times with his gun—and could have ended in tragedy had Negley not shown up when he did.

## No question, she's brave

A driver-less minivan rolling backward on a level street is bound to draw attention, but letter carrier Linda Stuchel did more than just watch it pass by.

Stuchel, the mother of two and a member of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Branch 84, saw a little boy standing inside the vehicle and her maternal instinct instantly took over.

"I figured he had put the gear shift in reverse," Stuchel told the *Valley News Dispatch*. On foot, the letter carrier ran up next to the van just as it began to curve toward a nearby house. She opened the driver's side door, clambered inside and hit the brakes.

Once the van was safely parked, Stuchel

**"We are a part of these neighborhoods."**

—Branch 46 letter carrier Michael Murray, after aiding an injured elderly patron.



**Linda Stuchel leapt into a moving vehicle to rescue the two small children on board.**

photo by Eric Felack—Valley News Dispatch

noticed another passenger: a baby girl strapped into a car seat in the back.

While the letter carrier was making sure both children were safe, their frantic mother came running toward the vehicle. It turns out she had left the motor running while she made a quick stop to drop off a note at a nearby home—which was just enough time for her four-year-old son to unbuckle his safety belt and start fiddling with the van's gear shift.

"I owe her my life," the thankful mother said of Stuchel.

"I was just really concerned that the kids were all right and that nobody got hurt," the letter carrier replied, although she admitted that after the episode was over, "I'm walking through my route thinking, 'Was that really stupid, or was that really brave?'"

## How to treat a head wound

It was a windy day, so what looked like a woman trying to pick up some overturned garbage cans along a curb didn't seem unusual. But as letter carrier Mike Mobley drew closer, the member of San Bernardino, California Branch 411 saw that, in fact, the woman was attending to an elderly man lying in the street.

At first Mobley feared the worst. "It looked like the person was dead," he said. Once the letter carrier was close enough, he recognized the man as his elderly customer John Serrano. Fortunately, Serrano was still alive, but he was bleeding from a head wound.

"I knew I needed to stop the bleeding right away," Mobley said, so he used a cloth he was carrying to apply pressure to the wound. Meanwhile, the woman used her cell phone to call 911. As they waited for help to arrive, the elderly man opened his eyes. "Is this the mailman?" he asked.

"He sounded relieved to know there

was a friendly face helping him out," Mobley recalled.

The next day, Serrano's family thanked the letter carrier for his timely assistance with a card and some fresh-baked cookies.

## Thief picks a poor hideout

Last November, Gary Staring was delivering mail close to his Garfield, New Jersey station when he saw a man running from a nearby apartment building, being chased by another man wielding a gun. When he heard the unmistakable sound of gunshots, the member of New Jersey Merged Branch 38 immediately used his cell phone to call 911.

When the police came, Staring learned that the man being chased was a suspected burglar. The letter carrier then rode along as the officers scoured the neighborhood, looking for the scoundrel. The search proved unsuccessful, so the police took Staring back to his station. To his surprise, the carrier spotted the fugitive hiding in an alley behind the post office. Staring pointed him out to the cops, who quickly handcuffed him and took him away.

Garfield Police Chief Robert Andrezzi was grateful for Staring's help. "His information and description of the events he was witnessing were instrumental to bringing a safe conclusion to the event," Andrezzi wrote. "In these times where people are reluctant to get involved, I credit Mr. Staring for his devotion to the community."

## Pit bull held at bay

The sound of a woman screaming immediately grabbed the attention of letter carrier Steve Soto as he was delivering his route. The woman, a nanny who cared for an infant in the neighborhood, was terrified by the sight of a loose pit bull terrier rapidly making its way toward

her. Soto, a member of Van Nuys, California Branch 2462, reached for his pepper spray, grabbed a nearby empty stroller and jumped between the nanny and the dog.

The pit bull stopped about 10 feet away from Soto but continued to bark at the carrier, nanny and child. A few seconds later, Soto heard the voice of the dog's owner ordering the canine to stay where it was until it could be more effectively restrained and led away.

Once the dog was safely out of the yard, Soto made sure both nanny and child were all right, and pledged to come back later to give a complete account of the incident to the child's parents.

## A different sign of trouble

Western Massachusetts Branch 46 letter carrier Michael Murray knew that one of his customers had some difficulty getting around, so rather than force the woman to struggle to her mailbox every day, Murray hung a canvas bag on her doorknob and would place the mail there, thus making it easier for her to retrieve.

One day, however, the bag was nowhere to be found. "I banged on the door and at first got no answer," Murray told the *Agawam Advertiser News*. "I banged again and heard [her] faint answer, asking me to get in touch with her grandson."

Murray used a neighbor's phone to call 911, and when responders arrived, they found that although the woman had fallen, her injuries did not require a trip to the hospital for treatment.

"When I got home, I had a message from her, thanking me," the letter carrier said. "She went through the entire list of Michael Murrays in the phone book until she found me."

"I still see her every day, and I ask her if there's anything she needs," Murray said. "We are part of these neighborhoods."

# HELP on the Way

Elizabeth Brown was able to find a missing child and return him to grateful parents because she knows who lives just around the block.

photo by Dave Van Allen



**Elizabeth Brown was delivering her route** one afternoon when she was hailed by police canvassing the neighborhood. The police were searching for a missing eight-year-old boy whose parents thought he was playing at a friend's, but realized he had been missing for nearly four hours. Brown knows the family but hadn't seen the child. "I was worried that he might be in real trouble," the Branch 1629 Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio member said. "Since I was nearly done for the day, I decided to join the search." Returning to the neighborhood a short time later, Brown remembered a little girl who lived a few blocks away from the missing boy's home, and though she hadn't seen the two children play together in the past, she thought it would be a good place to start. When a babysitter opened the door, Brown asked if the child was there. Sure enough, the boy was there. Brown asked the babysitter to call the child's frantic parents while she escorted him home.

**The group of dogs being taken for a stroll** had already raised **Terence Stefansky's** awareness level, but the letter carrier was soon called to action when he saw the dog walker take a tumble. Stefansky, a member of Reading, Pennsylvania Branch 258, hurried over to check on the woman, who had apparently fainted and sustained some injuries. The carrier quickly called 911, then stayed with the woman and her canine companions until help arrived.

**Mike Wilkinson, a member of Branch 3745** Little Rock, Arkansas, noticed smoke billowing from the attic of a home on his route. Knowing an elderly couple lived there, Wilkinson acted quickly. He called the fire department and then began pounding on the door, trying to get the couple's attention. When they failed to respond, Wilkinson broke a front window to gain access. Once inside, the carrier found his patrons and ushered them to safety.

**There is a woman on Lori LaPorte's route** who can be counted on to pick up her mail every day, so the member of Western Massachusetts Branch 46 was understandably concerned when her patron's mail went uncollected, even though her car was still parked nearby. LaPorte investigated further and discovered the woman lying on the floor inside her home after having fallen several days earlier. LaPorte called 911, and soon an emergency response team was on the scene. "The police said [she] was going to be okay," LaPorte later told the *Agawam Advertiser News*, "and her family told me she was grateful." She added, "We're out there every day and get used to our customers' habits. I was glad to help her."

**Tony Martin, a member of Joplin, Missouri Branch 366,** had stopped off at a fast food joint for his lunch break when he heard someone calling for help. According to *The Webb City Sentinel*, a woman inside the restaurant had collapsed and the letter carrier quickly realized that the CPR training he had received in the military some 14 years earlier made him the only one qualified to render assistance. With help from a 911 operator jogging his memory, the letter carrier was able to get the unconscious woman breathing by the time paramedics arrived.

**Kevin Blakesley was out delivering his route** last fall when he found a woman being attacked by three rather large dogs. Blakesley, a member of Eugene, Oregon Branch 916, instantly ran to her aid, shouting at the dogs and shooing them away. Confident the canines would not return, the letter carrier focused his attention to the woman, first calling 911, and then keeping her company while they waited for medical help to arrive.

**Letter carrier Ben Skibitsky was going** about his deliveries when he spied a car

slowly traveling in circles at the end of a residential street on his route. The member of Maine Merged Branch 92 went over to the car and started walking alongside it, asking the woman who was driving if she was all right. When all he got was a garbled answer, Skibitsky realized she was likely experiencing a stroke or seizure and immediately used his cell phone to call for help. The carrier then opened the still-moving vehicle's driver-side door, put the car in park, then waited with the woman until an ambulance arrived.

**When a teenager suffered a leg injury** following a bike wreck, letter carrier **Darrell Schulte**, who was delivering mail nearby, came to the rescue. The Omaha, Nebraska Branch 5 member used his cell phone to call 911, then he stayed with the lad while they both waited for medical help to arrive. Schulte, who later found out that the boy's wound required eight stitches, didn't think his actions were particularly remarkable. "Anyone else would have probably done the same thing," he said—but, of course, "Anyone Else" wasn't around.

**Letter carrier Sam Trippiedi was walking** a park-and-loop relay last summer when he spotted one of his customers, Theresa Bula, lying in her front yard. After several shouts failed to elicit a response, Trippiedi knelt down beside her and tried to rouse her by patting her wrist. The woman remained unconscious, so Trippiedi, a member of Decatur, Illinois Branch 317, began looking for help—first at the woman's home, where there was no answer, and then next door, the home of some of Bula's relatives. Fortunately, someone there was home, and after calling for emergency medical help, they went to Bula and managed to bring her around. Satisfied his customer was in good hands, Trippiedi resumed his route.

**A closed window separated a barking pit bull** from **Phyllis Scott**, but the letter car-

rier kept a wary eye on the house as she walked by anyway, watching the animal's owner inside struggling to control the dog and keep it away from the glass. But when the dog suddenly turned and attacked its owner, the member of Mid-Michigan Branch 256 went from watchful observer to active participant. After she called 911 from her cell phone, Scott enlisted the help of a neighbor and together they rapped on the window, drawing the dog's attention away from its victim until professional help could arrive.

**“My heart, my heart” were the only** words that the woman standing on the side of a busy street was able to say to letter carrier **Laurent Demers**, a member of Lewiston, Maine Branch 241, who had spotted her from across the street, clutching at her chest. Demers ran to a nearby store and asked employees to call 911, then went back to the woman just in time to ease her to the ground when she passed out. EMTs quickly arrived on the scene and the letter carrier quietly returned to his deliveries. The entire episode would likely have gone unreported had the grateful woman not tried to contact Demers and thank him through some of his co-workers a week later.

**Letter carrier Ron Little was delivering** his route when he saw an elderly woman trying to rescue her dog from an assault by two rottweilers. Little, a member of Denver, Colorado Branch 47, realized that his dog repellent would probably only further irritate the angry canines, but when he saw one of the rotties bite the woman, he ran to his LLV, grabbed his cell phone and called for help. Within minutes, the rottweilers were caged and hauled away, and the woman and her dog both received treatment for their injuries.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LETTER CARRIERS

**Padre Island, Texas Branch 1259 member Kevin Matthies** grew worried when he realized that the mail for his customer, Dwane Cunningham, was starting to pile up in his mailbox. A neighbor helped Matthies check on Cunningham, and together they found the customer inside the home, the apparent victim of a stroke. The letter carrier quickly called 911, and paramedics soon arrived to take the patron to a nearby hospital. In a letter, the neighbor praised Matthies. “Please recognize Kevin for saving this customer's life,” she wrote.

**Mrs. Ramirez, an elderly customer on** letter carrier **Eric Rhodes'** route, was walking on her front sidewalk when she suddenly stumbled and fell. Stunned and dizzy, Ramirez remained on the ground, unable to right herself, until Rhodes, a member of Santa Clara, California Branch 1427, came by to make his daily delivery. The carrier immediately rushed to Ramirez' side, helped her sit upright, then stayed with her until she assured him she felt better.

**Isadore Daniels knew one of** his customers had recently suffered a stroke and he immediately suspected something was amiss when she didn't acknowledge him as he approached her front door. As he drew closer, the member of Little Rock, Arkansas Branch 35 noticed that his patron was standing perfectly still in the doorway, her hands tightly clenched. Unable to get her to respond, Daniels phoned his managers, who in turn called the woman's family. The customer was then taken to the hospital, and after a brief stay there, she returned home.

**“We care for the people we work for,”** said letter carrier **John Field**—and this carrier cares above and beyond. Sylvia Lexow, a 74-year old customer on Field's route, had been undergoing chemotherapy and one Saturday she felt so weakened that she lay down on the floor to rest, then was unable to get moving again. On Monday, Field, a member of Branch 155 Belleville, Illinois, brought Lexow's mail inside for her as he usually does. When he called out to the woman, he heard a moan and he quickly found her. After hearing she had been there for two days, Field said, “I could actually see the fear in her eyes and that scared me. I was afraid of her going into shock.” Field tried to call 911 from Lexow's phone but found no dial tone, so he sprinted across the street to a neighbor's home to call. “He really went into action fast,” Lexow recalled. “Really, I'm talking fast! He's a real hero.”



**John Field visits his customer, Sylvia Lexow in the hospital after summoning help upon finding her in distress in her home.**

photo courtesy of Highland News Leader