

Proud TO SERVE

Letter carriers' daily duties give them unique knowledge of the goings-on in our communities. These are the stories of men and women who used their special position to the great benefit of the patrons they serve.

Child pulled from wreck as truck motor races

After he saw a black pickup truck miss a turn and slam violently into a dumpster, the first thing Cleveland, Ohio Branch 40 member Emmitt Tucker heard was a little girl calling from the wreckage. "The truck bounced off the dumpster, plowed through a small electrical housing building, tore through two large satellite dishes and stopped," Tucker said. "I could hear the girl screaming 'Please help me! Get me out!'"

The letter carrier went into action instantly. A passerby was trying to help the driver, whose door was blocked, so Tucker leapt into the back of the still-revving truck and told the terrified 8-year-old child to open the rear window. "She hit the latch on the window and I reached in and pulled her out," the carrier said.

After removing the child to a safe distance, Tucker returned to the truck to try to aid the driver. "The driver was having some sort of seizure. His foot was still pushing on the accelerator, but the truck was blocked by one of the satellite dishes," Tucker explained.

Once the letter carrier and the passerby managed to turn off the ignition, Tucker called 911 and waited at the scene with the driver and the trembling child until emergency personnel arrived. Recalling the experience Tucker said simply, "I'm glad I was there to help."

Patron pinned by SUV

People sometimes forget just how heavy a vehicle really is, but when Marilyn Hall stepped out of her SUV and it slipped out of gear, she was quickly reminded. Letter carrier James "Benjie" Mack was nearby when he saw the car begin to roll out of Hall's driveway, dragging the patron with it into the street. The vehicle came to rest at the curb, pinning Hall's ankle between the curb and the tire. The Roswell, Georgia Branch 4862 member carefully climbed into the SUV and eased it forward, away from the injured woman. With Hall freed and the truck safely parked, Mack used his cell phone to call the woman's husband and summoned help, then waited until the others arrived.

A very grateful Hall said, "I know that this goes above and beyond his job description. I very much appreciated his timely action." Mack was recognized by the Roswell postmaster, Arthur D. Smith, for his deed.

Carrier resuscitates crash victim

Traveling to work one morning, Chicago letter carrier Debra Hamilton came upon a traffic accident—not unusual for a Windy City commute. As she attempted to pull around the wreck to continue on her way, she noticed a body lying beside one of the cars. Realizing just how recently the crash occurred, the Branch 11 member quickly pulled out of traffic to help assess the injuries. Another passerby, traveling just behind her, had also stopped and was checking the pulse of the unconscious woman. When no



Debra Hamilton of Chicago, IL Branch 11, who resuscitated a crash victim on her way to work.

ROSWELL



Roswell, GA Br. 4862 member James “Bennie” Mack was honored for saving a patron from being dragged under her SUV. Pictured (from l) are: Paul Barner, chief steward; D. Robert Johnson, branch president; Brother Mack; Roswell Postmaster Arthur D. Smith.



Eye on the ELDERLY

While delivering mail, **Daryl Schwan** of Aberdeen, South Dakota Branch 502 heard a low rumbling sound coming from the garage of one of his patrons. Listening more closely, Schwan realized there was a vehicle running within. He rang the doorbell, but received no response. The carrier located a telephone nearby and called 911. Fire fighters forced their way into the home and found Schwan’s patron disoriented from exposure to carbon monoxide fumes and minutes away from certain death. Schwan’s patron thanked Schwan for his “alertness and quick action,” and credited him with saving his life.

Gene Kahl of Pensacola, Florida Branch 321 suspected that something was amiss when he found mail piling up at an elderly couple’s home. When he passed the home, he marked the car tire with chalk so that he could judge whether it had moved when he returned. Finding the mark undisturbed two days later, Kahl knocked on the door. Although he could hear someone inside, he received no response. The carrier went to a local deli to call for help. When police arrived, they discovered the husband dehydrated and too weak to move, holding the hand of his deceased wife, singing hymns to her. “He was ready to die with her in that house,” said the carrier, who prides himself on knowing the name of every resident on his 700-home route. “I know their dogs. I know their kids,” he said, adding, “I’m just glad to be of service.”

A full mailbox is often the first outward sign that an elderly customer is in distress. Such was the case on letter carrier **Tracy Johnson’s** route. A member of Shawnee Mission, Kansas Branch 5521, Johnson took note of the accumulated mail at one woman’s home and knew that no vacation notice had been filed. When knocking on the door and calling out the woman’s name yielded no answer, Johnson alerted neighbors and emergency personnel. The local EMS discovered the woman had fallen and broken her hip four days earlier. The woman was taken to a hospital and later was moved to a nearby convalescent center.

pulse was detected, Hamilton was unwilling to let the situation stand.

She ran to the trunk of her car and retrieved a pair of sweat pants and her bagged lunch. The carrier tucked the pants under the woman’s neck in order to clear the airway and used the sandwich bag from her lunch to create a protective barrier. As Hamilton administered CPR, the woman began to cough and regained consciousness. Hamilton stayed with the accident victim until emergency teams arrived and took over.

Toddler alerts carrier to apparent suicide attempt

Letter carrier John Galindo, a member of San Bernadino, California Branch 411, was surprised to see a toddler, about 3 years old, walk up to his truck as he was delivering mail one afternoon. A quick look around made it clear the child was alone in her yard, which concerned him. Galindo asked the little girl where her mother was. “The answer shocked me,” he said. “She said her mommy was asleep and would never wake up. I asked the girl to go back to the house and tell her mother that the mailman is outside and needs to talk to her.”

The child, however, came back alone, so Galindo went to the door and rang the bell. Receiving no answer, he dashed next door and asked a neighbor to call for help. Returning to the home, the letter carrier went inside and found the mother had apparently taken medication and was completely unresponsive. Medical personnel soon arrived and the child’s father was called.

“It was scary,” said Galindo. “I am glad everything turned out all right.” The neighbor who helped Galindo sent a letter of thanks to the post office for the carrier’s quick action in what she described as a “serious and heart-wrenching situation.”

Stopping a scam cold

Letter carriers’ special role in the community puts them in a position to hear about a wide range of joys and troubles. When Jeff Krofcheck, a Cleveland, Ohio Branch 40 member, delivered mail to Charles Zlakowski one afternoon, the man was excited to share the news of a recent windfall. Zlakowski said he had been contacted by a woman claiming that she worked for a law firm that tracked down sweepstakes winners who hadn’t responded to mail notices. The patron had already paid his first “wiring fee” of \$2,600 and the next day he was sending the “final” \$72,000 to a Nicaraguan firm that would bring him millions.

Krofcheck had heard this same story before from another patron and recognized it as a scam. He told his customer it was a hoax, but Zlakowski explained the many conversations he had had with supposed accountants and lawyers who answered all his questions.

Krofcheck knew Zlakowski was going to lose his savings if someone didn’t intervene. After work the letter carrier did some research on the perpetrators of foreign lottery scams and brought his findings to Zlakowski that same evening. The customer was convinced and kept his cash. “If Jeff hadn’t shown up that day, I guarantee you, the next day that check would have been gone,” Zlakowski said.

FIRE & RESCUE

Crisis was neatly averted when Christopher Mooney, a New Castle, Pennsylvania Branch 22 carrier, arrived at a home on his Clearfield route. When he smelled and saw smoke rolling out of a downstairs window, he urgently knocked at the door. Receiving no answer, Mooney called the fire department. Fire fighters found an unattended pot burning on the stove and extinguished it before it could seriously damage the home.

In a letter to the editor of the *Clearfield Progress*, homeowner Florence Homer wrote, “[The situation] could have been very serious, but because of the quick actions of one of Clearfield’s mail carriers, that was avoided. My heartfelt appreciation and thanks must go to him.”

When letter carrier Kimberly Winther pulled into the parking lot of an apartment complex on her route and noticed smoke coming from the balcony of one of the apartments, she immediately jumped into action. The Grand Rapids, Michigan Branch 56 member called emergency services

and, while waiting for help to arrive, recruited some of the tenants to help to slow the progress of the fire. The group threw dirt and gravel onto the flames, partially smothering the fire and keeping it from spreading to other parts of the building. The local sheriff commended Winther for alerting the fire department so quickly and for taking steps to help save the lives of the tenants as well as protect the complex from any great damage.

Having a fire extinguisher on hand is only half of the solution to an unexpected fire—knowing how to use it is key. Luckily, Tidewater, Virginia Branch 247 member Larry Hill, was prepared. When a distraught customer ran from her home, yelling that her son’s bedroom was on fire, Hill made sure everyone was out of the house, called 911 and then entered the home armed with the customer’s fire extinguisher, which she did not know how to operate. Hill quickly extinguished the flames, keeping the fire from spreading beyond the bedroom furnishings.

Taking to heart the lesson of his experience, that evening Hill made sure everyone in his household knew how to operate an extinguisher.

Barbara Channels, a member of Hartford, Connecticut Branch 86,

was first on the scene of a fire at a home on her route. When she saw flames coming from an electrical junction box near an apartment door, she first called emergency personnel and then checked whether anyone was home. When no one answered the door, the carrier picked up a garden hose and doused the flames with water.

The fire department credited the carrier’s fast action for containing the fire and minimizing damage to the building. “Had Barbara not acted as quickly as she did, the fire could have been a lot larger. She did an excellent job,” one fire fighter stated.

Coming upon a house fire can be daunting, but letter carrier Earl Holston took the blaze he discovered in stride. While making a delivery, the Tidewater, Virginia Branch 247 member noticed that the vinyl siding on a garage wall of the home across the street was on fire. He crossed the street, grabbed the running sprinkler from the next yard and proceeded to extinguish the flames. Rather than take for granted that the fire was out, Holston asked two women waiting for their children at the bus stop to use a cell phone to call the fire department. Once the call was made, Holston continued his route.



Eye on the ELDERLY

Living alone can be lonely indeed for many elderly. Letter carrier **Derylyn Godwin** was always ready to check in on a 96-year-old woman on her route, who met her each day on the porch. When Mrs. Wilcox was not sitting in her chair one day, Godwin, a member of Charleston, South Carolina Branch 3902, was concerned. Calls into the house went unanswered, so Godwin entered the home and found Wilcox lying on the floor of her bedroom where she had fallen. The letter carrier called 911 and waited with her customer until emergency personnel arrived. Because of Godwin’s attentiveness, Wilcox recovered fully and was soon back on her porch, greeting all comers with a smile.

Gardening is great exercise with a beautiful payoff, but can certainly be taxing. When letter carrier

Gary Keist came upon one of his customers, Robert Dew, unconscious in a flowerbed, he immediately came to the man’s aid. Keist, a member of Bloomington, Illinois Branch 522, called out to a neighbor to alert emergency personnel. Responders found that the man was a diabetic whose blood sugar had dropped dangerously low. After receiving care at a local hospital, the man quickly recovered—in time for his 86th birthday celebration.

Dew’s thankful daughter wrote to the local postmaster, saying, “It was Gary’s knowledge of and concern for the people on his route that helped save my dad’s life.”

Many patrons have patterns that are quite well known to their letter carriers. When Mrs. Ship didn’t come to the door to greet **Gary Prieur** on the day her Social Security check arrived, the Buffalo-

Aid for injured crash victims

When letter carrier Keith Woodward, a Shawnee Mission, Kansas Branch 5521 member, saw a school bus smash into a tree, he hurried to aid those on board. After prying open the bus doors and helping the two teenage passengers out of the damaged vehicle, Woodward used his Army medic training to attend to the driver, who was pinned against the dash and suffering from shock. The carrier waited with the three victims until paramedics arrived. When all was under control, he proceeded with his daily rounds.

Impaled patron saved

Garden Grove, California Branch 1100 member Ted Snyder's quick response saved customer Carl Millis from a near-fatal injury. When Snyder saw neighborhood a teen assisting a staggering Millis, he kept an eye on the man. The 86-year-old carried his groceries haltingly, then fell face down in his garden. Snyder immediately came to Millis' aid, finding he had landed on a piece of exposed rebar and had impaled his cheek on the rod. Snyder compressed the wound and summoned help.

When paramedics arrived, Millis was airlifted to a nearby hospital, where he eventually underwent surgery to have a metal plate inserted to replace his shattered cheekbone. Snyder modestly commented on his role by saying, "Anyone who carries mail for a while will eventually end up helping people."

Strong-arm robber thwarted by fleet-footed carrier

As Billie Jean Ussery unloaded mail at the back dock of his station, he heard the frantic shouts of postal customer Ruby Norris. When the Thomaston, Georgia Branch 2809 carrier looked up, he saw a man force his way into Norris' car and proceed to wrestle her purse away from her. Ussery quickly ran to the vehicle and pulled the attacker from the car. The man scrambled to his feet and ran off with the purse. A local deputy happened to be coming out of a business along the street and intercepted the robber as he tried to flee. Norris, who suffered a heart attack after the ordeal but later recovered, referred to Ussery as "my hero."



Branch 1100 carrier Ted Snyder, whose immediate response saved patron impaled in garden. Photo by Will Magallanes

Western New York Branch 3 member noticed the change of routine. When he discovered she hadn't picked up the previous day's mail either, he quickly called emergency personnel. Ship was found lying on her floor, having fallen two days earlier. Thanks to Prieur's alert response, the patron was transported to the hospital where she recovered.

One crisp winter morning **Anthony Villani**, a member of Long Island Merged, New York Branch 6000, detected a faint smell of gas outside a customer's home. and alerted the homeowner, Thomas Fisher. While Fisher couldn't catch the scent, he followed Villani's advice and contacted the gas company, which confirmed the carrier's suspicions. A leak was found near the external

meter, where a screw had become loose.

A grateful Fisher wrote, "I think he's the tops. He epitomizes what service is all about. Who knows what could have happened if it went undetected? Somebody walking by with a cigar could have set it off."

Villani takes it all in stride. "When you're out there, you're always looking around, taking care of the neighborhood," he said. "I would want someone to do the same for me."



L.I. Mgd., NY Branch 6000 member Anthony Villani (r) and patron Thomas Fisher revisit the site of a gas leak detected by the carrier.

Photo by Ed Stever



Eye on the ELDERLY

When letter carrier **Terry Holcomb** of St. Louis, Missouri Branch 343 heard a loud popping noise and turned to see smoke pouring out of a home on Osceola Street, he didn't stop to ponder the situation. Holcomb knew it was the home of a 95-year-old woman and ran toward the burning building. "I tried to open the door, but the handle broke," said Holcomb, "so I started banging on the door." The resident heard the commotion and came to the door in her nightgown, as she had been sleeping and had not noticed the fire. The woman later told the *St. Louis Dispatch*, "He saved my life. I wouldn't have gotten out without him." While the fire burned a hole through the roof, the woman was unharmed thanks to Holcomb's knowledge of his patrons and his quick action.

Brenda Brosia-Carter came upon one of her elderly customers waving some mail out of the window of his car that he wanted posted. When she parked her vehicle and moved to meet the man at his car, he stepped from his car which he inadvertently put in reverse. The 76-year-old man was knocked down by the car door and the vehicle rolled over both his legs. Brosia-Carter, a member of Cayce-West Columbia, South Carolina Branch 4616, first made sure that the man was alright and then went to retrieve the car, which had run down an embankment and come to rest under some trees. After parking the car and removing the keys, the carrier returned to the patron, who insisted that he was only mildly injured and could drive himself to his doctor.

For two and a half hours as he lay in the cold February wind and rain beside his van all Mr. Van Abernathy could say was, "9-1-1." Van Abernathy was disoriented by a diabetic shock, cut from his fall and weakened from starting dialysis. He tried to pull himself to where he could be seen but had only enough strength to brace himself against his vehicle. When letter carrier **Roger Hinson**, a member of Charlotte, North Carolina Branch 545, approached the driveway he thought he heard an injured animal, but quickly discovered his patron. Hinson called an ambulance and despite the ordeal and prolonged exposure, his customer recovered.

"Because of the heroic efforts of Hinson on that day, he not only delivered my mail—he delivered me from possible death," Van Abernathy said. "I want to thank this concerned citizen for his help."

For 86-year-old Leona Ryan, sitting on the porch with her cocker spaniel, waiting for the mail and greeting letter carrier **Jeff Dickon** for a brief chat was a daily routine. Dickon, a member of Akron, Ohio Branch 148 became concerned when Ryan was absent from her usual perch one day. "I

could see her dog locked inside the house, barking like crazy," said Dickon. "That dog usually ignores me—I knew something was wrong." Dickon also knew that a nearby neighbor had a key to Ryan's home. The two entered and found Ryan lying face down in the bathroom, lodged between the vanity and the wall, conscious but unable to move. Dickon called rescue personnel and Ryan was soon rushed to the hospital.

"Leona's relatives knew of Jeff and his kindness, cheerfulness and thoughtfulness, as she spoke of him often," the neighbor later wrote. "Jeff is a hero to myself, my neighborhood, Leona's family and all of her friends."



Charlotte, NC Branch 545 member Roger Hinson discovered customer Mr. Van Abernathy in the pouring rain suffering from diabetic shock. The two celebrated Van Abernathy's recovery at the post office.