

# The Postal Record

The monthly journal of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LETTER CARRIERS



## A YEAR'S WORTH OF HEROES 2016-2017

In this book, you'll find the heroic and charitable letter carrier features from the July 2016 to the June 2017 issues of *The Postal Record*, NALC's monthly membership magazine. These stories represent a small fraction of the selfless and generous actions carriers perform every day, often anonymously. An independent panel of judges chose from among these features to name the recipients of the annual Heroes of the Year awards.

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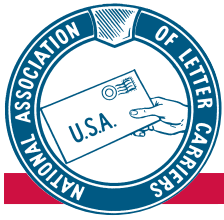
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# National Association of Letter Carriers

Fredric V. Rolando, President

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October 4, 2017

People trust their letter carriers. And that's something we take seriously.

People know that letter carriers represent honest hard work in public service. Letter carriers deliver for the American people day in and day out, and are an integral part of the finest and most affordable postal service in the world.

But we do much more than deliver the nation's mail. We give back to the public we serve wherever we can. We contribute to the fight to stop muscular dystrophy by raising funds for MDA. We run the nation's largest one-day food drive to help the hungry. We are prepared to deliver medicines and vaccines in case of a biological attack on major cities. We look out for those in need every day. And many times, in the most challenging of circumstances, we are heroes.

Each month, in our magazine, *The Postal Record*, we publish stories of bravery and community service performed by our members. Over the course of a year we highlight hundreds of these stories – and we know that many of these impressive acts go unreported. And why is that? Because after helping someone, maybe even saving one or more lives – most of our carriers simply go back to work.

If we do find out, it's often because a neighbor or relative of the person or family that was aided writes a letter or calls to tell us what happened.

I believe letter carriers are some of the most dedicated and caring people you will ever find.

After you read the stories in *A Year's Worth of Heroes*, I think you'll agree.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fredric V. Rolando".

Fredric V. Rolando  
President, National Association of Letter Carriers

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF LETTER CARRIERS

# Stamp Out Hunger

## FOOD DRIVE



Top: Jasper, AL  
Above: Detroit, MI Br. 1  
Below: Central CA Coast Br. 52



## Customers' generosity makes for a standout food drive

**C**ountless NALC members, along with thousands of other postal employees and a host of citizen volunteers, exhibited tremendous sacrifice and generosity on Saturday, May 14, during the union's 24th annual "Stamp Out Hunger" Food Drive.

"Volunteering our time and effort to do what we can to help

families on our routes struggling with hunger is something that every NALC member can be proud of," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "At the same time that we raise awareness in such a dramatic and powerful way that the sad reality of hunger in this country continues to be such a widespread problem, we also further strengthen our ties to the communities that we touch at least six days a week."

The official tally for this year's drive was 80.1 million pounds of food collected in more than 10,000 cities and towns in all 50 states, in the District of Columbia and in every U.S. territory where NALC has a presence. This outstanding collection figure brought the drive's 24-year total to more than 1.5 billion pounds.

Rolando highlighted the efforts of the nation's letter carriers, their families and untold numbers of helpers for their as-

sistance in making the drive a success. He also thanked the NALC's national partners in the drive: the U.S. Postal Service, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, Valpak Direct Marketing Systems, United Way Worldwide and its local United Way chapters, the AFL-CIO and Valassis.

The president also noted with appreciation the boost to food drive that was provided once again by cartoonist Jeff Keane, who annually creates distinctive "Family Circus" artwork that gets printed on promotional posters, T-shirts and more.

Central Florida Branch 1091 captured the title as the top branch in the nation by collecting 2,233,365 pounds of food. Los Angeles Branch 24 came in second with 1,523,525 pounds, followed by three more high-achievers from Florida: Clearwater Branch 2008 (1,303,559 pounds), West Coast Florida Branch 1477 (1,260,176 pounds), and South Florida Branch 1071 (1,190,110 pounds).

The list of the highest-collecting branches in 11 membership-size categories can be found on pages 18-19.

Similar to past practice, the 2016 calculation of total pounds collected accounts for patrons' monetary contributions to the drive as well as their actual, physical donations of food. In previous years, an outside agency handled the cash-to-pounds calculation. This year, the union surveyed a broad selection of on-the-ground food charities across the country to find out how they realistically leverage their own



relationships to stretch donated dollars. The arrived-at figure came to 13.2 pounds per dollar—meaning that the \$952,185 in monetary contributions received this year equals 12,568,842 pounds of food, and that amount is included in the national 80.1 million pound total.

## A year-round problem

On Saturday, May 14, millions upon millions of bags of non-perishable food first were collected by letter carriers and volunteers, who then sorted and delivered it to local community food banks, pantries and shelters that provide those less fortunate with a lifeline of basic nutrition that should help carry them at least through the summer months.

“Everyone thinks of donating food and money during Thanksgiving and the holiday season,” Michael Girsback, a staff member at Santa Monica, CA’s Westside Food Bank, told the *Daily Press*. “However, when the summer months roll around, people are often busy taking care of their kids who are out of school or planning out their next vacation, and making a donation to the food bank is the last thing on their minds.

“That’s what makes this letter carriers’ food drive so special,” Girsback said. “It provides us with thousands of pounds of food just before summer and usually lasts us well into the fall months.”

Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 food drive co-coordinator Tim Thornton added that there is no prize or glory for the letter carriers who pick up the food. “This food drive is voluntary for our carriers,” he told the *Daily Press*. “We get nothing extra for it. We do it out of love for mankind.”

“This [drive] helps us to bridge that summertime gap,” Pilot Mountain, NC Outreach Center board member Casey Shaw told *The Pilot*. “With kids out of school, the needs are even higher in the summer and we need to be able to meet those needs. And during the summer,

people are outside enjoying their lives and food banks tend to be forgotten.”

Boise, ID Branch 331’s Candace Lincoln also emphasized on KTVB-TV the food drive’s schoolchildren angle. “School’s about ready to get out, so we have a lot of children who need extra food and some protein in their diets—and places to go to get some food,” she said. “A lot of people this time of year need it, and the pantries definitely need to fill their shelves again.”

Kid-friendly food is in fact always needed, St. Cloud, MN Branch 388 Food Drive Coordinator Joyce Bell told *The Newsleaders*, especially as school years end. “It’s just amazing what the need is out there for food, but it’s very heartening to see people helping out,” Bell said.

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of St. Cloud Communications Coordinator Trina Dietz noted that during the Great Recession of 2008, “We saw a big jump in the number of families using the food shelf.”

Sadly, “the numbers have pretty much stayed the same in terms of need,” Dietz said. But fortunately, the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive makes it easy to give. “I literally made my donation last year in my pajamas,” she said. “How much easier can you make it for someone to help others?”



Naperville, IL Br. 1151

Below: South Jersey Br. 908

Bottom: Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive spokesman Edward James Olmos makes the pitch for people to make a donation







West Branch, MI Br. 3786

Donating in pajamas—and, more importantly, the convenience of having food picked up by letter carriers—also was on the mind of Golden Harvest Food Bank’s Ashley Siler in Augusta, GA. “We wanted to make it as easy as possible for everyone to donate,” she told WJBF-TV. “I walked out this morning in my pajamas and put our food donation by our mailbox so it took 10 seconds, and it was the easiest thing I’ve ever had to do for a food drive.”

In southern states—Florida in particular—summer can present some extra challenges. For example, Harry Chapin Food Bank of Southwest Florida President and CEO Richard LeBer told Fort Myers’ *News-Press* that not only are many of the

large crops used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in food programs out of season in the summertime, employment

options often are reduced dramatically in the Sunshine State after the so-called “snowbirds” head north for a few months to escape Florida’s sweltering heat and humidity, leaving behind wage earners who often find their work schedules cut or their jobs eliminated altogether.

### Positive response

“This year was a really good collection,” Harrisburg, PA Branch 500’s Greg Andregic told Pottsville, PA’s *Republican Herald*, adding that it goes to show that the “community supports each other.”

Capt. Kevin Polito of The Salvation Army in Pottsville told the paper that his pantry—which before the drive had, at best, a couple of weeks’ worth of food left to distribute—should be able to make it now through the fall, thanks to the food drive. “My heart is swelled over with gratitude,” Polito said. “That’s a great response by the community.”

And the giving didn’t end on May 14. In Clanton, AL, Branch 3457 letter carrier Adam Moyes told *The Clanton Advertiser* that on the Monday following the drive, he was still picking up bags from customers who had put out food too late in the day on Saturday. “There were certain points where nearly every house on a street had bags out,” Moyes said. “Everybody pitched in and did their part. It was one of the best [drives].”

That following Monday also was busy for Hammond, LA Branch 2223’s Mark Landry. “Saturday was pickup day, but we’re still getting more in today,” he told Hammond’s *The Daily Star* on May 16. “This year the community has shown a wonderful outreach.”

Up in Minnesota, Hopkins Branch 2942 retiree and food drive coordinator Steve Peterson told the *Hutchinson Leader* that his branch received a lot of volunteer help

## Ohio branch mourns food drive coordinator’s death

Longtime Tiffin, OH Branch 413 food drive coordinator Joe Weininger died just days before this year’s Letter Carriers’ “Stamp Out Hunger” national food drive on Saturday, May 14.

“For the Tiffin area, Joe was the leader and organizer,” the Salvation Army’s Maj. Becky Stetser told Tiffin’s *The Advertiser-Tribune*, adding that Weininger had helped run the local food drive effort for as long as she could remember.

Branch 413’s Kim Bowersox told the newspaper that Weininger was an important part of a team of postal employees who help make sure each year’s food drive is a success.

“He goes above and beyond,” Bowersox said. “He’s the kind of guy who volunteers and helps in the community. His whole route is going to miss him dearly.”

Bowersox said that, recently, Weininger had even saved and adopted a dog whose previous owner was unable to care for it. “I’ve never heard anyone say a bad thing about him,” she said.

Dedicating this year’s food drive in Tiffin to Weininger “was the least we could do,” Bowersox said. She expressed a hope that this year’s drive would be successful to honor Weininger.

This year, letter carriers in Tiffin—a northwestern Ohio community of about 17,000 people—collected 8,314 pounds of food, a nearly 20 percent increase over last year’s total.



this year from the members the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, a national sponsor of the food drive. "They go way above and beyond," he said. "The rural carriers don't get enough credit. They don't get paid extra." And just as it is for city letter carriers, he noted, "It's all volunteer."

To the east, Green Bay, WI Branch 618 letter carrier Darrell LeCloux noted to *Door County Daily News* that "everything stays local, which is very important." LeCloux used the word "overwhelmed" to describe his response to his community's food drive generosity.

That word also found its way into many other reports, such as this one from Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore Chief Executive Officer Ruth Jones Nichols.

"Once again, we are overwhelmed by the support of the community, as well as the Postal Service men and women through this annual effort," she told Hampton, VA's WAVY-TV. "It just shows the power of what we can accomplish collaboratively in the fight against hunger through combined resources and services."

Eastern Idaho Food Bank Branch Manager Rebecca Ristrem told Pocatello's KPVI-TV that her agency and others reach an average of 30,000 people in Eastern Idaho.

"I'm so excited that our mail carriers here participate" in the food drive, Ristrem said, "because they don't have to. It's a wonderful commitment that they have made to help feed hungry tummies across the nation—but it's near and dear to my heart that they are here in Eastern Idaho."

## Getting it done

With 24 years of national food drives now under our belts, Worcester, MA Branch 12's Norman LaFlash told the *Telegram* that letter carriers and volun-

## Bags make a difference

In many areas of the country, the success of this year's Letter Carriers' Food Drive often resulted from local distribution of special paper or plastic bags bearing the food drive's logo.

"We'll take any bags that customers have," NALC Director of Community Services Pam Donato said, "but the fact is that, where specially marked bags are distributed, food donations often are doubled."

One example where bags had a dramatic effect on food donations came out of Pittsburgh, where International Paper employees represented by United Steelworkers worked together this year to manufacture and donate to Pittsburgh Branch 84 letter carriers half a million paper bags.

"Branch 84 went from 290,000 pounds of collected food in 2015 to more than a million pounds this year—all because of bags!" Donato said.

But such bags—paper or plastic—are expensive, so it often can be a struggle for branches to find local sponsors willing to help defray their production. Fortunately, union solidarity could be counted on to solve this problem in a number of locations, with great results.

In several Texas communities, for example, American Postal Workers Union locals kicked in some cash for bag production, as did the Air Line Pilots Association in Dallas. Charleston, WV Branch 531 letter carriers got a similar boost from the United Mine Workers office there, while food drive coordinators in New York and California received some financial support from the local members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE).

The AFL-CIO's state federations in Nebraska and Arkansas sponsored tens of thousands of bags for distribution in key locations in those states, while the federation's national office helped pay for 300,000 bags in Missouri.

And not only did first-time food drive national sponsor UFCW offer the assistance of its 1.7 million members up to, and on, Food Drive Day, that union also backed bag production for distribution in select communities in New York, Ohio, Louisiana, California and Washington state, also with great results.

"Building on our relationships with our brothers and sisters in AFL-CIO's unions is a natural outgrowth of our membership in the larger labor movement," Donato said. "We hope to expand on such relationships in future drives."

teers together have this annual national experience on the second Saturday in May down to a science. "We operate like a well-oiled machine," he told the newspaper, noting that in some cases, a person's letter carrier is one of the few people who are checking up on residents. "We care about our customers," LaFlash said. "We see them every day and we come to know them and look out for them."

Meanwhile, Elmira, NY Branch 21 President Rodney Stanfield told WETM-TV that even before the final collection figures rolled in, he knew local food donations were up compared with last year.

"When I was driving around, checking on the carriers and how they were doing, it was very positive," Stanfield said.



UFCW members donate Food Drive bags in Massapequa, NY

Snohomish Co., WA Br. 791





# Top 110 branches by size category

## Category 1 (2,000 or more members)

Los Angeles, CA Br. 24.....	1,523,525
South Florida Br. 1071.....	1,190,110
Garden Grove, CA Br. 1100.....	1,184,724
Pittsburgh, PA Br. 84.....	1,034,000
Dallas, TX Br. 132.....	816,909
San Diego, CA Br. 70.....	740,286
Sacramento, CA Br. 133.....	675,682
New Jersey Mgd. Br. 38.....	600,000
Long Island Mgd., NY Br. 6000.....	471,553
Minneapolis, MN Br. 9.....	462,817

## Category 2 (1,500–1,999 members)

Central Florida Br. 1091.....	2,233,365
Buffalo-Western NY Br. 3.....	887,657
Milwaukee, WI Br. 2.....	747,751
Tri-Valley CA Br. 2902.....	503,213
Portland, OR Br. 82.....	430,843
Phoenix, AZ Br. 576.....	289,856
San Antonio, TX Br. 421.....	287,314
Hartford, CT Br. 86.....	281,859
Atlanta, GA Br. 73.....	205,000
Denver, CO Br. 47.....	194,750

## Category 3 (1,000–1,499 members)

West Coast Florida Br. 1477.....	1,260,176
Tampa, FL Br. 599.....	821,042
Northeast Florida Br. 53.....	521,000
West Palm Beach, FL Br. 1690.....	513,113
Harrisburg, PA Br. 500.....	329,614
Rochester, NY Br. 210.....	326,545
St. Paul, MN Br. 28.....	303,932
Kansas City, MO Br. 30.....	285,204
Mass. NE Mgd. Br. 25.....	267,431
Southeast MA Br. 18.....	266,151

## Category 4 (700–999 members)

Clearwater, FL Br. 2008.....	1,303,559
San Juan, PR Br. 869.....	1,046,000
Oklahoma City, OK Br. 458.....	690,420
Nashville, TN Br. 4.....	529,484
Pasadena, CA Br. 2200.....	411,800
Northeastern New York Br. 358.....	355,722
South Macomb, MI Br. 4374.....	332,098
Omaha, NE Br. 5.....	320,390
Worcester, MA Br. 12.....	312,395
Honolulu, HI Br. 860.....	308,902

## Category 5 (500–699 members)

North Oakland Co., MI Br. 320.....	260,096
Madison, WI Br. 507.....	256,766
Raleigh, NC Br. 459.....	197,873
Tacoma, WA Br. 130.....	190,580
Shawnee Mission, KS Br. 5521.....	168,671
Marietta, GA Br. 1119.....	152,484
Van Nuys, CA Br. 2462.....	151,615
Maine Mgd. Br. 92.....	141,503
Central Iowa Br. 352.....	141,337
Wichita, KS Br. 201.....	134,343



“Each carrier was saying, ‘Hey, I’m seeing more food from my customers,’ or they’re having more houses donate food or the quantity was more from each house.”

To the east, Vestal, NY Branch 5151 President Jonny Farnham told WBNG-TV, “Most people put out a whole bag of stuff, but honestly we will take anything we can get.”

Speaking to WIFR-TV, Rockford, IL Branch 245 letter carrier Kelli Ramos said that postal customers there often are eager “to hand us their bags, and it gives us a one-on-one opportunity to meet with a community and together help others.”

And over in Springfield, IL, the annual food drive brings lightness to the heart of Branch 80 letter carrier Robert Hake. “Kind of like, I can’t believe how many people are willing to give something to help others out,” he told WRSP-TV. “That makes you feel better yourself and better about what you’re doing with your job.”

Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 President Walter Barton explained to WCBS-AM that the letter carriers in his branch love the extra work on occasions such as the food drive. “We look at it as a labor of love, because they have that connection to the people on their routes,” Barton said.

That connection goes too for rural routes—and rural letter carriers—as well as those on city duty. “A lot of times, people in the rural areas are unable to really bring in and donate [food],” local St. Vincent de Paul Society President Gale St. Martin told Gladstone, MI’s WLUC-TV.

“This food drive is a 24-year-old tradition, so it is a very important staple in the nation but it’s also a very important staple in Jackson,” Regional Interfaith Association Communications Director

Chelsea-Catherine Cobb told Jackson, TN’s WBBJ-TV.

## Mostly pleasant skies

While the country’s weather largely was pleasant on Saturday, May 14, there were a few spots where conditions could be seen as less than ideal. In Elkhart, IN, for example, it was cold and rainy—yet Branch 547 letter carrier Mike Cataldo told *The Elkhart Truth* that 20 percent more food was donated this year compared with last year. “Elkhart County residents gave from their heart,” Cataldo said. “They knew they could count on their carrier to come get the food, so they made sure it was ready.”

A little farther north, letter carriers and food bank volunteers in Michigan had to deal with rain, snow and even hail as they collected donations. “We got a taste of just about every season Michigan has to offer on Saturday,” Feeding America West Michigan CEO Ken Estelle told the Grand Rapids *Rapidian*, “but that didn’t stop the carriers or our volunteers and staff from doing a great job. We could very easily be looking at double what we took in last year.”

Along with perseverance, another key to food drive success is organization—something that comes naturally to letter carriers. “In the past, we didn’t have this many volunteers, so the food would almost stack to the ceiling as it was dropped off,” Elyria, OH Branch 196 President David Lozano told *The Chronicle-Telegram*. But over the years, he said, the process has become streamlined. “Now, as soon as it hits the floor, the food is categorized and stocked on shelves,” he said.

And just in time, too. “Prior to this,

**Opposite page:  
McAlester, OK  
Br. 1166**

**Right: Fredricks-  
burg, VA Br. 685**

**Below right: San  
Diego, CA Br. 70**



we had a lot of empty space on the shelves,” Rebecca Haywood, a Salvation Army caseworker in Elyria, told *The Chronicle-Telegram*, adding that many adults in her area go hungry, forgoing meals because they only have resources to feed their children. Thanks to this year’s food drive, “I think today we collected enough to get us through October,” Haywood said.

## Looking to the future

New for this year’s drive was a pilot project through special food drive partner Amp Your Good, which accepted throughout the month of May online food donations for select hunger organizations in San Francisco, in New York City, and in Greenwich, CT. Amp Your Good’s online “Crowd-Feeding” platform makes it easy for postal customers to donate fresh fruits, vegetables and other healthy food, to complement the non-perishables donated on Food Drive Day.

“This seemed to be a pretty good test run for online donations,” said NALC Community Service Director Pam Donato. Managing the national food drive is one of the duties assigned to the Minneapolis Branch 9 letter carrier detailed to NALC Headquarters in Washington, DC.

Donato reported that the average amount of food donated online, per donor, was 34 pounds. And because this was an online drive, naturally anyone from anywhere could donate food with just the click of a mouse.

“Those three pilot locations received a special food drive postcard promoting the online option,” Donato said. “From what we can tell based on ZIP code information, nearly a third of donations came from people located outside of where the postcard was delivered.” She added that NALC is looking at ways of possibly expanding the online drive in 2017.



While next year’s food drive might seem as if it’s still a long way off, Donato noted that as soon as one drive ends, preparations for another one begins. And the 2017 drive will be extra special, because on Saturday, May 13, NALC will conduct its 25th annual Letter Carriers’ “Stamp Out Hunger” Food Drive.

“Our silver anniversary next year will provide our union a golden opportunity to continue our special mission,” President Rolando said: “To help raise awareness that too many of the millions of men, women and children we see at least six days a week still—and unacceptably—face hunger every single day.”

*Many more photos from this year’s drive can be found on NALC’s Flickr account. Click the Flickr icon at the top of the home page at [nalc.org](http://nalc.org) to check them out.*

## Category 6 (350–499 members)

Fort Wayne, IN Br. 116	485,028
Scranton, PA Br. 17	296,315
Ozark Mountain, MO Br. 203	255,147
Snohomish Co., WA Br. 791	235,168
Spacecoast Florida Br. 2689	221,000
Ponce, PR Br. 826	186,221
Sun City, AZ Br. 6156	185,593
Erie, PA Br. 284	179,824
Montgomery, AL Br. 106	175,215
Knoxville, TN Br. 419	154,501

## Category 7 (200–349 members)

Fort Myers, FL Br. 2072	294,899
Roanoke, VA Br. 524	270,168
Lakeland, FL Br. 1779	261,409
Naples, FL Br. 4716	257,000
Green Bay, WI Br. 619	235,677
Savannah, GA Br. 578	216,000
Asheville, NC Br. 248	207,914
Boise, ID Br. 331	180,476
Columbia, MO Br. 763	170,260
Wilmington, NC Br. 464	169,256

## Category 8 (100–199 members)

Charlottesville, VA Br. 518	317,008
Billings, MT Br. 815	245,320
Ft. Walton Beach, FL Br. 4559	169,784
Venice, FL Br. 5480	165,735
Eau Claire, WI Br. 728	159,051
Huntington, WV Br. 359	138,650
Ogden, UT Br. 68	136,052
Central Maine Mgd. Br. 391	135,000
La Crosse, WI Br. 59	124,349
Panama City, FL Br. 3367	105,100

## Category 9 (50–99 members)

Ocala, FL Br. 1103	250,000
Albany, GA Br. 4040	107,257
Fredericksburg, VA Br. 685	81,749
Bristol, TN Br. 807	81,600
Camarillo, CA Br. 4114	78,400
Aiken, SC Br. 1569	75,834
Valdosta, GA Br. 998	70,000
Rocky Mount, NC Br. 1321	65,600
Wahiawa, HI Br. 4837	57,656
Wausau, WI Br. 215	55,188

## Category 10 (26–49 members)

Beaufort, SC Br. 3262	66,500
Rossville, GA Br. 2808	66,000
Sebring, FL Br. 2744	55,000
Marshfield, WI Br. 978	49,357
Saint George, UT Br. 4043	44,000
Greer, SC Br. 2553	40,486
Logan, UT Br. 970	37,867
Roseburg, OR Br. 1518	34,494
Benton, AR Br. 3706	34,043
Oconomowoc, WI Br. 1267	33,000

## Category 11 (1–25 members)

Thomasville, GA Br. 1026	50,957
Natchez, MI Br. 476	33,590
Christiansburg, VA Br. 4292	32,000
Meridian, ID Br. 4745	31,137
Newton, NC Br. 2486	31,050
Hudson, WI Br. 1613	27,000
Kailua Kona, HI Br. 5516	24,533
Rogers, AR Br. 1514	23,525
Pewaukee, WI Br. 5129	22,155
Dumas, AR Br. 5141	22,000





Jamie Parks celebrates running with his wife, Lynn, for 25,000 miles.

# LOVE on the RUN

**S**outh Suburban Merged, IL Branch 4016 member **Jamie Parks** is celebrating 25 years—and 25,000 miles—of competitive running with his wife, Lynn. And for every one of those miles, he pushed Lynn in a wheelchair.

Dedication to their task, and to each other, has paid off for the Tinley Park, IL, couple. Just months before they were to be wed in 1987, Lynn suffered a traumatic brain injury in a car crash. She spent 17 days in a coma, and it was seven months more before she was able to talk again. With Jamie's help, Lynn went through years of rehabilitation. Their planned wedding day came and went.

"We stuck together throughout her rehab, and we ended up being married in '94 because she wanted to walk down the aisle, which she was able to do with some assistance," Parks said. But she never regained the ability to walk more than a short distance.

By then, Jamie already had begun pushing Lynn in runs and races. An avid competitive runner, Jamie was inspired by other wheelchair-pushing runners he saw, and it made it easier to be with his wife at the finish line if she was already in a race with him. They first ran a local 10K together in 1991 and never looked back, completing nearly 300 running events together so far.

Training with Lynn wasn't easy for Jamie at first, but he's no ordinary athlete—on

top of his daily mail route, he has run at least a mile every day for 25 years, even on a treadmill, after abdominal surgery, with the flu and while nursing a broken toe. Religiously devout and made of muscle and determination, Jamie keeps detailed records of every mile and every run. Last July, 25 years to the day after their first run together, Jamie and Lynn reached 25,000 miles—equal to a lap around the world.

It was the latest in a string of running achievements. In their first marathon together, the Chicago Marathon in 1996, the couple set an unofficial course record of two hours, 57 minutes for a wheelchair-and-runner duo—a feat that's even more impressive because they used a standard wheelchair that wasn't designed for speed.

In fact, they used a standard wheelchair until their fourth marathon, in Boston, in 2008. The year before, Jamie and Lynn had been honored as "Heroes of Running" by *Runner's World* magazine, and at the ceremony, the representative of a company that makes running wheelchairs approached the couple. "He came up to me after the awards ceremony and said he noticed that we were still running with this off-the-rack wheelchair," Parks said. The new chair was ready just in time to use in Boston.

To pile on to the achievements, Lynn gave birth to a daughter, Annalyn, who at 17 is a runner herself with a seven-year streak of hitting the pavement for at least a mile a day, like her dad.

The Parks' story has attracted coverage by dozens of publications and TV shows, including an hour-long documentary, "Marathon Love," which first aired on Discovery Health in 2008. The film included excerpts from home videos documenting their romance and Lynn's recovery, and chronicled their run that year in the Boston Marathon (they finished in three hours, 25 minutes and ahead of thousands of runners without wheelchairs).

When Jamie and Lynn began their running journey, a runner pushing someone in a wheelchair was uncommon, and some races even banned the practice. Now, many running events recognize this as a competitive category with official records. Jamie and Lynn plan to run in the Chicago Marathon this October to chase the official record.

Jamie never has thought of Lynn as slowing him down. "People say, 'Just imagine how much faster you'd be if you ran without pushing Lynn,'" he said. "You know what? I don't even want to know.

"We're a team. We're going to be a team racing together until God decides I'm not going to run anymore," he said. **PR**



Just one of their medals



# Carrier dies while performing heroic rescue

**H**ouston Branch 283 member **Glenn Higgins**, a 37-year letter carrier, was driving home on May 11 when he saw that a car had run into an electrical pole on the side of the road and caught fire. He stopped his car and rushed over to try to rescue the people he could see inside the burning vehicle.

“He noticed a car that had been in an accident,” Max Higgins, Glenn’s son, told KPRC-TV. “There were down power lines everywhere. The front of the car was smoking and because he is a hero and a good man, he decided to stop and help.”

In his rush to help, Higgins unfortunately stepped on a live power line. The electricity surged through his body and “sixty percent of his body was burned,” Max Higgins told the TV station, adding that his father had third-degree burns on his legs.

Higgins, 58, was placed in intensive care. There, doctors decided that both Higgins’ legs needed to be amputated from a point above the knee. The hospital kept the carrier in an induced coma to help manage the pain. After multiple surgeries, Higgins’ condition was stable, but still critical. He died on June 5.

“He was a good member and was a nice gentleman,” Branch 283 President Willie Ferguson said of Higgins. “It wasn’t a surprise that he did what he did.

“We were all devastated,” Ferguson said. “He was always smiling, he was



Glenn Higgins with his grandchildren

always happy.”

Higgins is survived by his wife of 37 years, Karen; his son, Max; his daughter, Megan; and two grandchildren, Reece and Avery. Memorial services for Higgins were held June 12-13 in Houston.

“We offer our condolences to Glenn’s family,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “They are in our thoughts and prayers.”

Well wishes for the Higgins family may be sent in care of Branch 283 at 2414 Broadway Boulevard, Houston, TX 77012. **PR**

## Proud to Serve

Proud to Serve is a semi-regular compilation of heroic stories about letter carriers in their communities. If you know about a hero in your branch, contact us as soon as possible at 202-756-7403 or at postalrecord@nalc.org. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or firefighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the form of concerned letter carriers.

Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they often are the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

## Screams and gunshots can't scare this carrier

Detroit Branch 1 member **Marlon Williams** was delivering mail one day in April when "I heard someone screaming," he said. "I know a real scream from a fake scream." The carrier stopped what he was doing and drove toward the sound, which came from about a block away.

As Williams was pulling up, he heard two gunshots inside a house. "It startled me," he said.

A woman, Jessica Margheni, came out, covered in blood, and she told Williams that the family's pit bull had suddenly attacked her father, Don, in the backyard. Don had had his back turned, and he thought maybe that was why the dog didn't recognize him and attacked. When the dog turned on Jessica, she grabbed a gun and shot the dog.

She told Williams that Don was in the basement, so the carrier went inside to help.

There were puncture wounds on the man's neck, and "his arm was mangled and his leg was mangled," Williams said. "It was blood everywhere... I put the pressure by his neck and I kept the blood from flowing out."

A neighbor who arrived to help called 911, and emergency responders soon arrived.

"My phone had dropped. I didn't

have any communication so I just hoped the neighbors or somebody would come," Jessica Margheni told WBJK, the local Fox TV news affiliate.

The Marghenis were grateful for Williams' actions and are doing just fine now. "He did his job. He did a very good job. We're thankful," Jessica told WBJK.

But Williams doesn't think he's a hero. "I was just there at the right time, that's all," the 16-year postal veteran told WBJK.

## This carrier has his customers' backs

On April 16, Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Joseph Moskal** was going about his route when "I heard the most blood-curdling scream you could ever imagine," he said. He looked up and saw in horror that a 14-year-old girl was being attacked by a 300-pound man on her front porch.

Moskal ran to the scene. A neighbor was trying to question the man, who had his hands around the girl's throat. "He was trying to kill her," the carrier said.

Charging up the porch, Moskal body slammed the man to get him off the girl, who had been choked unconscious and was bleeding. The aggressor got up and attacked the girl again, so Moskal slammed him down once more and then stood on the man's back, using the door and window as leverage to keep the man down. The neighbor had already called 911, but Moskal called as well while he held the man down.

The neighbor helped to restrain the man and, after a few minutes, police and emergency responders arrived, arresting the man and providing medical help to the girl. "She was lifeless and I thought she was dead," Moskal told USPS. "And what was probably only a few minutes seemed like forever, waiting for help to arrive."

Police told Moskal that if he had



**Detroit Branch 1 member Marlon Williams received media attention for his role in tending to a customer after a dog attack.**

**Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member Joseph Moskal recently was recognized for helping to save a young girl on his route from an attack. Pictured (l to r) are Branch President Larry Kania, Moskal, local Postmaster Thomas Szklarz and Station Customer Services Manager Paul Urbanski.**



interceded only a minute later, the outcome might have been much different. “I was at the right place, at the right time,” Moskal said. “Afterwards, I was shaking and, to this day, I still see the event happening in my mind.”

Northwest District Chief Anthony Barba told *The Buffalo News* that the attacker, a man with a history of mental health problems and who was an outpatient at a local psychiatric center, targeted the girl randomly. She had been out on her porch waiting to be picked up for a school-related activity when the man rushed up. “She was on her porch and all of a sudden he darted over to her and before she could move he started choking her,” Barba said.

The girl was treated for her cuts and bruises and was released soon after, while the suspect was hospitalized at a psychiatric facility and was expected

to face charges upon his release.

But the third-year letter carrier doesn’t think he’s a hero. “It was more or less subduing him,” he said. “I’m just glad I was able to help.”

## Letter carrier to the rescue

Concord, NH Branch 72 member **Scott Martin** was delivering mail one day in February when “I could hear a beeping noise,” he said.

He traced the sound to his 104-year-old customer’s smoke detector inside her house. He knew the woman lived by herself, and the situation just didn’t seem right. No one responded when the carrier knocked on the door, and when he looked across the street he saw a neighbor looking back. “I waved him over,” Martin said.

With the neighbor, the two men entered the home. “The kitchen was full

of smoke,” they said. The woman who lives at the house had forgotten a pot of eggs cooking on the stove, which was now charred.

She was in the living room and seemed happy but surprised to see the men in her home. “The smoke was getting in the living room” just at that point, the carrier said. “She had no idea what was going on.”

They got her out of the house and then opened windows to ventilate the home. “We made sure she was safe and getting fresh air,” Martin said. The woman was unharmed and grateful for the carrier’s help.

But he brushed off any superlatives for his life-saving actions. “I’m just glad I was there,” he said. Martin, who has spent 17 years out of his 23 as a letter carrier on this route, added, “Anything out of the ordinary, I notice.”

## Eye on the elderly

On a rainy Sept. 8, 2015, West Palm Beach, FL Branch 1690 member **Toni Williams** was delivering mail when she saw that one of her elderly customers had fallen. She had apparently tripped over a low concrete wall and was not easily visible to passers-by. “I guess she had slipped,” the carrier said. “She hurt her elbow really bad and also broke her hip.” The octogenarian told Williams she had been there for two hours in the rain. “I



**Toni Williams**

helped lift her up and got her into a covered lawn chair,” she said. Williams then called 911 and the woman’s son to fill him in on the situation. Williams stayed with her customer until paramedics arrived to take her to the hospital to treat her injuries.

When the carrier saw that the scene was in good hands, she continued on her route but later visited her customer in the hospital. The woman soon returned home. “Everything’s back to normal,” Williams

said. But the 20-year postal veteran brushed off any accolades. “Really, I did what anyone would have done,” she said. “You just help someone who needs help. I’m just glad I was there.”

While delivering mail on Sept. 14, 2015, Omaha, NE Branch 5 city carrier assistant **Christopher Ewing** heard his 92-year-old customer, Jean Couch, yelling for help from inside her home. “I looked in the window and saw her on the ground,” he said. The CCA entered the home and rushed to the woman’s side. He lifted her up and placed her in a chair, per her instructions. Couch told him she had fallen

about 45 minutes before. “She was just stuck there,” Ewing said. She was on hold with Life Alert to get help, so Ewing called 911 to make sure she got medical attention. In the meantime, he comforted her and collected all of her medications and papers that had fallen to the floor. Life Alert came back on the line, so the carrier called to cancel an ambulance. Ewing provided Couch with her phone so she could contact her granddaughter. The first-year letter carrier doesn’t think he’s a hero; he said he’s just doing his job. “I always look in to see how she’s doing,” Ewing said. “Being able to help her makes me feel good.”



Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member Louie Kunst learned that his actions in getting a package to his customer went viral via the website Reddit.



### Carrier's actions go viral after chasing down would-be thieves

On Dec. 30, 2015, Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Louie Kunst** had just delivered a package to a customer's door when he saw three teenagers on the sidewalk. "They were checking out every porch they walked by," he said. "I'd never seen them before, and I do this route every day. I kept an eye on them."

Kunst then saw one of them go up to a house where he had just delivered a package, take it, then start walking away with it.

Quickly finishing his loop, Kunst jumped into his vehicle and caught up with the teens as they were walking down the street. "At that point, my adrenaline was going," the carrier said. "I don't confront people very often."

The carrier could no longer see the

package. "I asked, 'Where's the box?'" Kunst told the local Fox TV news station. "And they acted like, 'We don't know what you're talking about.' I said, 'No, where's the box? I know you have it, I saw you take it off the porch. Where is it now?'"

Once the carrier pulled his cell phone out of his pocket to take photos of the teens, they threw the hidden package to the ground and took off running.

"I think they were more scared that someone did see them and confront them," Kunst told *mlive.com*, adding that he does not think the teens realized stealing mail and packages is considered a federal offense.

"Just the audacity of it! This is a nice area and neighbors look out for each other," the package's intended recipient, Nathaniel George, told Fox. "The fact they went up on the porch to grab the package is a little alarming."

Soon after, Kunst brought the dilapidated package back to the office. "The box looked like hell," he said. He and his supervisor re-taped it and wrote a letter to the patron to let him know what happened.

The patron was so impressed with Kunst's actions to retrieve his stolen package that he posted a photo of the letter on *Reddit.com*, saying, "The U.S. Postal Service doesn't play games." The post has since gone viral and generated thousands of online comments.

Kunst, whose parents are also letter carriers, told *mlive.com* he will continue to be vigilant on "the best job" he's ever had. "There's a lot of pride to it because a lot of people respect you," the four-year letter carrier added. "It's something that needs to be done right."

But he brushed off his heroic actions, saying, "That's what makes our community strong—looking out for each other."

## Fire and rescue

When he began his deliveries on Sept. 8, 2015, Rochester, MN Branch 440 member **Bill Belch** noted something that concerned him. "I heard a fire alarm in a house constantly beeping," he said. When he got to the house, the alarm was still going off and he saw that smoke was coming out from the basement and a living-room window. The carrier knocked on the door, but didn't get a response. He then heard a dog whining; looking inside, he saw it running around in circles. Belch called the fire department, which was on the scene within minutes. In the meantime, he noticed that

the door was unlocked, so he went inside, grabbed the animal and brought him outside to safety. "[The homeowner had] put the oven on 'self-clean' and it caught on fire," the carrier explained. While flames never started, the house had filled with smoke. The customer later thanked Belch for saving her house and her dog. But the 18-year letter carrier brushed off any accolades. "I didn't do much to be a hero—just called 911," Belch said. "The dog probably appreciated it. Other than that, I don't know."

One day this past winter, Hartford, CT Branch 86 member **Joe Major** was going

about his route when he saw a woman in distress at a house nearby. The carrier went closer and noticed smoke coming out of her home. The woman didn't speak much English, but indicated to Major that "her husband was still inside," he said. The carrier called 911 and then headed toward the back of the house, where he saw that the home was full of dark smoke. The dispatcher on the line told Major not to go inside, so he stood by the back door. "I just kept yelling and yelling for him," he said. "I think he followed my voice." The man eventually made his way to the back door, and the carrier

took the man to a neighbor's house for safety just before firefighters arrived on the scene. The man was taken to the hospital and was treated for smoke inhalation. When Major saw that everything was in good hands, he continued on his route. Though the home was later declared uninhabitable, the man and woman were OK, and the fire department called Major's post office to commend the carrier. But the third-year letter carrier didn't think his actions were a big deal. "I think I did what anyone else would have done," Major said. "I just walked by. I was lucky I was there at the right time." **PR**

## Help on the way

Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Kelly Chapman** was delivering her route on Sept. 22, 2015, when she saw a woman lying on the ground. “I saw that she was on the railroad tracks,” she said. “She had tripped over a grate and fell.” The woman was not very coherent, so the carrier called 911 and helped make the woman comfortable by placing her satchel under the woman’s head. “I don’t believe she broke anything, but she was pretty bruised up,” the carrier said. Chapman stayed with the woman until medical help arrived to take the woman to the hospital. The four-year letter carrier doesn’t think her actions were that heroic, though. “It was just something I’d do, no matter what,” Chapman said.



**John Scive**

**B**uffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **John Scive** was on his route one day last winter when he

saw a woman slumped over in her running car. “She didn’t look good,” he said. “She was either sleeping or out cold.” He asked a customer to approach the car with him in case she spoke only Spanish, as many in the neighborhood did, and they found the woman unresponsive. Scive opened the door and turned off the car. “She

was blue and firming up,” the carrier said, and he suspected a drug overdose, so he called 911 and stayed on the scene until emergency personnel arrived. “They told me to leave her in the car,” Scive said. Responding medical personnel treated the woman by spraying narcon up the woman’s nose, which counteracts heroin, and soon found a pulse. “She sat up like nothing had happened,” the carrier said. Scive said an EMT told him, “Well, you saved her life. About five more minutes and she’d be dead.” When the carrier saw that the woman was in good hands, he returned to his route. “You get to know when something looks out of place,” Scive said. “She didn’t look like she belonged there. You know who belongs and who doesn’t.” But the 11-year postal veteran doesn’t think he’s a hero. “The firefighters are the heroes,” Scive said. “I just called 911. I hope that someone would do that for me.”

**L**ouisville, KY Branch 14 member **William Goodwin II** was delivering mail one day this past spring when he saw his customer, Mrs. Jackson, lying in a flower bed outside her house. Thinking it was strange, the carrier crossed to that side of the street to check on her. A couple who was passing by also noticed and stopped to help. “She was going to get the mail and fell,” Goodwin said. She had apparently tried to use her arm to break her fall. “Her

arm was mangled behind her back,” the carrier added. “You could tell that it was broken.” Jackson’s husband had been inside the house and came out when he heard the commotion. He started to help pick his wife up, but he was injured and in a walking cast, so Goodwin and the passerby picked up the woman and carried her inside. An ambulance soon arrived to check out Jackson’s condition; meanwhile, Goodwin knew some of Jackson’s family members lived down the street, so he went to inform them about what happened. Not getting a response, he left a note. Realizing that his customer was in good hands, Goodwin continued on his route. Despite receiving praise for his actions, the 12-year postal veteran insists that it wasn’t a big deal. “It wasn’t really heroic; it was just being in the right place at the right time,” Goodwin said. “It feels good to help someone. Anyone with a heart would do it.”

**R**ochester, NY Branch 210 member **Justin Hull** was going about his route on Sept. 28, 2105, when “I heard a loud banging” from a nearby house, he said. His customer had fallen inside and crawled to the



**Justin Hull**

front door, using the screen door to hit the door frame to get his attention. When Hull arrived at the scene, the customer “was in pain and agony on the floor,” Hull said. “He had closed his eyes in distress.” The man began to get nauseous and complained he was having chest pains. Hull sat with the man and called 911. “I stayed on the line with them and I had him focus on his breathing,” the carrier said. He kept the man awake, and waited with him until emergency responders arrived to take the man to the hospital. Doctors discovered clots in the man’s heart and legs. The patron’s nephew, a USPS Office of the Inspector General (OIG) agent, wrote a letter to the post office, saying, “My uncle is very grateful and knows Justin may have quite literally saved his life. Please pass on my sincere thanks.” The first-year letter carrier brushed off any accolades, though. “I was just happy I was there for him,” Hull said. “I just did what I hope someone else would do for me in that situation.” **PR**

## Eye on the elderly



Lorenzo Clark

One day this past spring, Morristown, NJ Branch 272 member **Lorenzo Clark** was delivering mail when he heard a faint noise coming from inside an elderly customer's house. "I thought it was the television, but I wanted to check," he said. The carrier approached the house and he saw through the screen door that the woman who lived there was lying on the floor. He called out to her and she said, "Help," the carrier recalled. She told him she had fallen that morning and had not been able to get up, and she beckoned him to come inside. Clark helped the customer up and called one of her family members. Later, the customer's son-in-law, a retired letter carrier, contacted the postmaster to thank Clark for helping his mother-in-law. The 11-year letter carrier doesn't think he did anything special; he just said that being alert on the route is important. "It's something we're taught to do, to pay attention to our surroundings," Clark said. "Day to day, I try to help."

On Dec. 17, 2015, Scotts-bluff, NE Branch 1836 city carrier assistant **Aaron Beckstrom** was delivering mail when he noticed an elderly gentleman just standing on his steps partway up, holding onto the rail and not moving. "It was really cold," Beckstrom said. "He didn't have any gloves on." The CCA asked the man if he was OK and if he needed help. The man indicated that he needed aid and said that he had thrown his grocery bags up on the porch but he couldn't make it up the steps to get into his apartment. Beckstrom was concerned for the man. "I just helped him up the stairs," he said. "I didn't know what else to do, but I couldn't leave the poor guy outside in those temperatures." But the first-year letter carrier doesn't think he's any sort of hero. "I did what I figure anyone else would have done."

On Feb. 8, Western Massachusetts Branch 46 member **Heinz Hochrein** was returning to his vehicle at a park point on his route when "I heard someone scream," he said. The carrier looked over and saw that his 84-year-old customer had fallen and couldn't get up. The carrier went over to the customer. "I did my best to pick him up—it was kind of icy out," Hochrein said. The carrier got the man inside and assessed

him for injuries. "He didn't have any obvious bruises," he said, and the man told him he felt OK. Hochrein called the man's niece who usually came to check on him and made sure she would come over. Once the carrier was sure that his patron was OK, he continued on his rounds. "I don't consider myself a hero," the 11-year letter carrier said. "I was just glad I was at the right place at the right time."

On Saturday, Aug. 29, 2015, Charleston, WV Branch 531 member **Holly Allen** was delivering to an elderly customer. The woman had knee issues and lived about 150 feet from the street, so Allen would always bring her mail to the house. The carrier realized he had not seen her in a while, so "I opened the door and heard her yelling, 'Mr. Mailman, is that you?'" Allen responded, and found out that the woman had slipped on pickle juice in her kitchen and fallen. At the customer's request, Allen contacted the woman's granddaughter and stayed with his customer until the relative and emergency personnel arrived. "She was so thrilled that I

would even stay with her," Allen said. An ambulance arrived soon after, as well as the granddaughter. When the woman arrived, she asked if anyone else smelled gas. They found out that there was a gas leak in the basement, and

that gas had already filled the basement. They were able to turn it off without any issues. "I was so happy I was able to help a little bit," Allen said. But the 17-year letter carrier doesn't think he's a hero. "It's one of those 'lucky-to-be-there type things,'" he said. "It's something every one of us would have done, if called upon."

Fort Worth, TX Branch 226 member **Dan Do** was on his route on Sept. 23, 2015, when he noticed his customer Mrs. Harris's mail had been accumulating in the mailbox. "She always clears the box every day," he said. The woman would usually leave a note for him if she was going to be away. After three days, "The mail never moved at all. I thought, 'Something's wrong,'" he said. He knocked on the window, but didn't get a response. "I got an instinct that something was really wrong," he said. The carrier called the police to do a wellness check on Harris. Responding police and firefighters broke in through the back and found the woman unconscious on the floor, where she had been for at least three days. She was taken to the hospital, where she was treated for dehydration and released to a rehab center to recover. Once Do saw that the situation was in good hands, he continued on his route. Though he was commended for his actions, the 15-year postal veteran doesn't think of himself as a hero. "I'm just doing my job," Do said. "Any mail carrier would do the same." **PR**



Aaron Beckstrom



## Looking out for customers of all ages

On Feb. 8, South Florida Branch 1071 member **Richard Herrera** was going about his route and was turning in a cul-de-sac when “I noticed a little girl crying profusely,” he said.

Herrera recognized the young girl, Layla, because on Saturdays her parents would let her come to get the mail from him. The carrier knew she was about four blocks over from where she lived. “She had no inclination as to where she was going,” Herrera said. “She was

frantic, crying.”

The 5-year-old also recognized Herrera as her trusted letter carrier, and asked to get in his mail truck. Instead, he followed protocol by securing his vehicle and walking her back to her house.

On the way, they saw the girl’s uncle riding around on a bike, on the lookout for her. The girl had apparently been dropped off at the wrong bus stop; they found her parents waiting there.

“She was the smartest 5-year-old I’ve ever encountered. She knew what to do,” Herrera said, adding that he told Layla she had done the right thing.

“I took precaution to make sure she’s secure,” he said.

Layla’s family was grateful to the carrier. “I don’t know what would [have] happened that day had he not been there to help,” Layla’s grandmother, Cathy Czaruk, wrote to the postmaster general. “Please tell him thank you from our entire family.”

Herrera said he’s humbled by the recognition of actions, but doesn’t think it was that big of a deal. “We interact with customers every day,” the 23-year letter carrier said. “To me, it came as second nature. I did my job to the best of my ability. I’d do it again in a heartbeat.” **PR**

## Neighborhood watch

Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Nicklaus Gleason** was delivering his route one day in October 2015 when “I smelled a pretty bad odor in the front yard of a house,” he said. He didn’t think too much about it and continued on his



Nicklaus Gleason

rounds. The next day, a Saturday, he smelled it again and thought it was strange. “I got to the end of the street and saw an energy truck. It had to be a sign,” Gleason said. “I stopped and talked to the worker. He said they would check it out.” On Monday, Gleason’s scheduled day off, “I received a text from my swing person telling

me I was a hero,” he said. “Come to find out, the furnace had a huge leak.” The gas company told the homeowners they were lucky to be alive. He found out that the furnace was in the basement, where some of the members of the family lived. “They were extremely grateful,” Gleason said. But the 13-year postal veteran doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I was just happy that I was there,” he said. “I just felt like I was doing my job.”

Stockton, CA Branch 213 member **Richard Valles** knows his customers well; this past spring, his elderly customer, Helen Gough, confided in him that she was scared of the workers she had hired to do her windows. Valles had noticed them lurking around her property and described them as con artists. “I’ve seen them in the neighborhood before,” he said. “They were messing around in the house.” When Gough told her carrier that she was scared they might hurt her, “I just wanted them out of there because I knew

they were trouble,” he said. So, he asked neighbors for any contact information they might have for Gough’s relatives, and contacted the woman’s daughter, who lived eight hours away. She eventually came and got all of the men out of the house. “[She alleged that] they were scamming her and had taken thousands of dollars,” Valles said, adding that the district attorney was looking into the case. But the carrier doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I just made sure Helen was safe,” he said. “That’s all I worried about.” Valles, who has been on this route 25 years of his 30 as a letter carrier, said, “I always look out for my neighborhood. I try to take care of all my people out there like they’re my family.”

On Jan. 22, Boston Branch 034 member **Robert McGee** was delivering his rounds. “I was walking from yard to yard, my usual route,” he said, when he smelled the strong scent of natural gas as he approached a house. He knew the resident, Jean Higgins, worked from



Richard Valles

home, so he alerted her, advising her to call the gas company and evacuate the property. She did. Gas company crews arrived within a half-hour and determined there was a major leak in the gas line that went to Higgins’ house. She was able to return after a five-hour evacuation. Higgins was very appreciative of McGee’s actions, telling him that authorities had told her that her house could have blown up. “To this day, she still thanks me when she sees me,” the carrier said. “It could have been bad, I guess.” But don’t try to call the 15-year letter carrier a hero. “I was just happy to be where I was at that time,” McGee said. “Everything turned out well.” **PR**

## Proud to Serve

Proud to Serve is a semi-regular compilation of heroic stories about letter carriers in their communities. If you know about a hero in your branch, contact us as soon as possible at 202-756-7403 or at [postalrecord@nalc.org](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or firefighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the form of concerned letter carriers.

Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they often are the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

## Keeping the route safe and secure

On March 30, Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member **Joseph Manno** was completing his rounds when he observed unusual activity outside of the house he was delivering to. "I noticed two guys on a front lawn throw hoods over their heads," he said.

Manno didn't recognize them, and they didn't have any tools in their hands. "I heard them say, 'There's the mailman. Let's go,'" he said. "Then I watched them run to the back yard." He heard one comment that the homeowner wasn't home.

"This doesn't look right," the carrier said to himself. Manno knew the man who owned the home and, concerned, went to knock on the front door. The man's mother answered the door and the carrier tried to warn her about what he saw, but she didn't speak English.

So, Manno called police, who quickly responded. "They checked it out," he said. Police discovered that no one had broken into that home. The suspects appeared to have run to the neighboring house behind that one; those homeowners had just left for vacation. That home was secure, but the fence was damaged.

Later on Manno's route, the first homeowner located the letter carrier after his mother had called him. He asked the carrier what happened, and he thanked Manno for looking out for his

house and family. He also said that he had surveillance video at the home; after watching it, the man told the carrier, "Joe, they came 10 minutes earlier to case the house out."

Manno has been getting praise for his actions. "When we heard this story upon our return we were so grateful that Joe Manno had been on the scene. If not for his vigilance and quick action, our neighbors and possibly our home may have been burgled," neighbors Jennifer McGarry and Joseph Spletzer wrote in a letter to the district manager. "He cares and knows his neighborhood well enough to recognize when something is not right—when something or someone is out of place—and will take appropriate action."

But the 47-year postal veteran doesn't think he's a hero. Manno simply said, "I was glad I was there to prevent the crime."

## More than just a 'good deed'

On March 18, Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member **Victor Santos** was on his route with his postmaster. "Up ahead, I noticed a vehicle driving really slow," he said. The car continued to slow down, and Santos noticed it was drifting into oncoming traffic.

"The man's head was down," the carrier said, of the car's driver. When he got closer, he recognized the man as one of his customers.

Santos pulled over his LLV. "I crossed the road to find the man somewhat lethargic," he said. Santos put the man's car in park and shut it off, then yelled to his postmaster to call an ambulance.

"The man wasn't in the condition to drive. He was definitely not himself. He was slurring a little bit," Santos said. "I proceeded to take the keys and help him out." The carrier helped the man out of the car, and explained the situation to responding police when they arrived a few minutes later.

The customer had apparently been experiencing a medical issue. "My concern was a head-on [collision], because he



Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member Joseph Manno was praised for his role in catching burglars on his route.





**Irma Gonzales-Tranter**

was in the direct line of traffic,” Santos said. “It all worked out well.” The carrier has seen the man since, and he is doing OK now.

The 21-year postal veteran simply said he was doing his good deed for the day. “It’s a situation where I just acted out of reaction,” Santos said.

## Helping out ‘family’

On Jan. 11, Phoenix Branch 576 member **Irma Gonzales-Tranter** was delivering her route when she saw a grandmother with her two grandkids out on the front lawn. “I always see them out there,” she said.

Suddenly, she saw the woman run-

ning across the street with the 3-year-old boy, crying. Gonzales-Tranter was concerned, so she pulled over her LLV. The woman was trying to go to her neighbor’s house for help with her grandson Sebastian.

“He was blue to the face, unresponsive,” the carrier said. “I put him on the ground to start CPR.” The grandmother asked the neighbor to call 911 as Gonzales-Tranter continued chest compressions.

A responding police officer came within minutes to help with CPR, and together they were able to resuscitate Sebastian. An ambulance arrived a few minutes after, and paramedics

took over and brought the child to the hospital’s intensive-care unit.

Later that day, Gonzales-Tranter followed up to see how the child was and found out that Sebastian’s heart had apparently shut down after a seizure caused by an infection. The boy soon recovered and returned home.

Gonzales-Tranter said performing CPR was nerve-racking. “You just do the best you can and hope for the best,” she said.

But the three-year letter carrier doesn’t think she’s a hero; she said that letter carriers provide extra support for the community. “When you get to know your customers, they become family,” she said. “I just did what I had to do.”

## Neighborhood watch

Oak Brook, IL Branch 825 member **Joyce Kolanowski** had just pulled up to a condominium complex on her route to deliver mail one day this spring. “There was a little girl outside with a backpack,” she recalled, “and she was crying.” The child asked the carrier if she could open the door to the building because her mom wasn’t buzzing her in. Kolanowski recognized the child and knew she lived there, so she used her key to get the girl access to go inside and then continued to put mail in the complex’s boxes. Soon after, the 7-year-old girl came back down, crying, saying her mom wasn’t home. “Don’t cry, because I’m going to stay with you,” Kolanowski told her. “She calmed right down,” she added. The carrier called police and waited at the building. “I couldn’t leave her outside,” she said. Police soon arrived and were able to get in touch with the mother on her cell phone. The child

had had an early dismissal from school; the mother was at the store, but she immediately rushed home to her child. Kolanowski said her actions are all part of the job. “We’re out there to keep our eyes open and pay attention to what’s going on in the neighborhood, not just putting mail in the mailbox,” she said. But the 17-year letter carrier denied any major hero-



**Oak Brook, IL Branch 825 1 member Joyce Kolanowski (c) received recognition from local Postmaster Julie Buckley (l) and POOM Michael Young for helping a lost child on her route.**

ics. “To me, it was a simple act of kindness,” Kolanowski said. “I’m a mother and grandmother, and you don’t leave a crying child.”

On March 15, Portland, OR Branch 82 member **Charlie Grimes** was delivering mail on his route along with a trainee. “We were dividing and conquering the route,” he said, when “I noticed a little girl, in pajamas and barefoot, in a front yard.” Grimes knew that the young girl didn’t belong there. He kept an eye on her as he did his loops, but then saw her run to the middle of the street. The carrier went up to the girl and asked her if she was OK. The child started crying and held onto Grimes as he ushered her out of the street. “I whistled to my trainee to keep going and knocked on a door,” the carrier said. He asked the woman

who answered if she knew who the girl was. She did not, but she volunteered to call 911. An officer soon responded and attempted to take the little girl from Grimes, but she started screaming and would not let go of him. “The girl got attached to me,” Grimes said. “I held on to her.” The police called child protective services and began a door-to-door search for the girl’s parents. When child services arrived to take custody of the girl, she again started screaming and would not leave the care of Grimes. The carrier stayed with the child until the police were able to reunite her with her mother—two hours later. The girl had apparently gotten out of an unlocked house. The fourth-year letter carrier doesn’t describe his actions as heroic, though. “I’m a parent. I just trusted my gut,” he said. “I feel like I did what anyone who wears our uniform would have done.” **PR**

## The eyes and ears of the neighborhood

On May 5, Emerald Coast, FL Branch 4559 member **John Jackson** was going about his park-and-loop and had just dropped the mail in the box outside the home of his 78-year-old customer, Janet Doman. “I heard what I thought was someone saying, ‘Help,’” he said.

The carrier called out to see if the woman was OK. Doman called out, “John!” in return. “I knew she needed help,” he said, so Jackson broke the latch on the storm door and found her inside. “She was kind of tangled up in a chair that she had fallen into,” the

carrier said. “She was lying awkwardly.”

Jackson called 911. “She thought she had dislocated her shoulder,” Jackson told *The Bay Beacon*. He maneuvered Doman and moved the chair out of the way because her arm was caught in it. Doman told him that she had fallen four hours earlier and her medical alert necklace was not working.

Medical personnel soon arrived to attend to the woman. Doman told the *Beacon* that she calls Jackson her “guardian angel.” She added, “I was praying that he would hear me when he came because I know what time he

comes. I could have died there.”

Jackson, a 21-year postal veteran, told the paper he was “in the right place at the right time.” Doman had apparently broken her shoulder and has since recovered after going through rehabilitation.

The carrier and his customer became friends after realizing they had the same birthday. But Jackson doesn’t think he’s a hero; he’s just glad the woman had a mailbox right outside her house. “If it had been a curbside delivery, she’d still be there,” he said. “Because it was a door-side box, I was there. Any letter carrier would have done the exact same thing.” **PR**

## Eye on the elderly

Hamilton, OH Branch 426 member **Heather Hollister** was delivering her route on March 11 when she noticed her elderly customer, Mary Jones, had not picked up her mail. Knowing this was unusual for Jones, “I knew something was wrong,” the carrier said. “I talked to her every day.” Hollister took the mail from the box and went to the door to check on the woman. She knocked, but heard nothing. She knocked again. This time, she heard Jones crying for help. The door was locked, so Hollister went to a neighbor’s house to see if they had a key, but they didn’t. The carrier then called 911.

“They came and busted down the door,” Hollister said. They found Jones lying in the garage, where she had been for at least two days. “She had fallen and couldn’t get up,” Hollister said. “She had issues with her legs.” She had wrapped herself in rugs in an attempt to stay warm. Jones was taken to the hospital for treatment and recovery. The first responders told Hollister that Jones probably

would not have made it through another day on the ground. The 22-year postal veteran said it was a terrible feeling “when you hear someone hollering for help and you can’t help them.” Still,

Hollister doesn’t think she’s a hero. “I just feel that it was what anyone else would have done.”

Virginia Beach, VA Branch 2819 member **James Miller** was delivering the mail on March 16 when he noticed that mail was backing up in the mailbox of his customer, Jackson Wright. “He gets a lot of mail,” the carrier said, and he knew his customer usually picks up the mail every day. Concerned, Miller took the mail to the door and noticed it was open, just the screen door was closed. He knocked, and looking through the screen door, he could see Wright’s feet sticking out from behind the couch. Miller shouted in, and the man’s toes wiggled. The carrier called 911 and

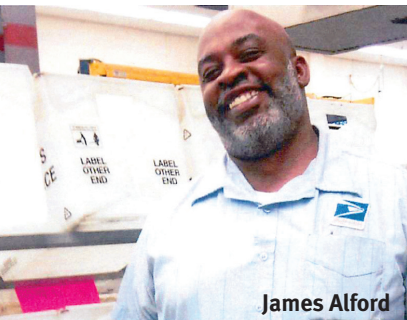
yelled to Wright, “Hold on—help is on the way,” he said. “I didn’t want him to exert any more energy than he had to.” Miller stayed on the line with the 911 operator until emergency personnel arrived. The man had apparently been on the floor for two to three days. Wright’s daughter later contacted the carrier to tell him how grateful the family was for his help. She also said that he was doing all right and would be moved to a retirement home. Miller, an eight-year Navy veteran and an 18-year letter carrier, doesn’t like to think of himself as a hero, though. He said he just tries to take note of anything unusual on his route. “I just want to help out,” he said. “I’m always trying to look out for the neighbors.” **PR**



Heather Hollister

## Help on the way

Cleveland Branch 40 member **James Alford** was delivering a certified letter one day in May when he saw something out of the ordinary. “There was a car coming down the street kind of fast,” he said. “She lost control.” The vehicle soon ran into a tree. The carrier asked a bystander to call 911 and ran over to help. He began by opening up the door. He assessed the driver’s condition and then pulled the female driver out. “A child was crying in the backseat,” Alford said. “I grabbed the child and got her out of the car.” The carrier put both the mother and 9-year-old girl a safe



James Alford

distance away, since he saw that the car was leaking fluids. At that point, “You could hear the sirens coming,” Alford said. The carrier kept the pair comfortable until help arrived. Both victims were taken to a hospital, where they recovered. The driver told authorities she had tried to dodge a squirrel and lost control of the car. The 18-year postal veteran denied any major heroics. “If you see something that needs to be done, it’s our civil duty as human beings to do something,” Alford said.

On Saturday, Feb 27, Elmira, NY Branch 21 city carrier assistant **Angelica Bruno** was

delivering mail on a route that she had regular subbed on when she noticed that the mail had not been picked up from a customer’s mailbox. “The mailbox was right next to the back door,” she said. So, the carrier looked in through a big window into the apartment and noticed that the kitchen looked very messy. Bruno decided to keep an eye on the situation. When she returned on Monday, “I came back, and it was still the same condition,” she said, then, “I looked in and looked down.” This time, she saw that someone was lying on the floor, not moving. “I knew she wasn’t lying there before,” the carrier said. “I kind of panicked.” She reported her concern to her postmaster, who in turn called 911. Emergency personnel arrived from the sheriff’s department that was close by and took the woman to the hospital for treatment. Bruno called the sheriff’s office the next day to check up on the situation and found out that the woman was doing OK. The first-year letter carrier said that she just tries to be observant. “I’m usually pretty aware of my surroundings and what’s what,” Bruno said.

As New Jersey Merged Branch 38 city carrier assistant **Gregory Loughlin** delivered mail one day in March, he heard what sounded like his patron yelling. “The gentleman must have heard me put mail in the box and started screaming for help,” the carrier said. “I asked through the door if he was OK.” The man said he had fallen inside his home and injured his back. The door was unlocked, so Loughlin entered the house and found the man on the floor. The man

said he was in pain and asked Loughlin to call 911. His phone had fallen across the room and out of reach, the carrier said, so the man asked him to retrieve it and to also call his wife. Loughlin stayed with his customer until emergency responders arrived. “It may have been 20 minutes out of my day, but I felt really good about having helped one of our customers,” he said. As a volunteer firefighter, Loughlin didn’t think much of his actions. “It’s just one of those things that I do,” the second-year letter carrier said.

On Aug. 31, 2015, Moundsville, WV Branch 893 member **Randy Caldwell** was on his park-and-loop route when “I heard a fellow screaming really loudly,” he said. He went over to the noise, and found a man, Mr. Blake, trapped underneath a mobile home after a jack that the home had been hoisted up on had slipped. “It pinned this man to the ground,” Caldwell said. “He was yelling and screaming, and in severe pain.” The carrier called 911 and asked the operator to make sure responders brought heavy equipment to help free Blake. “They were able to come with a backhoe,” Caldwell said. Blake was soon freed and rushed by medical helicopter to the hospital. Caldwell was commended for his keen awareness of his surroundings and his concern for his customer. But the 30-year postal veteran said his actions weren’t that big of a deal. “I don’t consider it a heroic act,” he said. “I just called 911 and stayed with him until help arrived. Guys do that every day around the country.”



Angelica Bruno

On a sweltering Aug. 4, 2015, Lakeland, FL Branch 1779 member **Kenneth Jinwright** was delivering his route when he turned onto a side street and saw an elderly woman lying in the middle of the road with her purse’s contents scattered around—“right out in the sun,” he said. When the woman saw the carrier, she raised her arm to get his attention as Jinwright pulled over. “I thought, ‘Oh, this ain’t good,’” the carrier said. “Her face was all bloody and her arm was bent the wrong way.” He knew the woman, his octogenarian customer, and asked her questions to make sure she was oriented and alert. She said she was not sure how long she had been lying on the pavement. “If she had been there a minute, it would have been too long in that heat,” Jinwright said. He picked her up and “held onto her and walked back to her home,” he said. When they got there, the woman asked the carrier to call her daughter at work instead of 911. While Jinwright made sure the woman was going to be OK and waited for the daughter to get there, he prepared a cold compress for his customer. He later found out that the woman had broken her wrist and a finger, as well as sustaining some cuts. She had apparently fallen after overheating and passed out. The patron, who soon recovered and returned home after surgery, was thankful to Jinwright. But the 19-year postal veteran didn’t think much of his actions, describing the word “hero” as overused. “I’m not a hero; a good Samaritan, probably,” Jinwright said. **PR**



# Four friends Become Angels



**Top:** The Better Angels of Our Human Nature get financial and volunteer assistance from other postal employees in the region. **Below:** The group gathered and delivered supplies to those hurt by Superstorm Sandy. **Bottom:** They also financially assisted in the creation of art therapy kits for children with a family member in hospice care.



**J**t all started in late 2009 on New York City Branch 36 member **Ernest Twomley's** route.

While delivering mail, he noticed a mother and daughter outside of their apartment building, and the 11-year-old girl was screaming in pain. His fatherly instincts kicking in, Twomley helped by carrying the girl up the stairs and into her apartment.

Soon after, he found out that the youngster he had helped with his small action had a terminal illness. Twomley, a 29-year postal veteran, said he asked himself, "What can I do for this family?" He headed back to the post office and mentioned to fellow Branch 36 members **David Correa** and **Heriberto Rodriguez** and postal employee Don Daggett that he wanted to do something for the family over the holidays.

Correa, a 31-year letter carrier and Navy veteran, told Twomley, "If you want to do it right, see if she has any other brothers and sisters. She can look like a hero." As it turned out, the girl had three brothers. So, Twomley asked the mother to have her children write letters to Santa Claus and he would make sure they got delivered to him.

The carriers solicited support and funds from co-workers and management, and then went to some stores to get gifts for the entire family. The girl really wanted an American Girl doll, so Twomley and Rodriguez, a 28-year postal veteran, went out shopping in New York City. "You can imagine two guys shopping for dolls," Rodriguez said with a laugh.

They then invited the family to the post office for a party, where they presented the mother and children with the gifts. Daggett dressed up as Santa Claus. "We made it the best Christmas they ever had," Twomley said. Someone said to him, "You made a differ-

ence in that family's life."

"To me, we just got a doll," he added.

Soon after, the girl died. When the four men went to the home to check on the family, there was a grief counselor working with them.

Correa said it got them thinking, "We could get involved by having a bereavement bag."

They soon teamed up with the Metropolitan Jewish Hospice to provide the children with a creative arts legacy kit, which helps therapists provide coping skills during the bereavement period through a program called "Art & Soul." (Naturally, the bag resembles a letter carrier's satchel.)

The carriers said that going to the hospice had been the toughest part, but it had been worth it when they saw the smiles on the patients' and family members' faces.

This experience led them to want to do more. The foursome was interviewed by a local news reporter, who dubbed them "The Better Angels of our Human Nature." When they solidified their commitment by creating a non-profit organization in 2010, they adopted that name as their own.

Besides providing support to sick and terminally ill children and their families, they've gone on to help with dozens of other causes, including Superstorm Sandy relief, "Toys for Tots" drives, Christmas parties for kids with autism, school supply drives, fundraising for the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA), supply drives for women's shelters—the list goes on. There is fundraising in stations, and Better Angels has its own Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) number (67657) to raise funds to help.

Better Angels does regular events all year long in the New York City area, though the group is trying to expand its reach by going to all five boroughs,

# Playing Santa

Long Island and New Jersey, and the organization is open to expanding even further by creating other non-profit outlets.

“Little acts of kindness go a long way,” Rodriguez said. “If we can deliver a letter and bills, we can deliver services to the community when they need it.”

The letter carriers cited one experience that was particularly memorable. After they found out that a fellow carrier’s house had burned down, they teamed up with a local merchant that supplies USPS uniforms.

Area letter carriers who had money left on their uniform allowance vouchers donated hundreds of dollars to her. Better Angels matched the donation.

“Everyone chipped in and got her a year’s worth of uniforms,” Twomley said, and they presented her the gift at the post office. “She started crying—she was overwhelmed.”

After Superstorm Sandy in 2012, when their city was hit especially hard, Better Angels knew they wanted to take action. Teaming up with another local post office and a fire department in the neighborhood, “We rented a truck and people would come by and donate water, mops, and we drove it out to victims,” Correa said.

“We not only live in the community, we work in the community,” Rodriguez said. “If there’s a tragedy, we’re suffering as well.”

Twomley said, “Just recently, there was a woman our reps came across who had terminal cancer.” So, they came up with the idea of an “Angels time out”—in which they sent her (and her daughter, who was her caretaker) to a beauty salon for a day of pampering. “We wanted to make her day as pleasant as can be,” Twomley said.

The guys say that a lot of people just want to do a good deed to get a photo op. Not them. “We want to get our hands dirty,” Twomley said. “We’re stepping up and doing what we need to do.”

Correa added, “We try to help in as



many different ways as we can.”

“We have to depend on one another,” Rodriguez said. “I just want to make sure that I am a solution to what people need.”

The carriers and their volunteers are glad that they are able to make a difference. “The highlight of all of it is that we can take some of the ugliness that’s been dished out to these people, and make their lives less stressful than they have to be,” Twomley said. “It feels great that we’re there and we could make a big difference, and I feel we are.”

While there are not currently a lot of other letter carriers involved, “Our goal is to get every station involved in community work,” Twomley said. “We want to make the biggest impact in the postal system as we can.”

This includes getting managers involved, such as permission to store donated toys at the post office.

They’ll ask carriers in other stations if they have women’s shelters with

Rockford, IL Branch 245 member Francis J. Loebach Jr., better known as “Chops,” retired last July after completing 50 years of active service. Always a customer favorite, during the last six years on the same route he had for 36 years, he delivered mail on Christmas Eve as Santa Claus and handed out candy canes to his patrons. “I look like him—I figured, why not?” he said. “The parents seem to get as much a kick out of it as the kids do.”



which they can partner. “It’s just a matter of getting people who want to participate,” Twomley said. “All you need is a willingness and wanting to help.”

The foursome thinks that, as letter carriers, they are uniquely able to identify what members of their communities need. “We see and feel what they go through,” Rodriguez said.

Twomley added, “Letter carriers are recognized as being pillars of the community—this solidifies it.”

For other carriers around the country who want to do something similar, the guys have plenty of advice. “Whatever it is the community needs, reach out to a person who knows what it needs,” Rodriguez said. “Speak to friends and co-workers from other stations. Reach out to congressional representatives. Sit down with them and ask, ‘Is there a way we can help?’ ”

Twomley said that volunteers are out there. “Look around—there’s always

a helping hand to do something.” He added, “Give not just money; give from yourselves.”

And the guys would love to help out carriers and branches personally, even creating new regional outlets of Better Angels. “We’re more than happy to speak to them,” Rodriguez said. “If we can expand somewhere else, or if individuals want to start their own organization, we can show them the process we went through.”

NALC members are also welcome to pass along ideas to Better Angels. Twomley said they want letter carriers to be “a positive force to be reckoned with.”

Better Angels just wants to help make postal communities better places. “We can’t do everything, but even the small stuff we do is pretty rewarding for families,” Correa said. “We’re delivering mail and delivering hope.”

Visit [tbangels.com](http://tbangels.com) for more information and to contact the carriers. **PR**

## He keeps the carriers cool



John Lauer

**O**ut on their routes in the summer heat, the letter carriers of Binghamton, NY Branch 333 get hot and thirsty, but thanks to the “hydration patrols” by the branch’s Director of Retirees **John Lauer** and his wife, Doris, they end their days refreshed and safe.

Doris, who is president of the local NALC Auxiliary, first suggested taking water out to carriers on a hot day in 2011. Lauer had just retired that year. When he carried mail, she had kept tabs on him to assure he had enough water and was safe in the heat. When Lauer told her the post office did not supply water to carriers, Doris said, “Well, maybe we should.”

The couple took on the task for the whole region, buying water and sports drinks by the case and distributing them to carriers on every hot day. They buy most of the drinks with their own

money; local businesses sometimes pitch in when they run out.

“We were probably out 45 to 50 days last year,” Lauer said, including a heat wave that kept him busy for nine straight days. They distribute drinks to carriers as they leave their stations in the morning, and Lauer drives out to find carriers on their routes to supply them with drinks. Last year, the carriers went through 37 cases of sports drinks, 13 cases of water and seven cases of flavored water.

“People say to me, ‘How do you know where to find them?’ ” Lauer said. “I delivered mail for 30 years—I have a general idea where all the park points are.”

The Lauers don’t abandon their carriers after summer’s heat wanes, though. When winter temperatures drop into the 20s, Lauer and his wife also keep the carriers warm and comfortable by serving hot coffee, tea and cocoa. **PR**

# Feeding the hungry throughout the country

**O**ne of the most meaningful gifts is the gift of nourishment. Just as letter carriers nationwide collect food for those in need as part of the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive each May, many also ensure that hungry people don't go without during the rest of the year, especially the holiday season. Here we bring you some of the stories that have come to our attention of letter carriers helping to keep the needy fed and cared for in this season of giving and throughout each year.

## Not wasting his time on Earth

Van Nuys, CA Branch 2462 retiree **Daniel Rathbone** cites former baseball player Roberto Clemente, who played in Rathbone's hometown of Pittsburgh, as one of his inspirations for the decades of volunteer work the carrier has done to feed and dignify the less fortunate.

"Whenever you have the opportunity to make a difference in this world, and you don't, you're wasting your time on Earth," Clemente once said.

"That inspires me to go out and reach out and help the less fortunate in the world," said Rathbone. "I use that as a starting post to reach out and

help other people."

Clemente was known for his own charitable acts; he died in 1972 when the plane he had chartered crashed on its way to deliver relief to his native Puerto Rico following an earthquake.

Rathbone is definitely not wasting his time on Earth. He jumped right in to his charity work after retiring from the Postal Service, and 23 years later he's still going strong. As a member of the mission committee of his church, Knollwood Methodist in Granada Hills, CA, Rathbone has extended his reach to feed many needy people in the Los Angeles area.

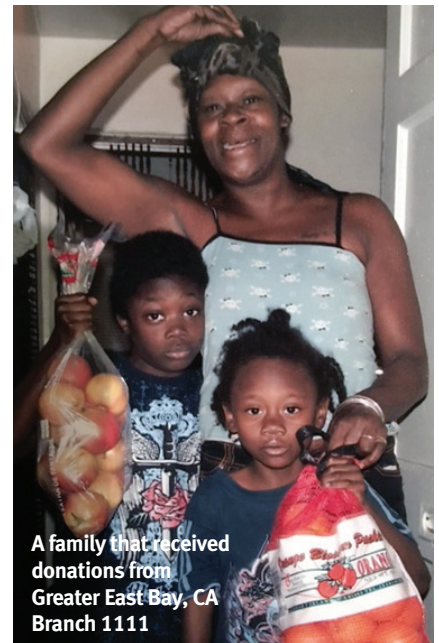
An Army veteran and gold card NALC member, Rathbone devotes about 25 hours a week to picking up food donations and distributing them as a volunteer for North Valley Caring Services (NVCS). With Rathbone helping to organize their efforts, the active carriers in his branch have pitched in through the Letter Carrier Food Drive. Rathbone also oversees a program at another church that serves breakfast to the needy, and he organizes and cooks for the NVCS Thanksgiving meal that feeds about 300 people each November.

Rathbone never misses a chance to help the less fortunate in other ways. He has taught Sunday School at a juvenile detention facility, went to New Orleans in 2005 for Hurricane Katrina relief, plays Santa Claus for needy children at Christmastime and participates in a memorial service the day before Thanksgiving to remember homeless people who have died, often with no one to mourn them.

He remembers two people in particular who, with his help, made their lives better and then turned to helping

others. A homeless couple, Tom and Lorraine, found permanent housing and "they came back and donated turkeys the last two or three years," Rathbone said. "They remembered when they were hurting and somebody was there to help them."

Rathbone has no plans to slow down his efforts to help others. "As long as I'm blessed with good health, I'll be there," he said.



## Dinners delivered

For the letter carriers of Greater East Bay, CA Branch 1111 and other postal employees and managers at Eastmont Station in Oakland, CA, assuring that their neediest customers don't go without a nice holiday dinner has been a tradition for at least three decades.

"The letter carriers know the needs of each customer because they visit them every day," Eastmont letter







**Left: Keith Fumagalli (c) presented a donation to the Maranatha Food Pantry in Chambersburg, PA.**

**Bottom: An official proclamation from the legislature of New Jersey recognized Cape May's postal employees for their efforts during last year's food drive.**

carrier **Darlene Amey** said. Amey coordinates the effort each December, collecting donations from employees and shopping for dinners.

The station puts goodies like turkey, ham, stuffing, canned vegetables, dinner rolls, fruit and cake for dessert in five boxes. Any leftover cash from the donations is divided among the boxes. Carriers then deliver them to needy families identified by letter carriers on five different routes.

Amey said she remembers the Christmastime giving happening since she started at the station 33 years ago. "Ever since I've been here, it's been going on," she said. "When I retire, somebody else is going to carry it on."

### Filling the food pantry

Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 letter carrier **Keith Fumagalli** was walking his route many years ago when he spotted a homeless man leaving a cart outside a grocery store. To help the man, "I decided I would leave 20 bucks in there and walk away," Fumagalli said. "Then I thought about it and said, 'I can do better than that.'"

Back at his station in Chambersburg, PA, Fumagalli collected donations from his fellow postal employees and bought turkeys that he and some other carriers delivered to needy patrons for Thanksgiving. They later delivered gift cards instead, and about 10 years ago, to reach more people, they focused their efforts on supporting the Maranatha Food Pantry in Chambersburg.

Since then, Fumagalli and a few

volunteers from other crafts have collected and delivered more than \$5,000 for the food pantry donated by their fellow postal employees in the station. "They're very, very generous," he said. "I've got some great co-workers. Without them, this wouldn't be possible."

Fumagalli, an Air Force veteran, said helping others "does more for me than it does for them. It makes me feel so good to be able to do that for them." He plans to continue his charitable work at his station until he retires in a few years and then perhaps pass on the tradition to younger letter carriers.

"He's probably the most selfless person I know," said Darrel Vance, a fellow Branch 500 member who alerted *The Postal Record* about Fumagalli's efforts. "He's a very humble person and he just can't do enough for the community. He's always giving to those who can't give back, and he doesn't expect to be given anything in return."

### A full table for the holidays

The postal employees of Cape May County in New Jersey never forget the hungry among them. For three decades—since before the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive became a national event—members of Cape May Branch 903 and surrounding areas have collected food for needy people to enjoy in the holiday season.

The effort began with now-retired Branch 903 member **John Vollrath** in the Wildwood, NJ, post office and

soon expanded. "Believe me, it's really needed in this community and this county," Vollrath said. "I saw how people went to food banks and were turned away, not having enough food to feed their kids—that bothered me."

Postal employees from all crafts and supervisors volunteer their time and effort each year on an early Saturday in December to collect food, led by letter carriers who carry the bulk of the food. "They hump that day to get it back," Vollrath said. Even local retired postal employees help by transferring the collected food to food banks.

Vollrath estimated that the last Cape May food drive yielded about 60,000 pounds of food for several area food banks. "The amount of food that has been collected over the years overwhelms me," he said.

The state legislature of New Jersey recognized Cape May's postal employees for their efforts with an official proclamation issued the day of last year's food drive. The proclamation recognized them "as an inspiration to all and whose energy and achievements help us glimpse a future of hope and promise." **PR**





# Branch makes giving to MDA a yearlong gift

**T**he Muscular Dystrophy Association, NALC's only official charity, is close to many members' hearts. When letter carriers of Fall River, MA Branch 51 saw a letter to Santa on the post office's bulletin board last year from a young boy who wished to have a cure for his brother Jaden's MD, they were especially touched.

Jaden's family happened to live on one of the routes of Branch 51 President **Paul Knarr**, a T-6. He contacted the mother to get some additional details about Jaden and the rest of the family and had her provide a wish list. "They had quite a bit of stuff on the list," Knarr said. "The younger brother wrote that it would be his best gift if Santa could get his brother to walk again."

Then Branch 51 got to work.

The five post offices that make up the branch collected more than \$1,000 for the effort over the course of just three days. The children's words got to the letter carriers. "When we read the letter to the carriers, we were able to collect money so easily," Knarr said. "They were able to put a face to the cause. They were genuinely enthused to bring these kids something for the holidays."

The funds went to gift cards for movies, toy stores and restaurants. "That way, the family could enjoy the holidays the way they wanted to," Knarr said.

Branch 51 put everything together in a gift basket and had the regular carrier deliver it on the route. "We got a card from the family after," Knarr said. "They were so overwhelmed and they had a great December."

Indeed, the members of the Fall River branch helped one local MDA family have a great Christmas, but they

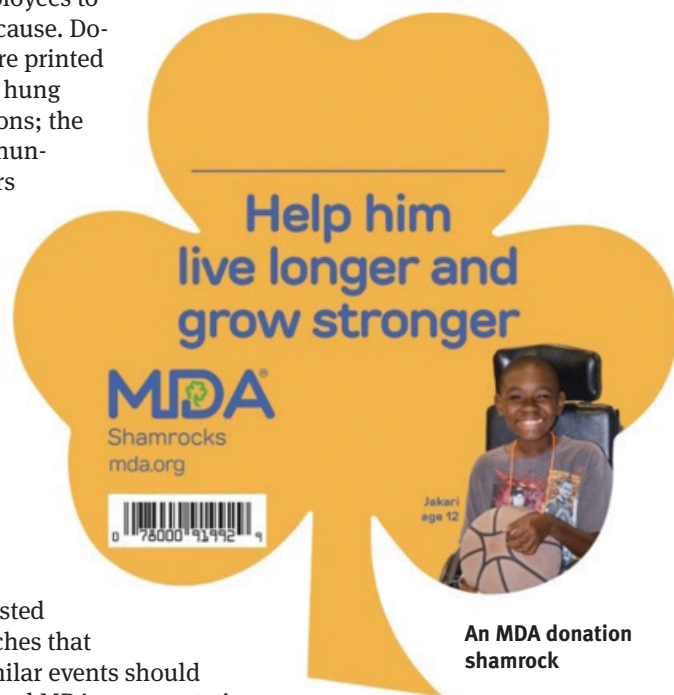
certainly don't stop there.

They're currently gearing up for their fourth annual bowlathon, which gets the whole community involved. In the spring, they offer "MDA shamrocks" for postal employees to donate to the cause. Donors' names are printed on shamrocks hung up at the stations; the drive collects hundreds of dollars each year. The branch president also has been involved with a local MDA camp, saying that he is fortunate to see firsthand how NALC helps.

Knarr suggested that any branches that want to do similar events should reach out to local MDA representatives, who can come and talk to carriers. "The local chapters [of MDA] are very supportive," he said. (Members can also reach out to Assistant to the President Geneva Kubal at NALC Headquarters at 202-756-7403 or [mda@nalc.org](mailto:mda@nalc.org).)

In addition, a personal link to the disease does wonders for the cause. "I've always found that what's compelling is to put a face with it," Knarr, an 18-year postal veteran, said.

All of these efforts that Fall River Branch 51 makes helps to deliver the cure for MDA. "It makes you feel like you're making a difference," he said. "We're doing our part to make others a little more comfortable." **PR**



An MDA donation shamrock

## Proud to Serve

Proud to Serve is a semi-regular compilation of heroic stories about letter carriers in their communities. If you know about a hero in your branch, contact us as soon as possible at 202-756-7403 or at [postalrecord@nalc.org](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or firefighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the form of concerned letter carriers.

Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they often are the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

## Carrier to the rescue for runaway vehicle

While on her route one day last June, Royal Oak, MI Branch 3216 member **Sherri Yorkey** was casing mail at the cluster boxes in a subdivision. "I thought I heard someone calling for help, but I had a radio going," she said.

When the carrier heard it again, she became concerned and checked it out. "There was a lady in the street hollering about her car," she said. The vehicle was coming straight toward the carrier.

Yorkey discovered that a customer had driven by and had wanted to talk to her, but put her car in reverse instead of park. The woman realized what was happening and tried to grab the brake, but the car continued backward and knocked her down, rolling over her foot and ankle, and kept going.

"My adrenalin kicked in," Yorkey said. "I just ran after the car and managed to jump in it. I didn't know I could run that fast."

Yorkey put the car into park, then went back to the woman. She helped the customer up and offered to call 911. The woman declined, instead calling her husband to pick her up. The carrier stayed to comfort her.

"I was a volunteer for the auxiliary

police department, so I know that helped me remain calm," Yorkey told a local newspaper.

The customer went to the hospital, and was found to have sustained two torn ligaments when the car rolled over her foot. "She was very lucky," the carrier said.

The woman later contacted the local postmaster. "Sherri was a godsend to me," she said, "a very kind and alert and helpful person."

The 32-year postal veteran brushed off any accolades, though. "The world is a better place when we help each other," Yorkey said. "I think anyone would have done it."

## All in a day's work

While approaching a house on her route on Sept. 12, 2015, Canton, OH Branch 238 city carrier assistant **Michelle Everhart** said, "I heard beeping, but didn't think anything of it at first."

As she got closer, the carrier noticed the sound was getting louder and she could also smell smoke. "When I approached the door, I was like, 'Whoa, that's fire,'" she said.

Everhart knew her patron was elderly, so she was concerned about her. "I started pounding on the door," she said. When nobody answered, she quickly went to a neighbor's house, but they did not answer either, so she went back to the house to see if there was any activity. There wasn't.

"I walked about 500 feet down the road, and the neighbors there were out," Everhart said. She filled them in and asked them to call 911.

Firefighters quickly responded, entering the building through an open window. It was determined that the customer had left home and forgot about a boiling pan of eggs on the



Royal Oak, MI Branch 3216 member Sherri Yorkey was praised for her role in stopping a runaway vehicle and tending to its injured driver.



**Kareem Armstead**

stove. The fire was contained to the kitchen.

Fire department officials credited Everhart with saving the customer's house from severe smoke damage. "It meant everything to her," the carrier said of her customer.

Still, the second-year letter carrier doesn't think she qualifies as a hero. "It's just part of being a carrier," Everhart said. "We notice things like that. If it would have been any of us, we would have done the same thing."

### Carrier's skills save the day

Chicago Branch 11 member **Kareem Armstead** was delivering mail one day in August 2015 when he saw a distraught woman run out of a house. "I just heard her scream," the carrier said.

The woman had something in her

hands. "I thought it was a puppy," Armstead said.

When he heard her shout for help, "I didn't hesitate—I just ran," he said. It turns out that it was her seven-month-old baby in her arms, and he had stopped breathing. The woman ran to the house next door, where an elderly couple lived, and set the baby on the couch.

The carrier went inside and assessed the infant, and his fatherly instincts kicked in. "He was turning blue and I was panicking," Armstead said. As people came streaming in, including police, the carrier performed CPR on the child.

When he didn't get a response, Armstead decided to blow into the baby's mouth like a balloon. "The baby bit my lip," he said, and that's when paramedics arrived to take over and take the young boy to a hospital.

After finishing his route, Armstead headed to the hospital to check on the family, where he was praised by doctors. The boy recovered and headed home soon after.

Sadly, the infant died at home just five days later of sudden infant death syndrome. The family wrote to Armstead to thank him for stepping in to help. They told him because of his actions, the entire family was able to come and say goodbye to the child.

The 19-year postal veteran doesn't want any accolades for his actions, however. "I hate the word 'hero,'" Armstead said.

Still, "It's something I'll never forget," he added.

## Fire and rescue



**Anthony Massaro Jr.**

Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member **Anthony Massaro Jr.** was delivering mail to a house on July 19, 2016 when he saw something out of the ordinary. "I saw smoke coming from an air-conditioning unit

on the side of the building." When the carrier went closer, he looked through a window and saw that thick, black smoke was quickly filling the home. He also saw flames coming from a small table. After calling 911, Massaro began banging on the door. A passerby saw what he was doing and came to help beat on the front, back and side doors of the house. "No one was home, thankfully," the carrier said. The fire department was just down the street, so firefighters arrived quickly to put out the fire, which was determined to have been started by an electrical appliance on the table. The homeowner had been on vacation. "There was very minimal damage to

the house," Massaro said. "I put the mail in the box when it was safe to do so and I continued on my route." Despite praise, the six-year postal veteran denies any heroics. "I did what I feel any person would have done," Massaro said.

Member **Joel Wiersma** was delivering mail one day last summer when he looked up at the house on the corner. "I could see smoke coming out of the window," he said. He went up to the window panes and felt them—they were hot, and the smoke was traveling up the window frame, so he called 911. The carrier knew that the residents normally

were not home at that time of day, but he wanted to be sure, so he started knocking on the door and a neighbor came by to help. Firefighters soon came to put out the blaze. They discovered that it had been started by a heat lamp falling and catching fire. Wiersma said the family came up to him later to thank him. The carrier admitted that a fire on the route is an unusual occurrence. "You don't encounter it every day, and I don't want to encounter it every day," Wiersma said with a laugh. Still, the 18-year postal veteran brushed off any accolades for his actions. "Anyone in their right mind would have done it," he said. **PR**





Tommy Heuer

## Caring in the community

Sioux Falls, SD Branch 491 member **Tommy Heuer** was going about his route on April 14, 2016, when he saw an unusual sight on the street. “I see a guy covered in blood limping his way toward me,” he said.

The carrier stopped to ask if the man was OK and see what he could do to help. “He kind of ignored me,” the carrier said. Not wanting to leave the man, Heuer pressed further. “He said he got jumped,” he said, and he

learned that he had been stabbed and was trying to walk to a hospital that was a few blocks away.

“He just had a lot of blood on him,” he said. The carrier stayed with the victim until he saw an ambulance pass nearby. Heuer waved it down and they picked the man up.

The stabbing had reportedly been drug-related, local radio station KELO reported. Police said that four men were in a car arranging a pot buy. The buyers intended to rip off the sellers, while the sellers intended to rip off the

buyers. After they realized what was happening, a melee broke out. One of the men was stabbed and another was hit in the head with a rock.

Once the man was loaded onto the ambulance bound for the hospital, Heuer continued his rounds.

The third-year letter carrier and National Guard veteran doesn't think of himself as a hero, though. “Honestly, I just stopped and talked to the guy,” Heuer said. “I feel like any other carrier would have acted in the same way on their route.” **PR**

## Neighborhood watch

Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Alex Dailey** was driving his LLV one day last February when he saw a bad situation. “I saw a dog loose and running over to where a UPS truck was parked,” he said. “I had



Alex Dailey

his truck. “I started yelling at the dog until it ran back to its owner,” Dailey said. The dog left. “I turned around and asked the guy if he was OK, and he said yes,” the carrier said. So, they both got back in their vehicles to continue their rounds. The UPS carrier flagged down another carrier, Jim Porzio, the next day and asked him to convey his gratitude to Dailey. But the first-year letter carrier doesn't think he should be called a hero. “I was just in right place at the right time,” Dailey said. “I am always happy to watch out for other people, no matter what. I hope if it was the other way around, someone would do the same for me one day.”

a weird feeling something was not right; I knew that there was a dog in that area that was bad news.” The carrier drove over to the UPS truck and saw that the worker was trapped by the dog between a house and

On Feb. 3, 2016, Corpus Christi, TX Branch 1259 member **Dennis Poer** had delivered a large package to a house and noticed that there was also a medium-sized UPS-delivered package

on the porch. As the carrier went about his route, he saw a man who, along with a friend, had about 10 minutes prior asked the carrier for some spare change for food. “He came by with the package I had just dropped off,” he said. Poer called the non-emergency police number to report what he had seen. “I was standing there. I don't know why he didn't see me,” Poer said. The man went two blocks down and the carrier lost sight of him. Soon after, he saw the man and a friend walk down the other side but without the package. “They had to have stashed the package somewhere,” Poer said. The carrier then saw the man go back to the same house and walk off carrying what looked to be the smaller package. A neighbor yelled out to the thieves, who then tossed the package back into the yard. The two suspects turned around to walk back toward a vacant lot just as the police ar-



Dennis Poer

rived and apprehended them. Poer gave them a statement and walked them to where he had seen the suspects go. There, they found the first package hidden in tall grass. Both were returned to the customer. The 23-year postal veteran brushed off any heroics, though. “All I did was dial a number and watch him,” Poer said. “That's it.” **PR**

## Help on the way



Craig Hall II

On Sept. 14, 2015, Houston Branch 283 member **Craig Hall II** was delivering mail when he heard a woman crying for help. The carrier tried to open her front door, but was unsuccessful, so he walked around to the back to try that door. Unsuccessful there as well, he called the police and huddled by the front door to wait until they arrived. “I was assuring her help was on the way,” Hall said. “Police had to break through the front door.” Responding officers found that the customer had apparently had a stroke and had been on the floor for two days. The woman received medical assistance and has since returned home. “She’s doing fine now,” Hall said. The 12-year letter carrier and Marine Corps veteran was commended for his role in helping his customer, but he said he felt like anyone would have done it. Being called a hero “is a stretch for me,” Hall said.

On June 1, 2016, New Hampshire Merged Branch 44 member **Tim Sullivan** was doing a relay

on his route. A man and his son had just gotten home. The son walked inside, and the carrier went up to the dad. “I handed him the mail, told him, ‘Have a good day,’ and walked away,” he said. The carrier then heard a thud. Sullivan turned back around and saw that the customer had crashed three feet to the ground, head-

first off the porch. The man’s head was bleeding excessively. The customer’s son called 911, and Sullivan wasted no time, providing first aid and helping to stabilize the man as they waited for EMTs to arrive. “He was lying on his back,” the carrier said. “I just held his head in place. He kind of gasped and came to.” The man apparently was dehydrated and had passed out. An ambulance soon arrived to take the customer to the hospital, where he remained overnight. When Sullivan saw that the situation was in good hands, he headed back to the post



New Hampshire Merged Branch 44 member **Tim Sullivan** was congratulated by his family and colleagues for aiding a man on his route.

office, changed his bloody shirt and then went back out to finish his route. “Tim is the kind of letter carrier who stops at nothing to do the right thing,” Branch 44 President Dan Yianakopolos wrote to *The Postal Record*. “His actions are that of a true hero.” But the 15-year postal veteran disagreed with the hero appellation. “I don’t see it that way,” he said humbly.

On the evening of April 5, 2016, Dayton, OH Branch 182 city carrier assistant **Donte Cotton** was standing in the back of the post office talking with a supervisor when they heard a loud bang. When they looked in the direction of the sound, they saw a transformer pole shake and sparks shot out of the transformer. They walked through the gate of the post office to see what was going on. “We could see a car had flipped to its roof,” Cotton said. The driver got out of the car and told them her child was inside. When the carrier looked, “I saw a baby’s body

moving around,” he said. “My main concern was the little kid. My fatherly instincts kicked in.” The supervisor called 911 as Cotton got on his back and crawled



Donte Cotton

through the broken glass into the driver’s side window. “I pulled the girl out of the broken window,” he said. He then handed her to her mother as medics arrived on the scene. The youngster and her mother were taken to the hospital and treated for non-life-threatening injuries. Cotton doesn’t think his actions were a big deal. “I was just doing a good deed,” the second-year letter carrier said. “I wouldn’t call myself a hero.”

On Aug. 8, 2016, Evansville, IN Branch 377 member **Barrett Wright** was about to deliver mail to a doctor’s office on his route. “I had just pulled up in my mail truck,” he said. It was an empty parking lot, save for one van. When he looked over at the vehicle, “there was a woman lying face-down on the concrete,” the carrier said. “I was kind of freaked out.” Wright ran over to help, and the woman said she had tripped out of her van and was complaining of pain in her hip. She had been lying awkwardly, partly under the vehicle. The carrier called 911, applied first aid, and calmed the woman until she was taken to the hospital. But the second-year letter carrier doesn’t think his actions are a big deal. “It was nothing too crazy,” Wright said. “I feel like anybody would do the same thing.” **PR**



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# Honoring heroic carriers

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## A twofer of heroism

On June 30, 2016, Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Evelyn Woodward** had just gone off the clock and was working in the union office at the post office when “I heard this weird scream,” she said.

Others seemed to think that the noise was from children playing in the lobby. “I just had this intuition that it wasn't,” Woodward said.

She got up to check out the situation and saw that a clerk was lying down. “She fell face-first on the floor,” Woodward said. “She was convulsing and in a pool of blood.” The clerk had just finished working the window and was walking to the back to close out her drawer when she had an apparent seizure, then fell to the floor and hit her head.

Woodward yelled out for someone to call 911 and ran to the woman's side. The clerk was bleeding from the head, so Woodward began first aid. Then the clerk stopped breathing.

After he heard the scream and Woodward's shout out, fellow Branch 56 member **James McKay** rushed over. The two carriers rolled the woman onto her back and picked her head up. “She had bit down on her tongue so hard, we couldn't get her mouth open,” Woodward said.

“We need to start CPR,” McKay said. Woodward cleared the woman's

wind pipe and secured her head while McKay, who is also an EMT with the local fire department, began performing chest compressions. “She started breathing again,” McKay said. Then the woman came to and jumped up. McKay and Woodward tried to keep her lying down to prevent any further injury and asked her questions until paramedics showed up to take over.

The clerk was taken to the hospital and soon recovered. Because Woodward got so much blood on her in the process, the two women now joke that they're “blood sisters.”

But Woodward, a 30-year postal veteran, doesn't consider herself a hero. “I was pretty happy that she came back to life,” she said. “I would just hope that someone else would do the same.”

McKay echoed that sentiment. “I'm not a hero,” the 22-year letter carrier said. “Luckily I had the training. I was just glad I was there.”

## All in a day's work

On July 7, 2016, Buffalo-Western NY Branch 3 member **James Burkhardt Jr.** was on his route training a city carrier assistant. “As we were walking down the street, we could smell smoke,” the carrier said. They couldn't see its source, so they continued to deliver.

When they looped back around on the street a little while later, the CCA said, “Well, that doesn't look like a barbecue.” They could see flames coming from a back porch, so Burkhardt—a 26-year volunteer firefighter in the community as well as a Marine Corps veteran—told the CCA to go on ahead delivering. “I'll go check this out,” he said.

Burkhardt knew the residents' vehicles and didn't see them there, so he went straight to the patio. There, he saw a lawn chair engulfed in flames. “I didn't see a garden hose there or at the neighbor's house,” he said.

He had his personal vehicle on the



Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 members **James McKay** and **Evelyn Woodward** were recognized for their role in providing CPR to a clerk at their post office.



**Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member Gary Sulz was commended for helping to save a man who had a drug overdose. Pictured (l to r) are Branch 6000 President Walter Barton, Sulz and Area Representative Vince Calvanese.**

route because the CCA was using an LLV, so Burkhardt headed to his car for his personal fire extinguisher and called in to report the fire. Meanwhile, a neighbor saw what was going on and knocked on the door to make sure the residents weren't home, and then called them to let them know what was happening.

The carrier used his extinguisher to hold the flames at bay until the fire department could arrive to take over. When firefighters arrived, "It was still kind of up between the floorboards," he said.

Burkhardt said the homeowners were thankful for his actions, but the 10-year postal veteran brushed off any heroics. "It's just part of the day," he said.

## Letter carrier intuition strikes again

Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member **Gary Sulz** was driving back to his route from lunch on a hot Aug. 15, 2016, when he noticed a man lying half on the grass and half in the street. "I thought he was just lying on

the lawn because it was hot out," the carrier said. "I thought they were just relaxing."

As Sulz passed, though, he looked back and noticed the man was holding his cigarette strangely. The customer had the nagging feeling that something wasn't right, so he turned around to check on the man.

When he got over to the man, Sulz became even more concerned. "He was staring into the sun and not breathing properly," he said. The man was unresponsive when Sulz shook him, and his pupils were pinpoints.

The carrier tried to call 911 but the call got dropped. A passerby stopped, and Sulz told them to call 911. The carrier, also a 30-plus volunteer firefighter and EMT, ran to his postal truck, where he kept a pocket CPR mask.

Sulz ran back and started rescue breathing on the man. People started coming up to them, and the carrier asked, "Does anyone know him?" Someone said they were his neighbor, so the carrier asked questions to see if he could narrow down the reason for his medical episode. "It could have

been anything," Sulz said. When he asked if it could be because of drugs or alcohol, one neighbor said yes.

Sulz suspected then that it was a heroin overdose and told the responding EMTs that they should bring Narcan, an opiate antidote. He continued to work with EMTs, helping the man to breathe, while they set up an IV. The man was revived and taken to the hospital.

Word soon spread, and the carrier was praised for his actions. "Gary Sulz showed outstanding citizenship and what it means to help another human being and that we all need to be aware of situations that we may come across to help another human in crisis," an anonymous patron wrote to the post office. "I hope that you will take the time to recognize Gary for the wonderful person he is and for the fine example he showed that day. He is an asset to the ... post office and our community."

Sulz said that he was simply in the right place at the right time. "I was just glad I was able to use my expertise," the 29-year postal veteran said.

## Neighborhood watch



**Mary Wilkins**

On May 25, 2016, Peoria, IL Branch 31 member **Mary Wilkins** was on her route when she saw some-

thing concerning. "I was taking a break and I pulled into a gas station," she said. "I see a little boy in an alley on a battery-operated toy vehicle." The toddler was riding his toy tractor and looked like he was headed toward a busy street. "That gets your adrenaline going," the carrier said. Wilkins got out of her vehicle quickly. "I stopped the truck that was coming at him and I grabbed him," she said. After bringing him to a safe

location, Wilkins assessed him. She noticed that the boy was bleeding from an injury on his face and could not tell Wilkins his name or where he lived. "He couldn't speak," she said. She called police and assisted the responding officers by contacting nearby houses looking for the child's parents. After about an hour with no results, the police officer took custody of the child. "The cop took the boy around and stopped at

houses that had toys at it," she said she later found out. The officer eventually saw a matching part to the toy tractor at a house and found the boy's mother inside. "The mom said she was cleaning and didn't know he was gone," the carrier said. The 10-year postal veteran doesn't think she's a hero, though. "I just love kids and love helping people, and I love doing my job," Wilkins said. "I just look at it as doing my job." **PR**

## Proud to Serve

San Diego Branch 70 members Joe Meyers (l) and Greg Wilder (r) received media attention for their actions in helping customer Joel Gerber (c) after an accident with woodworking machinery.



### A double dose of heroics

“All I heard was a big boom,” San Diego Branch 70 member **Greg Wilder** said as he had been delivering mail on Sept. 7, 2016.

The sound drew Wilder’s attention to customer Joel Gerber, a woodworking hobbyist, who had had an accident with a piece of machinery in his garage. Some of the wood came loose from the equipment; the piece hit the floor, while another part hit the man on the side of his jaw and in his chest. Gerber was thrown from the force.

“He flew up in the air,” the carrier said. He hit his head on the concrete floor and landed on his back.

Wilder ran to Gerber’s side and saw that the man was unconscious and bleeding profusely from the nose, chin, ear and head. “His eyes were floating in his head,” Wilder said.

Fellow Branch 70 member **Joe Meyers** was about a block away and had been heading to Wilder to give him some mail. “I heard it happen,” he said. Meyers pulled up in his truck; he and Wilder called 911 and tended to Gerber.

“He finally came to. He was kind of

out of it,” Meyers said. “We got towels for his head.”

They began asking Gerber about his wife. Wilder yelled her name, but she didn’t respond, and they looked for Gerber’s cell phone. Wilder then went outside and flagged down a neighbor driving by. The woman knew Gerber’s wife and called her to fill her in. The two carriers also retrieved Gerber’s wallet from inside the home, gave it to EMTs, and locked up Gerber’s home.

“It all happened so quickly,” Wilder said.

Gerber received 35 stitches in his chin and a few dozen more stitches in the back of his head, and he underwent surgery to reconnect his jaw, which had been pushed into his ear. He recovered soon after. “He’s doing great now,” Meyers said.

“One thing sticks in my mind: I wouldn’t be alive but for these two postal employees,” Gerber, a federal judge, told the *Solana Beach Sun*. “This is just a beautiful story where two civil servants saved somebody’s life—a citizen who they were serving.”

Gerber also wrote a letter to the local postmaster to commend the carriers.

“Had Mr. Wilder and Mr. Meyer not acted with dispatch, compassion, and courage, it is a relative certainty that I would have bled to death,” he wrote. “Too often public servants are maligned and treated with disdain. Mr. Wilder and Mr. Meyer’s actions reflect the high quality of our civil servants and the important role that they play in our daily lives. I am forever indebted to them and to the Postal Service for selecting quality people to serve our community and county.”

But the carriers brushed off any accolades.

“We did what we had to do to make sure he was safe,” Wilder, a 20-year letter carrier as well as a Navy veteran, said. “I just felt like, as a human being, you help people. It should be automatic. You want to see people live.”

Meyers echoed that sentiment. “I was glad we were in front of that house,” the second-year city carrier assistant said. “I’m just happy he’s OK.”

At a reunion soon after, Meyers told Gerber on the local NBC-TV affiliate, “I just want to thank you for taking time out of your day to say hi to us every time you see us. I always enjoy delivering to your house.”

## Eye on the elderly



Rebeckah Gold

When Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member **Rebeckah Gold** noticed an unusual accumulation of mail one day in summer 2016 at her elderly customer Jack’s home, she became concerned. “He’s usually on it,” she said. The carrier and a neighbor checked on the man and found him in his house with a bruised face but otherwise OK. She was off the next day, and when she returned to the route

the day after, she saw that the mail pile had grown. “I knocked on the door and he wasn’t answering,” the carrier said. Gold could not find the neighbor, so she called the local sheriff to ask for a welfare check on Jack. She explained that he is usually sitting at a table at the back of the house, which you can see through the glass front door, but she could not see him. The responding sheriff found Jack in his back yard.

“He had gotten a cut on his face and it went septic,” the carrier said. Emergency responders credit Gold with potentially saving the life of the man, who recovered after spending weeks in intensive care. Gold, a 10-year postal veteran, brushed off any praise, saying she was just doing her job. “It’s a good feeling to be at the right place at the right time,” she said. “I was just watching out for my guys.”



## Help on the way

Hopkins, MN Branch 2942 member **Brian Halbakken** was working at his case on June 20, 2016, when a supervisor appeared. “She seemed to be really scared,” he said. “She came to me with a choking sign, so I turned her around.” The carrier, an office safety captain with responder training, grabbed the woman and gave her three quick thrusts of the Heimlich maneuver. The piece of food she had been choking on flew out. After the woman got



Brian Halbakken

a breath in, she thanked the carrier, who responded, “Relax, it’s over.” The woman had been eating her lunch at her station when she started choking and had wandered to find someone. “I was the only person there at that time,” Halbakken said, adding that he felt like he “was meant to be there.” When Halbakken saw that his supervisor was all right, he went back to casing mail. The 30-year letter carrier denied any major heroics, however. “I just felt like anyone would have done it if they knew the technique,” Halbakken said.

On April 27, 2016, Worcester, MA Branch 12 member **Brian Cole** was going about his route when he came across a man lying

on the ground. “He had blood on his face,” the carrier said. “I thought he had tripped off the wall.” Cole rushed closer to the man. “He was gasping for air,” the carrier said. Cole gently rolled the man into a better position. “He had a needle sticking out of his arm,” he said, speculating that he had probably come out of the halfway house nearby. Cole called 911 and talked to the operator as he started CPR. “I did chest compressions until paramedics arrived,” he said. Cole was confident it was a drug overdose, and directed EMTs to provide the man with an antidote. They were able to stabilize the man and told Cole that he would be all right. The fourth-year letter carrier and Army veteran, who did a combat tour in Iraq, does not think he’s a hero, though. “It was a natural reaction to help someone,” Cole said simply.

Charlotte, NC Branch 545 member **Alex Pachter** was going about his route one day in July 2016. “There was a plumber working outside,” the city carrier assistant said. “He started screaming and jumping around. Pachter ran closer and realized that the man was being electrocuted. Pachter quickly unplugged the machine the plumber had been using and asked if he was all right. The man



Alex Pachter

said he was OK and declined the CCA’s offer to call 911. “He seemed to be fine,” Pachter said, so he continued on his route. He later found out that the outlet the man had been working on was wired backward. When Pachter looped back around the street, the plumber was back to work. Still, the man was grateful and went to Pachter’s manager at the post office the next day to commend him. “It’s not that big of a deal,” the first-year letter carrier and Navy veteran said. “All I did was unplug something. I’m glad the guy was OK.”

Corpus Christi, TX Branch 1259 member **German Osorio** was going about his route on July 29, 2016, when he found a note in a customer’s mailbox. “He usually doesn’t get much mail, but I saw the letter,” the carrier said. It appeared to be a suicide note, instructing the carrier to call the police and stating that the side door was open. Osorio quickly called his super-



Corpus Christi, TX Branch 1259 members **Corisa Ruiz** and **German Osorio** were praised for their role in helping a suicidal customer.

visor at the post office, fellow Branch 1259 member **Corisa Ruiz**. “He sent a picture of the note on the mailbox,” Ruiz said. “I immediately called 911.” Ruiz, a third-year letter carrier and Army National Guard veteran, told the dispatcher the address and the information she knew, then headed to the scene, which was only a few blocks away from where she was on a route. The two carriers waited until police and EMTs arrived. Officers found the man lying on the floor inside after attempting suicide. “He was unconscious, but they saved his life,” Osorio, a second-year letter carrier, said. They were glad they made it in time. “If that man hadn’t had mail that day, it would have been too late,” Ruiz said. They don’t think they’re heroes, however. “Anyone would have done the same thing, I’m pretty sure,” Osorio said. Ruiz agreed, saying it was a “team effort” and that “it could have happened to anyone.” **PR**

## Eye on the elderly



Sara Hauck

When Marshfield, WI Branch 978 member **Sara Hauck** was delivering mail one day last summer on the route she's had for 15 years, she noticed that her longtime customer, Sally, was not sitting in her usual chair outside on her porch. "She always waited for me and I'd hand her her mail," the carrier said. She described the woman as friendly. "She's the grandma of the neighborhood," she said. Suspecting something was wrong, Hauck decided to look closer and tried the door, which was unlocked. She spotted Sally unresponsive on her kitchen floor and called 911 and then the woman's daughter. Sally had apparently gone into diabetic shock because of low blood sugar and suffered some bruising from her fall as well. She was briefly hospitalized and returned home a few days later. In a letter to the local postmaster, the customer's family wrote, "We can't express how much appreciation we have for our mail lady." Hauck brushed off excessive praise. "My customers are like family to me," the 20-year letter carrier and Army veteran said. "I was just glad I was on the route that day. I did my job and took care of my customer."

On June 10, 2016, Naples, FL Branch 4716 member **Joey Featherston** was deliver-

ing to a retirement community on his route. "I said hello to one of my customers," he said. He knew the 85-year-old woman, Vivian, well, and when she responded, she did not seem to be acting like herself. She was trying to get to her car but was fumbling with her keys and mumbled to him in response. "Everything about it was out of the ordinary," he said. Featherston suggested that the woman return to her apartment, and walked her there. The carrier mentioned it to a nurse administrator, who followed up with Vivian, finding her in the midst of having a stroke. Vivian received medical treatment at a local hospital, went to a rehab facility, and returned to her condo shortly thereafter. "Mr. Featherston exemplifies everything I suspect you aspire for in his role with the USPS," Kent McRae, senior vice president/COO of the retirement community wrote to the local postmaster. "Mr. Featherston's responsibilities are to deliver the mail... but he does so much more than that. We are truly grateful that he is assigned here and hope that he continues to be a member of the...family for years to come." But the 22-year letter carrier and Navy veteran describes the people on his

route as his second family and doesn't think he's a hero. "I was just in the right place at the right time," Featherston said. "I would expect anyone to do what I did."

Noticing mail piling up at customer Mr. Wilson's apartment on her route one day last summer, South Suburban Merged, IL Branch 4016 member **Kathyleen Sinwelski** became concerned. "He faithfully picks it up daily," she said. In addition, there had been a robbery at the complex the day before, so the carrier wanted to be extra cautious. She went to the man's apartment door and also noticed two deliveries from Meals on Wheels. Sinwelski quickly notified the apartment complex manager, who she asked to call 911 for a welfare check. Responding authorities checked on the man and found him unconscious in his bed, where he had been for up to two days. Mr. Wilson was hospitalized for having a blood sugar level six times above normal. He soon recovered, and his grateful son told the postmaster that Sinwelski was "a life-saving angel." The 30-year postal veteran said that carriers encounter situations like this daily. "I know my customers. I knew



Kathyleen Sinwelski

something was up," Sinwelski said. "It makes me feel good that I'm out there and aware. Carriers know everything. If you want to know something, talk to a mail carrier."

As Corpus Christi, TX Branch 1259 member **Kenneth Grigsby Jr.** went about his route one hot day in July 2016, he saw an elderly customer waving to him. He waved back, thinking it was a friendly gesture, but then noticed that the wave was more urgent. The woman had apparently fallen outside her home. "She had been attempting to water her garden on the front porch area," he said. The woman had then tripped on the water hose and fell to the concrete. Unable to get up, she was sweating and tired. Grigsby ran over and raised the woman to a kneeling, then a standing, position. He asked the woman where her husband was, and she said he was in the back yard. Grigsby went through the house to find him and brought him to his wife. The two helped the woman inside and made sure she was OK. The woman's husband, Vic Menard, later wrote a letter to the editor of the *Caller Times* in Corpus Christi to praise the carrier. "Without his help, I am uncertain how long she would have lain there in pain," Menard wrote. "Thank you, Ken Grigsby, for your over-and-above assistance in a difficult situation, and kudos to all the other postal angels who cruise our neighborhoods on a daily basis, providing the best postal service in the world." But the 18-year letter carrier and Army veteran brushed off any accolades. "I just felt anybody would do that," Grigsby said. "It was a gift for me to be able to help them." **PR**



Naples, FL Branch 4716 member **Joey Featherston (c)** was congratulated for his role in tending to a customer having a stroke.



## Carrier not afraid of a little fire

On May 12, 2016, Worcester, MA Branch 12 member **Matthew Demma** was delivering his mail when he noticed something unusual. “All of a sudden, I saw smoke coming out of a screen door,” he said. “I heard someone inside and a TV.”

He opened the door and asked, “Is anybody in here?” He heard his

92-year-old customer, Morrie Johnson. “I couldn’t see, the smoke was so bad,” Demma said. “I put down the mail and went inside the house. I grabbed the woman and brought her outside.”

Johnson kept saying that she was sorry about the stove. Demma figured that meant that was the origin of the fire. So, after calling 911, “I took my shirt off, wrapped it around my face and I went back in,” the carrier said.



Matthew Demma

He turned off the stove, threw a burning pan into the sink and then headed back outside to fresh air, where he comforted his customer until emergency responders arrived.

Johnson’s grandson found Demma on his route a few hours later to thank him. The second-year letter carrier and Navy Reserves member declined any accolades, however. “I’m not a hero,” Demma said. **PR**

## Fire and rescue



Dwayne Martin

Alexandria, VA Branch 567 member **Dwayne Martin** was delivering mail to a home on Saturday, May 28, when he noticed something unusual. “I smelled smoke coming toward a house,” he said. When he got closer, “I heard the fire alarm,” the carrier added, and saw that smoke was pouring out from under the front door. Martin saw a car in the driveway, so he began knocking on the door, but got no response. He went next door to a neighbor’s home, but they were not home either. With his cell phone back in his LLV,

the carrier quickly went to another door and asked the neighbor there, Stephanie Beekman, to call 911 to report the fire. Firefighters arrived shortly. “They busted open the door and smoke was everywhere,” Martin said. They discovered that food had been left cooking on the stove unattended and were able to put out the fire before there was any extensive damage to the house. “We caught it just in time, but it was pretty close,” Martin said. Neighbors praised the carrier’s efforts. “If it wasn’t for Mr. Dwayne, only God knows how many homes could have caught fire, and so many people would have been homeless,” Beekman wrote to the post office. “I thank God Mr. Dwayne was in the right place at the right time and responded as quickly as he did. He’s an awesome mailman who takes his job very seriously.” Martin contends that he was just in the right place at the right time. “I was just doing my job,” the 10-year postal veteran said.

While Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Roy DeLeon** was delivering mail on his route on the hot morning of July 25, 2016, he noticed something out of the ordinary at a house. “As I’m driving down, there’s black smoke coming from the porch,” he said. The carrier ran up to the enclosed front porch and called 911. “I wasn’t sure if anyone was in the house,” he said. DeLeon couldn’t get to the front door because of the blaze, and couldn’t get to the back door because the property was fenced in, so he improvised. He grabbed a stick and started beating on the side of the house and screaming, “Is there anyone in there?” DeLeon said. “After a few minutes, they opened the door.” The family, which included three children, had been sleeping and awoke to the carrier’s banging. “I woke ‘em up and got them out of there,” DeLeon said. They all got out to safety before firefighters came and were able to contain the fire from

spreading to the rest of the house. When the 18-year letter carrier and Marine Corps veteran saw that the situation was in good hands, he continued on his rounds. Despite praise, DeLeon doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I don’t want to take much credit,” he said. “I was happy to be there in that moment. Any normal person would do it in that situation. **PR**



Roy DeLeon



## Proud to Serve

Proud to Serve is a semi-regular compilation of heroic stories about letter carriers in their communities. If you know about a hero in your branch, contact us as soon as possible at 202-756-7403 or at [postalrecord@nalc.org](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or firefighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the form of concerned letter carriers.

Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they often are the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

## Neither snow, nor rain, nor trees

A strange noise alerted Northeastern New York Branch 358 member **John Richichi** while he was delivering mail on the morning of Aug. 2, 2016, his 30th anniversary on the job.

"I heard a bending-branch-type sound," he said. The carrier paused to try to locate the source of the unusual sound. He looked around to see if anyone was around him—there was no one. "Coming back on the other side [of the street], I heard it again," he said.

Seconds later, he realized the noise was coming from a tree right next to him. "I just had a hunch it was gonna go," the carrier said.

Richichi saw a car containing a woman and her son coming his way, so he ran into the middle of the road to flag it down and stop it. "The limb came down behind me," he said. "It was just a fluke."

The tree was so large that it fell across the whole roadway.

The woman told Glens Falls, NY's *The Post-Star* that without Richichi's intervention, "the tree would have been right on top of us."

Another customer, Richard Ost, praised the letter carrier in a letter to the editor of *The Post-Star*. "I was very pleased, but not surprised, to read the

front page article about our mail carrier, John Richichi," he wrote. "John has been our neighborhood mail carrier for a number of years now and he always goes the extra mile for everyone. The postal service and our community can be very thankful for John and all that he does for others."

Richichi brushed off any praise, saying that "being called a hero is hard to digest."

## Carrier keeps a watchful eye on his route

While going about his route in a foot and a half of snow last winter, Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **James Bigham** came across an elderly customer who had fallen outside his home on some ice. "It was one of those days that you had to watch yourself," he said. The carrier got the man back inside his home, made sure he was OK, and then continued on his route.

A few hours later, Bigham came across another elderly customer, Larry Lewis, outside of his apartment complex with his dog. "It wasn't unusual to see him out there with his dog," Bigham said.

When the carrier got closer and looked over again, he saw that Lewis had fallen into the snow. Lewis wasn't wearing many layers and couldn't get up. He had called for help and his dog barked, but no one had stopped. "He was struggling and it looked like he was in trouble," the carrier said. "It was so cold, there was no way he was going to be out there that long."

Remembering that Lewis had a heart condition, Bigham was extra concerned. "I asked him, 'Are you OK?'" the carrier said. Lewis replied that he was not and that he needed help, so Bigham set his satchel down and went over to him.

He knew he would have to lift the



Northeastern New York Branch 358 member John Richichi was recognized for his role in preventing a large tree limb from crushing an oncoming car.



As Atlanta Branch 73 member Zipporah White (l) helped a customer (r) who was having medical issues on the roadside, fellow Branch 73 member Chadwick Green diverted traffic away.

man up, so he got behind Lewis and managed to get him standing. The man fell again, and Bigham lifted the man up yet again and helped him over to the apartment building. Bigham gently guided the man to his apartment and told him, “Catch your breath.” A few minutes later, Lewis was speaking more coherently.

The man didn’t want Bigham to call 911 and promised him that he would go to the doctor’s office soon. Assured that he was OK, Bigham continued on his route but stopped by later to check on Lewis.

The man wrote about his appreciation for Bigham to the local postmaster. “Outside of my feet and hands turning a little blue, I am alright thanks to Jim,” Lewis wrote. “I probably would have laid there until I expired, so I guess Jim saved my life. I thought someone at the post office should know about him and what he did for me that day in the snow.”

Bigham, a 28-year postal veteran, said that despite the praise, he doesn’t believe he’s a hero. “I just feel that I have been on that route for a number

of years and I know my customers,” Bigham said. “I think anybody would have [done it], had they known the situation.”

## See something, do something

Atlanta Branch 73 member **Zipporah White** was in the process of driving city carrier assistant and fellow Branch 73 member **Chadwick Green** for delivery training one day in summer 2016 when they noticed an elderly man sitting on the curb, looking dazed.

“He was trying to flag people down,” Green said, but to no avail.

“There were so many cars that passed him, I couldn’t believe it,” White said.

The carriers pulled over to help the octogenarian. “I asked if he was OK, and he was slurring,” White said. “He kept shaking.”

“It was extremely hot that day,” Green added.

Green headed toward the busy street and directed traffic away from White and the man. “A lot of people didn’t see him,” Green said. “It was a lot of traffic and I was a little worried about

getting hit myself.”

Meanwhile, White called 911. “He had been walking from a grocery store for a mile with no water,” White said of the man. “The operator told me not to give the man water but to keep talking to him until first responders arrived.”

When EMTs arrived on the scene, they took the man’s vital signs and checked his blood-sugar levels. “When they checked his ID and saw his address was nearby, I went to his complex to look for his roommate and inform the property manager, who returned to the scene with me,” White said.

The man was then taken to the hospital for treatment of heat stroke and dehydration.

“When we returned to the office, our co-workers were calling us heroes,” said White, a 15-year postal veteran. “We just felt good because we were able to help someone who was clearly in danger.”

Green, a first-year letter carrier and Marine Corps veteran, echoed that sentiment. “I was just helping out a fellow citizen,” he said.

## Eye on the elderly



Pierce Hodges

On July 12, 2016, Winston-Salem, NC Branch 461 member **Pierce Hodges** was going about subbing on a route when he heard a conversation. “I could hear a woman telling her husband she couldn’t get up,” he said. The carrier couldn’t see her and when he looked over, he saw a house’s front door open, so he figured they were inside. When he looped around, however, he saw his elderly customers,

the Womacks, lying down on the front patio. While trying to walk through a walkway with a walker, Mrs. Womack had fallen and could not get up. Her husband tried to get her up, but was too weak to help his wife, as the couple had both been recovering after recent hospitalizations. The Womacks were on the ground and had started getting sick from the heat. People were driving by but no one stopped to help until

Hodges saw Mr. Womack. The carrier hurriedly pulled over his vehicle and got out to help. “I just rolled her over so she could sit up and then stand up,” Hodges said. The first-year letter carrier and Army veteran said he had checked in with couple and they are doing well. While Hodges said he is “humbled” by being called a hero, he doesn’t think that he deserves the title.

Philadelphia, PA Branch 157 member Gary Booz (l) was commended for administering CPR to his co-worker, clerk Lynette Wilmer (r), who had a heart attack.

## Timing is everything

On July 25, 2016, Philadelphia, PA Branch 157 member **Gary Booz** was getting ready to start his deliveries for the day. The carrier had come in two hours early because the Democratic National Convention was in town, and he wanted to get his mail delivered on time.

In another part of the building, clerk Lynette Wilmer collapsed and was unresponsive and not breathing. Employees called 911 and the dispatcher urged them to find someone who knows CPR.

"Another safety person told me someone passed out," said Booz, who is on his station's safety team. "She was sitting there, casing the mail and fell backward."

As a member of the team, it's Booz's responsibility to meet the ambulance and take EMTs to the area where the emergency is, but before going out to meet the ambulance, something told him to check on Wilmer first.

When he reached her, someone was on the phone with a 911 dispatcher who said CPR needed to start right away. Booz was the only person in the area who knew CPR and he started it immediately. Though he had never used the technique before, "It's funny how it comes to you automatically,"

he said. Booz continued CPR until responders arrived.

EMTs continued CPR and took Wilmer to the hospital. The woman was in a coma for six days and given just a 50/50 chance to survive. She recovered, though, and went home a few weeks later. Doctors said that without Booz's quick thinking and starting CPR, Wilmer likely would not have survived.

"All the doctors praised him: 'He was so good. He was better than we could have done.' I'm grateful, Gary, I'm grateful," Wilmer told WPVI-TV, the local ABC station. "I know without Gary on the work floor, I wouldn't be here."

The 31-year letter carrier said he's honored at being called a hero, but brushed off any praise. "I wasn't supposed to start that early," Booz said. "I believe God used me that day—there's no doubt in mind."

## Well, that's not something you see every day

"I was just doing my route, walking," South Suburban Merged, IL Branch 4016 member **Grace Pott** recalled of a hot June 24, 2016, when she heard a commotion.

The carrier soon realized in horror that the sound was that of a customer



throwing a body into his van, locking the vehicle, and then walking back into his house.

Pott called 911 and when officers came, she described what she had seen. "I told them, 'The back door's open. The person's in there,'" she said. "I was spooked and freaked. My legs were shaking."

The customer had apparently thrown his mother into his van. Officers found that the elderly woman was alive and called paramedics. They also took the man to a hospital; the reporting officer, who commended Pott for her actions, told the letter carrier that the customer was planning to kill his mother and then himself.

"It was a pretty bizarre day," Pott said. "This is not something you see carrying mail."

The 16-year postal veteran doesn't consider herself a hero, though. "I just think I was there at the right time and the right place," she said.

## Help on the way

On Dec. 10, 2015, Lynn, MA Branch 7 member **David Crowley** was delivering his route when "I noticed a syringe in the street," he said. Since it was a nice neighborhood and the gutters were usually cleaned, the carrier took note. Crowley next saw an SUV pulled over to the side of the street. Since it was a main road,

it was not unusual to see someone pull over to send a text message on their phone, but the car had been sitting there for quite a while. "I just got curious," the carrier said. He checked the car and noticed a young man slumped over inside with the engine running. "I didn't see him moving at all," Crowley said. Remembering the syringe,

he became concerned. "I knocked on the window," he said. "I knocked pretty loud." The carrier reported it to a nearby neighborhood police patrol, saying, "I think this kid is OD'ing." The officer arrived to investigate and called in an ambulance. The 18-year-old man had indeed apparently overdosed and was able to be revived

by medical personnel and taken to the hospital. "I just put two and two together," Crowley said. "They told me he was pretty close to dead." The carrier brushed off any major heroics. "I'm glad I was able to help out," the 30-year letter carrier said. "Anybody would have done it, especially carriers in my office." PR



## Eye on the elderly



Sharon Bennett

Fayetteville, NC Branch 1128 member **Sharon Bennett** was delivering to curbside mailboxes on May 27, 2016, when she saw her octogenarian customer, Mr. Gregory, who had been walking down the sidewalk with the aid of a walker, fall to the ground. Bennett, an Army and National Guard veteran, knew that the man had previously had a stroke and was concerned. So, Bennett pulled over, secured her vehicle, and “I ran diagonally across the road,” the carrier said. The man had some bruises and was bleeding from his hands, but was otherwise OK. She helped Gregory in getting back on his feet and stayed with him until his relative who was inside his house came to help him home. Bennett denies being a hero, though. “I was just in the right place at the right time,”



Robert Snee

the four-year letter carrier said. “I deliver to a lot of elderly customers on my route and I’m just always on the lookout.”

Wilkes-Barre, PA Branch 115 member **Robert Snee** grew concerned on July 14, 2016, when he saw a 93-year-old customer’s mail piled up at his home. The carrier said that the man, “a kind of notable neighborhood character,” walks around the neighborhood all the time. “I didn’t see him for a few days,” Snee said. “Something seemed funny.” When he saw that the grass at the man’s house was kind of high, coupled with the mail pile, he decided to investigate. He knocked on the man’s door, checked with neighbors, and stopped at the man’s favorite coffee shop, all to no avail. Snee’s customer also frequented the post office, so he called his supervisor to ask if he had been there. When Snee found out that he hadn’t, he asked the supervisor to call 911 and ask for a welfare check. Emergency responders discovered

the man in his bathtub, where he’d been for a few days. Paramedics took the man to a hospital and credited Snee with possibly saving his life. Snee, a 40-year letter carrier and Air Force veteran, said there was “nothing heroic about

it. It was just phone calls and ringing doorbells.”

While delivering a package in nearly 100-degree heat on Sunday, Aug. 7, 2016, Dallas Branch 132 city carrier assistant **Devante Lacy** spotted an elderly customer in distress next door. “I just saw him collapse face-first on concrete,” he said. The man was lying on the ground and appeared to have been mowing his lawn. “There wasn’t anyone outside,” Lacy said. The carrier ran over to the man and tried to help



Devante Lacy

him sit up. “He couldn’t say anything,” he said. As he was doing so, a neighbor came over and told Lacy that the man had previously had a stroke, and it appeared he was having another. “We can’t leave him out here in the sun,” Lacy said. They knocked on the door, and the man’s son answered. He hadn’t been aware that his father was outside. “I just grabbed the guy and put him over my shoulder and took him inside to A.C.,” Lacy said. He called 911 and made sure the man was in good hands



Jeff Hawkinson

before continuing on. Lacy doesn’t think his actions were a big deal. “I was just looking at it like I was in the right place at the right time,” the second-year letter carrier said. “It could have been a lot worse.”

One day last fall, Sioux City, IA Branch 69 member **Jeff Hawkinson** was delivering to an apartment complex. As he closed up the boxes, he thought he could hear a customer’s voice. “I heard her start calling out for help,” he said. Hawkinson investigated and noticed it was coming from his customer Mrs. Stusse’s apartment. He knocked as he identified himself as “Jeff the mailman.” Entering the apartment, he found that the 84-year-old woman had tripped over her cat and fallen. “She had broken her arm,” Hawkinson said. “She was on the floor and couldn’t get up.” Stusse had had polio when she was younger and had not been able to move her other arm since. Hawkinson called the woman’s daughter as well as a neighbor and stayed with her until they arrived. Hawkinson, who said Stusse was doing well, brushed off any accolades. “To me, it wasn’t a big deal, but I’m sure it was to her,” the 36-year letter carrier said.

## Neighborhood watch



Laura Kish

**A**kron, OH Branch 148 member **Laura Kish** was on her route on July 28, 2016, when she saw a toddler wandering around alone. “He saw me and just came running at me,” she said. “I had never seen the kid before.” Kish began asking him questions, but he was not able to tell her much about himself. The shoeless boy pointed to a house. “The house he was pointing at was vacant,” she said. Kish canvassed the neighborhood in search of someone who knew the child. Some neighbors recognized the child, who had apparently gotten out from his house before. “This time he climbed out of a back window,” Kish said. She and the neighbors got the boy home safely. The 29-year postal veteran brushed off any accolades for her actions. “It’s no big deal, really,” Kish said. “I didn’t really do anything; the neighbors did.”



Tammy Ernst

**Y**ork, PA Branch 509 member **Tammy Ernst** was driving down a street on her route one day last spring when she noticed something unusual. “I came to a stop sign,” she said. “As soon as I turned, I saw this toddler walking toward the road.” The young boy was in front of his house by himself but was heading toward the street. The carrier quickly stopped her vehicle across the street and intercepted him. “Hey buddy, what are you doing out here?” Ernst asked him. “I put my hand on his back and turned him around.” At that moment, his mother came out of the front door of the home, asking the boy how he had gotten out of the back yard. Ernst made sure the child was in good hands and then resumed her route. Despite receiving praise, Ernst insists she’s no hero. “I was just there at the right time,” the 22-year letter carrier said. “Anyone, I hope, would have done the same thing.”

**O**n Oct. 17, 2016, Cincinnati Branch 43 member **Martin Mitchener** was

delivering mail on his route when he saw a 2-year-old girl wandering in the streets without shoes or a coat. “I wasn’t sure where she came from,” he said, and the girl couldn’t give him any pertinent information. Mitchener saw a house with a door open, but he knew that a pit bull lived there, so “I was leery of knocking on the door,” he said. The carrier grabbed his phone and called his postmaster, who in turn called local police. Mitchener stayed with the child until officers arrived to take custody of her. After police arrived, “two teenaged kids left the home with the pit bull by the collar,” Mitchener said. They apparently were supposed to be watching the toddler but had left the front door of their home open, and the girl had wandered out into the street. Mitchener, a 29-year postal veteran, brushed off any mention of heroics. “It was not too dramatic,” he said. “I just stayed with the little girl until the police showed up. It was the proper thing to do.”

**M**t. Pleasant, IA Branch 660 member **Betty Lutz** was delivering mail on Saturday, May 21, 2016, when she was approached by a customer on her route who said that his 4-year-old son had been missing for at least two hours and asked if she had seen him. “The father came up to me because he knew who I was,” she said. The carrier told the man that she had not seen him, but she took the boy’s description and the man’s phone number,



Betty Lutz

promising to call him if she did come across the boy. Lutz went about her route, looking as she went, and asked neighbors if they had seen the youngster. A short time later, three blocks away, Lutz noticed a boy who fit the description swinging in the back yard of a home on her route, so she went over to talk to him. When Lutz asked the boy if he lived there, “He said, ‘I live here all by myself,’” she said. She believed the child did not belong at that house, so she called his parents and stayed with the child until they arrived. “I don’t know if he could have found his way home.” Trusting his letter carrier, the boy was excited to hang out with Lutz and asked if he could ride in her LLV and deliver mail with her. The parents were relieved and thankful for the carrier’s awareness and assistance. Lutz said she was honored and humbled to be called a hero, but that her actions weren’t a big deal. “I was just doing my job,” the 23-year postal veteran said. “Anybody would have done it. You just look out for everybody.” **PR**





Rebecca Phillips

## A carrier's helping hand

On Sept. 21, 2016, Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Rebecca Phillips** was delivering mail on her route when she spotted a man who had passed out. There was a liquor store on the carrier's route, so it was not unusual to see people loitering.

"I had seen him before," she said. But this time, "He was just lying there."

Afraid that the man would get hurt, "I grabbed a Clif bar and went over to see if he was OK," Phillips said. She asked if he was all right and also if he had eaten. He said he had not, so she gave him the bar and told him to take care of himself.

When she passed by on her route again a little while later, she saw that the man had again passed out and had stuck the bar in his pocket instead of eating it. "I couldn't leave him there like that," Phillips said. "I saw a lot of people walk by him."

So, she went over and woke the man up again. She asked him if he would like her to call an ambulance, and he told her that would be a good idea. The carrier called 911 and stayed with the man to comfort him.

The man told Phillips that most of his relatives had died and he was using alcohol to cope. "I just wanted him to know that someone cares," she said.

The ambulance took a while to arrive, so the carrier called 911 to check on it. They assured her it would be on its way soon, so Phillips quickly finished her loop. When she came back a few minutes later, she saw the ambulance there.

The 10-year letter carrier doesn't see herself as a hero, though. "I just saw somebody who had kind of given up on life," Phillips said. "I'm just here and I'll help however I can."

## Vigilant carrier to the rescue

Casper, WY Branch 1681 member **Annie Humphrey** was on her route one day in October 2016 when "I heard someone yelling, 'Help me!'" she said. The carrier couldn't tell where it was coming from, so she continued to listen as she made her next delivery. "I heard her yell it again," she said. "You could tell something was really wrong."

Humphrey ran for a block and a half until she saw what happened. Sarah, a former co-worker who now worked for a waste management company, was limply hanging out of the cab of her garbage truck. Humphrey would occasionally see Sarah on her route, so "it was hard seeing her like that," the carrier said.

Sarah told Humphrey that she had set the truck's emergency brake and put its transmission in neutral. She then got out of the truck to get a trash can, but a

mechanical failure and caused the truck to roll, pinning her between the front of the vehicle and a telephone pole.

Sarah was able to drag herself into the truck through an open door and radio for help. "She probably helped herself, more than anything," Humphrey said. "She was almost passed out." Sarah also said that she couldn't feel the bottom half of her body.

"All I did was have her lean against me," the carrier said. She then moved Sarah onto the ground.

The truck was still running, so the carrier turned it off. Humphrey then realized that Sarah's feet were higher than her head because of the slope of the ground, so she rearranged her so that her blood wouldn't rush to her head. "I was terrified to move her, but I didn't really have a choice in the matter," Humphrey added.

Humphrey stayed with Sarah and comforted her friend until the emergency crews arrived. The accident broke Sarah's pelvis in five places and her tailbone as well. She is still recovering from her injuries.

Despite being lauded as a hero, Humphrey denies performing any major actions. "I think Sarah's the hero. She's a brave girl, I'll tell you. She's tough," the fourth-year letter carrier said. "I don't need to be glorified. I would have done it for anyone. I'm just glad she's OK." **PR**

## Eye on the elderly



Eric Brooks

While delivering mail to one of his regular customers on Sept. 21, 2016, Hayward, CA Branch 1707 member **Eric Brooks** heard a faint voice calling from inside the house. "I luckily heard, 'Mr. Mailman, I fell down the stairs,'" the carrier said. Knowing that his 87-year-old customer previously had had a double-knee replacement and that he had been using crutches to get around,

Brooks was concerned. The carrier called out to the man, who told him he had fallen. "He went down 10 stairs," he said, and his wife was in the back yard doing some garden work. Brooks found the man's wife and then checked on the man with her. The man did not seem to have any major injuries, but "he was pretty beaten up," Brooks said. The carrier called the sheriff's depart-

ment and made his customer comfortable waiting for help to arrive. Once he saw that the man was in good hands, Brooks continued on his route. The 28-year postal veteran said his customers are proud of his actions, but that being called a hero is embarrassing. "It's not like I saved his life, but I saved him from some amount of misery," Brooks said. "It's the classic mailman story." **PR**

## Proud to Serve

Proud to Serve is a semi-regular compilation of heroic stories about letter carriers in their communities. If you know about a hero in your branch, contact us as soon as possible at 202-756-7403 or at postalrecord@nalc.org. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or firefighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the form of concerned letter carriers.

Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they often are the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

## Carrier helps defuse tense situation

On Dec. 6, 2014, Connecticut Merged Branch 20 member **Clinton Parker** was delivering mail when he was contacted by the police and asked to help out with a police standoff.

The carrier, who has spent 30 years on active duty in the Army and in the Army Reserves, got a police escort to the scene but didn't know much about the situation, only that shots had been fired and a fellow soldier he knew was involved. The soldier's father had suggested Parker to police as someone who could help.

When they pulled up to the scene, Parker saw a neighborhood cordoned off. "He had fired off a shot and he had barricaded himself," he said. "I was nervous and concerned because there were live weapons. I didn't know what to expect."

Police and a SWAT team had surrounded the house after receiving a call that an armed man who was had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was threatening himself and others. The power in the neighborhood had been cut off, and police were trying to apprehend the man.

"During the standoff, they weren't going to let me on the scene," Parker said.

The carrier convinced them that he would only be of help if he could go to the soldier. "I knew the soldier. I didn't think he was a threat, but I knew that situation needed to be defused," Parker said. "I knew he needed to see a familiar face."

Parker entered the home with an offi-

cer and began to counsel the man during what became a seven-hour standoff. "It was a tense moment for everyone involved," the carrier said. "Once they let me on scene, I could relate to what he was going through. I talked him into laying down his weapons."

After the peaceful surrender, Parker accompanied the man, along with his family, to the hospital, where he received treatment for his PTSD. Parker said the man is now doing well. "I try to stay in contact with him as much as possible," he said.

The Watertown, CT Police Department issued a memo that said, "With total disregard for your own safety you entered the home and counseled the subject which resulted in his surrender shortly thereafter. You should be commended for your actions."

But Parker brushed off any accolades for helping defuse the situation. "It was about helping out a fellow soldier," the 30-year postal veteran said. "I was glad there were no injuries or fatalities and it ended peacefully. If I had to do it all over again, I would do it the same way."

## It was just perfect timing

Western Massachusetts Branch 46 member **Rick Ridenour** had just parked on his route to deliver mail on Dec. 8 when "I saw a couple of guys running toward the back of a home," he said. There was some sort of commotion, and he looked around to try to identify the source.

Ridenour started hustling over to the group. He then saw that a man, Aarin Coates, was pinned to the ground beneath a vehicle that he had been repairing. It had slipped off the jack and onto his chest. "He was yelling that it was crushing him," the carrier said. "The guy was clearly in trouble."

Heidi Mayhew, Coates' fiancée's aunt, who lives at the apartment house where the accident occurred, was inside watching TV when she heard the screaming and ran outside to see what happened. She then ran back inside and called 911.



Connecticut Merged Branch 20 member **Clinton Parker** was recognized for his role in talking down a soldier with PTSD who had threatened to shoot himself and others.





John Zeis

Along with a few other neighbors and passersby, Ridenour helped to lift the vehicle off of Coates, relieving the pressure and allowing him to be pulled from beneath the vehicle.

By the time Ridenour and the others had Coates free, first responders arrived. Coates was airlifted to the hospital, where it was discovered that he had broken about a dozen ribs during the incident. He soon recovered.

“The doctor said if he’d been under there for longer, he would have died,” Mayhew told the [Greenfield, MA] *Recorder*. Coates’ fiancée, Tabitha Sisto, told the newspaper, “If it wasn’t for the people who helped him he wouldn’t be here right now. I just need to say thank you again from the very bottom of my heart for everyone who was involved and the quick thinking and actions of everyone who helped save my future husband’s life.”

Ridenour brushed off any accolades for his actions. “There’s not a single brother or sister in the union who wouldn’t have done the same thing,” the

11-year postal veteran said. “That’s just who we are.”

## Dedicated carrier looks after his customers

Pittsburgh Branch 84 member **John Zeis** was working his normal route on Saturday, Oct. 1. On the first day of the month, when his 93-year-old customer, Catherine Schatzel, receives a check, the carrier usually knocked on her apartment door at her nursing home and handed it to the woman, or she would tell him to just stick it in her mailbox.

“She didn’t come out that day and I thought it was really odd,” Zeis said. So he put the envelope in the mailbox and continued delivering his route.

By Monday, Zeis became worried as the mail was still in the mailbox from the previous delivery day, so he contacted Schatzel’s neighbor, who called the landlord, who in turn called police.

Responding officers broke the door down to find the woman on the floor

with an apparent leg injury. Schatzel said she had suffered a fall a few days prior and had been stuck on the floor ever since.

Police commended Zeis, saying that, had he not contacted somebody, Schatzel might have died. The woman soon after was moved to a different nursing home, where the carrier went to visit her.

Zeis, a 29-year letter carrier, has seen his fair share of unusual situations during his postal career. In March 2008, he was emptying a relay box when two men approached him and demanded money. One of the suspects pulled out a gun and shot Zeis as he ran down the street with his satchel.

“I feel that if I wouldn’t have survived the shooting, I wouldn’t have been able to save [Schatzel],” he said. “That’s a bonus for sure.”

But Zeis doesn’t consider himself a hero. “It’s all in a day’s work,” he said. “I love my job. I’m made to be a letter carrier. I really enjoy it. We all have a limited time here, and we should all give back and look after the elderly.”

## Fire and rescue



Dan Maguire

“I saw some smoke,” Boston Branch 34 member **Dan Maguire** said of delivering his route on June 27. Since it was summertime, he figured it was probably just a barbecue, so he continued on his rounds. “A couple of houses later, the wind blew

the smoke into the vehicle,” he said. Maguire decided this was no barbecue. He went up to the customer’s driveway and saw that a bag of trash had caught fire there. “It was close to the house,” he said, so he called 911. He saw three or four teenagers who were inside upstairs and tried to grab their attention. “I was throwing rocks at the window,” Maguire said. “The rest is history.” The teens made it out safely, and the one who lived there later told Maguire, “You saved my life, man.” Maguire doesn’t think he’s a hero, though. “I’m just glad I stopped,” the 31-year letter carrier said.

While Cedar Rapids, IA Branch 373 member **Cyler Stewart** was performing some park-and-loop deliveries on Oct. 5, “I smelled something burning,” he said. As the carrier approached a home on his route, “I noticed some smoke coming from the back of



Cyler Stewart

the house,” Stewart said. As he got closer, he noticed flames shooting from an electrical box on the side of house. Stewart called 911, who told the carrier to keep an eye on the situation and to make sure no one went near it. “I tried knocking on the door, but no one was home,” the carrier said. Responding fire crews were able to put out the fire without extensive damage to the home or property. Stewart later returned to check on the returned residents, who commended Stewart for his quick actions. The second-year letter carrier insisted he wasn’t a hero. “I was just out there, doing my job, taking care of my customers,” he said. **PR**

## When 'seconds and minutes' count

Oshkosh, WI Branch 173 member **Eric Momsen** was delivering mail on a cold day in January 2016 when "I heard someone shouting and yelling," he said.

The carrier first thought it might just be teenagers, but he quickly identified the source outside a nearby house. "I looked over and saw this woman screaming on her cell phone," Momsen said. "She was saying, 'My baby's not breathing and turning colors.'"

Momsen rushed over and learned that the woman's 6-month-old daughter was inside and had stopped breathing. He went in and found the baby on the

sofa with her grandmother. "It was non-responsive, lying there with its eyes closed," he said.

Momsen, a veteran of the Navy, Navy Reserves and Army National Guard as well as a Boy Scout leader, had extensive CPR training. "Adrenaline starts to go and I was trying to stay calm," he said.

Momsen took a "look, listen and feel" approach. "I assessed that the baby looked like it had swallowed its tongue," he said, possibly from a seizure. The carrier instructed the woman to tilt the girl on her side, to allow her tongue to fall to the side of her mouth and create an airway.

"I touched its wrist to take her pulse," the carrier said. "I think the coldness of my hands shocked her."



Eric Momsen

The baby opened her eyes; soon, color returned to her face and she started to breathe normally again.

EMTs took the baby to the hospital, and the girl soon recovered and returned home.

"It all happened so quickly," the carrier said. "Seconds and minutes count when they have that small of lung capacity."

Momsen brushed off any heroics, though. "I think anyone would have done the same thing," the 23-year postal veteran said. "How could you live with yourself if you walked by?"

This wasn't the first time Momsen has been recognized for actions on his route; he was featured in the April 2016 *Postal Record* for alerting a customer that her house was on fire.

## Neighborhood watch



Cynthia Perkins

Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Cynthia Perkins** was delivering mail on a park-and-loop route on Saturday, Oct. 15, when "I see a little boy running down the middle of the road, and I mean running," she said. The 2-year-old, barefoot in just a diaper, was headed directly toward a

busy road. The carrier parked her postal vehicle, caught up to the child and asked where he lived and where his mom was. The boy kept repeating what Perkins said, and was not able to tell the carrier where he lived. "I started walking with him, door to door, trying to figure out where this little dude lived," Perkins said. There was no answer at the first few houses, but then the carrier spotted a house with a door open. The toddler went inside, and his mother was there. Perkins followed him in to introduce herself to the mother, who had apparently fallen asleep on the couch when the child was sleeping. The boy had awakened and gotten out of the house without waking her. The mother

was grateful to the carrier for watching out for her child. Perkins brushed off any major heroics. "I think any mom would feel I just helped this kid out," the nine-year postal veteran said.



Agana, Guam Branch 4093 member **Paul Carbullido** was preparing to leave his delivery at a

local mall on Aug. 12. As he was securing his mail to proceed to his next delivery, he noticed two women and two children gathered around a vehicle. He soon realized that it appeared that they were locked out of the car. "But what caught my attention was when one of the la-

dies was crying and banging on the vehicle window," Carbullido said. "That's when I ran to the vehicle to see what was going on." As he looked through the window, he saw a child crying and sweating in the back seat. "They had a metal rod, but just could not pick the lock," the carrier said. He took hold of it and tried himself, and after a few minutes was successful in opening the car door. "Boy was everybody happy," the 30-year postal veteran said. Carbullido, an Air Force veteran and current Air National Guard member, doesn't think he is a hero. "Everything happened so fast, I did not think I was capable of doing what I did," Carbullido said. **PR**



## Help on the way

On June 14, Maine Merged Branch 92 member **Vernon Moore** was going about his mail route. Driving by a house, “I could see a hand waving out through a window,” the carrier said. Moore rushed over and asked, “Glenn, are you OK?” The man responded “No.” He found out that his customer, Glenn Oxley, had been home alone when he passed out



Vernon Moore

and fell down five stairs inside his split-level home. The man had been on the floor inside; hearing Moore’s mail truck, he dragged himself to the door, pulled himself up enough to unlock the deadbolt, turned the door handle and fell against the door to flop partially outside to attract the carrier’s attention. Moore tried to put the man’s back against the wall and pivot him, but the man asked him to stop because it hurt and asked him to call 911 as well as a neighbor, who was a registered nurse.

Moore quickly knocked on the neighbor’s door and they returned to Oxley. “We both talked to him until the ambulance got there,” he said. “We assured him that he would be OK.” EMTs soon arrived to give Oxley medical attention for his five broken ribs. “If Vern had not been there driving his appointed rounds in his truck with its unique sound, I don’t know what might have happened to me,” wrote Oxley, whose injuries required a long hospital stay and months of rehab. “I always knew Vern was a great guy, but I didn’t know that one day he might save my life.” But the nearly 30-year postal veteran simply said it’s all part of being a letter carrier. “It’s something we do. You’re glad you can help,” Moore said. “It’s human nature to help someone in need.”

“I heard a girl scream across the street,” Maine Merged Branch 92 member **Jon Olason** said of his route on Sept. 3. He then heard the girl scream a second time, “Mom, call 911.” The carrier ran in their direction and saw that there was a man pinned under his car in the garage. He noticed a jack sitting on the floor close by, and the Olason instinctively grabbed it. “I jacked it up, got it off him, and he scooted out,” he said. Once the car

was off the man, the carrier asked him if he was all right. The man said his chest was a little sore and he had cut his forehead. The carrier stayed with the family to comfort them until emergency crews responded and then left to deliver the rest of his route. The family profusely thanked Olason the next time they saw the carrier and told him the man had suffered multiple broken ribs, cuts and bruises. But the 20-year postal veteran and Army veteran doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I’m just a good Samaritan,” Olason said. “I was just in the right place at the right time, that’s all.”

While delivering mail one day last fall, Lincoln, NE Branch 8 member **Zach Paremske** noticed a customer outside. “She was sitting on her porch,” he said, so he asked her, “Do you want your mail?” The customer whispered to the carrier, “Help me.” The woman, speaking in broken English, asked Paremske to call 911. She had apparently had stomach surgery the day before and was having complications. The carrier waited with the woman to comfort her, and paramedics and the woman’s husband arrived at the same time. “While I was sitting there, they were asking me questions,” Paremske said. Once he filled every one in and



Zach Paremske



Andrew King

saw that his customer was in good hands, the carrier continued his route. He later checked in on the woman, who was doing better. But the fourth-year letter carrier doesn’t think he deserves any special credit. “I feel like anyone would have done the same thing if someone was asking for help,” Paremske said.

Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Andrew King** was on his route on Oct. 21, and had just pulled onto a street when he saw a woman attempting to lift a man. “He appeared sick,” the carrier said. “The woman screamed, ‘Can you help?’” King quickly parked his LLV and went to assist the woman. He asked her if 911 had been called and the woman said yes, but she seemed confused, so the carrier decided to call 911 to be on the safe side. “He was very dizzy,” King said, so they gently moved him to the grass. The man started vomiting, so King got the man on his side and tipped his head so he wouldn’t choke. They continued to make him comfortable until help arrived. Responding paramedics said that the man was most likely experiencing an allergic reaction. King said that the man is doing well now, but that he is not a hero. “I was just doing the job,” the third-year letter carrier said. “We’re all heroes. It’s our responsibility to keep an eye out.” **PR**

## Eye on the elderly



Odie Penn

On Aug. 2, Newport, RI Branch 57 member **Odie Penn** stopped by an elderly customer's house to bring the mail to her, as she normally did. "I always check in on her," the carrier said. Penn called for the woman upon her arrival, but there was no answer. She walked through the house and saw the woman's laundry room door open but didn't see the woman. Penn thought, "Nancy's not here today; what's going on?" She then left the customer's mail on her countertop and continued her route. The following day, she returned to deliver the mail and noticed that the mail from the day prior was still there. "I got a feeling," Penn said. She called inside the house, "Nancy, where are you? Are you here?" Concerned after getting no response, Penn went next door and asked a neighbor for help. The neighbor called the woman's daughter, who said her mother should

be home and something was not right. They called 911, and responders found the woman lying on her bedroom floor with only a faint pulse. The woman was taken to the hospital, where she died several days later. Penn was credited for giving the woman's family members, who lived in other states, a chance to be with her at the end of her life. The 18-year postal veteran doesn't think she did anything heroic. "I always love to help people, especially those elderly people who need help," Penn said. "I always try to be there for them."

Eden, NC Branch 3712 member **Blake Cooper** was delivering mail on Saturday, Aug. 27, to the home of his 93-year-old customer, Gladys Campbell, who lived alone. "I slid some mail in the door slot," he said. "She said, 'Hey, can you help me?'" Glancing through the mail slot in her locked front door, "I could see her lying on the floor," the carrier said. He called 911 and kept talking to Campbell to comfort her until help arrived. Emergency responders crawled through a window to get to the woman,



Blake Cooper

who told them that she'd been lying there overnight and had been waiting for her letter carrier to come by on Saturday. Campbell feared she had either a broken hip or a broken leg and was taken

to the hospital for treatment. Cooper later visited the woman in a nursing home to check on her. The four-year letter carrier and Air Force veteran doesn't think he's a hero, though. "I was just doing what I was supposed to be doing," Cooper said: "helping somebody."

Hot Springs National Park, AR Branch 543 member **Sandra Emerson** was delivering mail on her route on Saturday, Sept. 10, when she saw something concerning at the home of an elderly woman who lives alone. "I noticed mail piling up in her



Sandra Emerson

box," she said. A few days prior, Emerson had helped the woman after she had gotten stuck in a recliner and her walker was out of reach. Concerned for the woman, the carrier decided to check on her and knocked on the door. The woman said to come in. Emerson discovered that the customer had fallen after getting out of her chair and had been lying on the floor for two days. "It just breaks my heart," the carrier said. Emerson called 911 and stayed with the woman until the ambulance arrived, offering her water and comfort, and help for her cat. The woman



Tyler Bruggeman

was taken to the hospital and later to a rehab center, and is doing well. Soon after, an EMT told Emerson's postmaster about her actions, and also said that, had the carrier not helped, the customer likely would not have made it. Despite the praise, the 29-year postal veteran insisted that she doesn't consider herself a hero. "I did what I'm supposed to do as a human," Emerson said. "Part of being a letter carrier is looking out for people."

"I walked up to the door and I heard a grunt when I opened the mailbox," McCook, NE Branch 1278 city carrier assistant **Tyler Bruggeman** said of delivering mail to an elderly customer on his route on Sept. 8. "He went to my church, so I knew he was older and used a walker," he said. Concerned, the CCA knocked on the door. The customer called out in response, and Bruggeman entered the house. "He was on his back and couldn't move," the carrier said. "He had just gotten breakfast and had fallen and couldn't get up." The man had been on the floor for about four hours. Bruggeman called 911 and the customer's family and stayed to comfort him until help arrived. The man was taken to the hospital to treat a bladder infection and then went to a nursing home to continue to recover. Bruggeman, a first-year letter carrier, doesn't think he's a hero, though he admitted, "If I hadn't gone in, I don't know when someone would have checked on him." **PR**





**Johnstown, PA Branch 4551 member Matthew Lamb (below right) was praised for his role in helping a young boy and his grandmother escape their burning home (pictured top right).**

## The heat of the moment

As Johnstown, PA Branch 451 member **Matthew Lamb** was delivering the Rucoskys' mail on Nov. 21, he could smell smoke. Since there had been snow recently, he attributed the scent to a woodburner or other heat source.

He continued on his route and as he delivered a package on a nearby street, "I looked down and could see flames from their porch," Lamb said.

Concerned, Lamb ran over to the Rucoskys' front porch and knocked on the door. He helped Helen Rucosky out of the home and to a safe distance away. "I asked if there was anyone else in there," he said. At first, she said no.

The carrier called 911 and the operator asked him about others inside. Lamb again asked the woman, and this time, "she said her grandson was inside," he said.

Rucosky's grandson, Adam, was upstairs sleeping when the fire broke out, so Lamb started looking for another entrance to the house. "I went to another door, because by then the fire had spread," the carrier said. It was locked, and roofing on the porch had begun falling around him.

Lamb then decided to try to go through the basement. Held back by heat and smoke, Lamb became discouraged. But when he heard cries from Adam, Lamb was determined to help.

The cries were coming from the other side of the house, so Lamb ran over. "Black smoke was pouring out," Lamb said. He told Adam, "Just jump out and I'll catch you." The boy climbed out of his window and jumped into the waiting arms of the letter carrier, who immediately took him to his grandmother.

The boy's father, Robert Rucosky, who is a volunteer firefighter, had not been home, but when he saw fire trucks near his house, he rushed to the scene.

Firefighters from four towns responded to the fire, and West Hills Fire Chief Don Blasko told *The Tribune-Democrat* that a preliminary investigation showed that the fire started after something hot from the kitchen was placed on the porch. The fire caused extensive damage to the front porch and first floor.

Lamb stayed with the family until fire crews arrived, then returned to and finished his regular route, insisting he was just at the right place at the right time. "I didn't think about it too much," the five-year postal veteran said. "Someone was needing help. I wasn't looking at it like I was in danger. I was just trying to help out one of my customers."



and saw a man by the bathroom door. "Her friend had a rope around his neck," he said. "He was motionless and dangling."

Zhu quickly rushed over to him. "I grabbed him from behind and lifted him up," he said. He called out to the woman to go to the kitchen and get a knife to cut the rope.

Zhu set the man on the floor as the woman called 911. She was upset and having trouble giving information, so Zhu talked to the operator to give the address.

The man was still having trouble breathing, and it was warm in the apartment with no air-conditioning on a hot day. The carrier looked around and saw a cutting board and grabbed it. "I kept fanning him and trying to get the air circulating," he said.

A few minutes later, he heard the man begin to breathe regularly, and paramedics arrived a few minutes later to take over. Zhu filled in police and was commended for likely saving the man's life.

Even though Zhu's co-workers have started to call him "Zhuperman" for his heroic actions, the carrier claimed he was simply in the right place at the right time. "It just happened," the 13-year postal veteran said. "I was scared, but in the moment, I just thought, 'I got to do it.'" **PR**



**Huan Boi Zhu**

## 'Zhuperman' to the rescue

On Aug. 6, Flushing, NY Branch 294 member **Huan Boi Zhu** was delivering mail when "this young lady came to me and said, 'Hey, mailman, help me!'" the carrier said.

The woman told Zhu that her friend was trying to hang himself. The carrier followed the woman to an apartment



# GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR

# MDA<sup>®</sup>



**F**or more than 60 years, letter carriers have dreamed up creative ways to raise funds for the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA), the NALC's official charity. Raffles, bingo nights, golf and poker tournaments, bowlathons and the like have raised millions of dollars for muscular dystrophy (MD) research and programs.

NALC has partnered with MDA since the earliest days of the charity, which was founded in 1950. In 1952, NALC named MDA as its official charity, becoming the first such national sponsor of the organization. Since then, letter carriers have raised more than \$100 million for MDA.

The union's steadfast support of MDA is helping the organization expand its priorities. MDA is still committed to medical research which results in the development of new drugs and therapies, but it also supports all those living with muscular dystrophy, including adults with MD who—as a result of MDA's advances in treatment—are living longer and fuller lives.

MDA's current focus involves stressing three parts of its mission, referred to as the “three C’s”:

**Cure.** MDA is still committed to research to find a cure, and improve treatment, for neuromuscular diseases. The organization's goal is to double the research on drug development and clinical trials.

**Care.** MDA plans to broaden the reach of its support and care network by 50 percent, to 100,000 families, by the end of this decade. It also plans to help families connect with medical experts through telemedicine and digital tools.

**Champion.** MDA hopes to increase to 20,000 the number of children who attend its week-long summer camps. Through its website, MDA also wants to give people with neuromuscular diseases new ways to share their stories and celebrate their successes as part of a greater effort to stress inclusion of people living with these diseases.

Many NALC branches have also added support for people with muscular dystrophy, and their families, to their fundraising efforts. These efforts have included connecting with those in the communities they serve living with MD and their families (including letter carriers with family members who have MD) to embrace them in



their fundraising efforts and provide personal support; others volunteer at MDA camps and work directly with children with muscular dystrophy.

“Including people who are affected by muscular dystrophy puts a face on our fundraising,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “It reminds donors and volunteers of the positive effect their efforts have on people’s lives, and it expands NALC’s support for them beyond raising money.”

In this issue of *The Postal Record*, we honor the branches that have achieved special recognition for outstanding fundraising efforts for MDA in 2016 while thanking every branch that contributes to the cause. Through our combined efforts, NALC raised more than \$1.2 million for MDA last year.

There are countless stories about how branches have rallied in their communities around people with muscular dystrophy and their families as well as carriers who took initiative to go the extra mile for MDA. In some cases, they raised funds directly to support the needs of a specific person or family.

## A second try for a new van

When Illinois’ MDA goodwill ambassador—a person with muscular dystrophy who represents MDA—couldn’t raise enough money on her own for a disabled-accessible van, the letter carriers at Springfield, IL Branch 80 stepped in to help get the job done.

Lizzie Chamberlain and her family had made a go at raising funds to buy a van that could accommodate Chamberlain’s wheelchair, but almost nobody showed up for the fundraising event. When Chamberlain’s mother, Lori, mentioned her disappointment to Branch 80 President **Jon Calloway**, he took the reins.

“It saddened me to see a family that has dedicated so much time to raising awareness and funds for MDA to not be supported by the community,” Calloway said. He began organizing a

branch event. “I thought if we could raise \$1,000, it would be a success.”

The branch ended up collecting more than \$7,500.

It started with a simple raffle of donated prizes, including an Apple watch, iPad and \$100 gift card. Within no time, letter carriers and other postal employees began eagerly buying tickets, skyrocketing the branch’s fundraising to a whole new level.

“I knew we could crush the original goal if we branched out and sold tickets outside the office,” he said. By selling raffle tickets to the public in the grocery store next to his post office, Calloway and other volunteers ended up selling 800 of \$5 raffle tickets.

The fundraising didn’t stop there however. Calloway invited Lizzie Chamberlain and her family to a branch meeting to receive a check. He also arranged for that evening to be fun, and to generate more cash, with a trivia night. A local firefighter who had organized similar events helped out, resulting in 180 people attending the trivia night, the first big event for MDA that the branch had run in many years.

“The members were grateful to have a fun social event for a good cause,” Calloway said. “Never in my wildest dreams did I realize the impact this would have on the branch and members. I had countless brothers and sisters wanting to donate silent auction items, sell tickets and fill tables at the trivia night with their families and friends.”

With Lizzie Chamberlain selecting the winning tickets, she ended up drawing her own name to win the iPad, thanks to many raffle ticket buyers who put her name on their tickets instead of their own. “Lori, and the Chamberlain family, were very touched by those individuals’ acts of kindness,” Calloway said.

“Our members took a great deal of pride in the event,” he said. “I look forward to seizing this momentum and making the branch stronger.”



Springfield, IL Branch 80 President Jon Calloway led the effort to raise funds so Lizzie Chamberlain and her mother, Lori, could afford to get a wheelchair-accessible van.





Cesar Medina ran in his first marathon with the help of MDA's Team Momentum program.

## Running with momentum

Cesar Medina just wanted to run in the 2016 Chicago Marathon. But when he signed up for MDA's Team Momentum, which allows athletes to raise money for MDA as they run in hundreds of races and events nationwide, he took the first step towards a goal with a much broader purpose.

For Medina, secretary of Downer's Grove, IL Branch 1870, the marathon would be his first—in fact, his first running event—and he needed some inspiration and support. "I've never participated in anything like this other than a walkathon in high school back in 1991," he said.

Through the Team Momentum program, MDA provides training and mentoring to get even the most novice runners over the finish line and fundraising tools to make it easy for friends, family and colleagues to donate. It's the kind of training and support someone running a marathon's 26.2 miles for the first time can use.

At a dinner for Team Momentum participants the day before the marathon, Medina met other runners and heard about people who were living with muscular dystrophy. "I heard many of the speakers with inspirational stories," he said. One such runner had pushed his wife in a wheelchair in past events. Unfortunately, she had died a few months earlier.

"He was still running with the wheelchair, with a picture of his wife where she would have been sitting," he said. "It was great inspiration to hear all those speakers."

At the marathon, Medina learned how important inspiration would be.

He ran for half of the marathon, but had to slow to a walk at the 13.1-mile mark. After a bathroom break at Mile 15, he struggled to move his legs again and race officials almost took him out. But his letter carrier perseverance kicked in.

"I was able to make it to the finish line and I crossed while somehow

running the last, maybe, 50 steps," he said. "I wanted to quit every step the last quarter of the marathon, but I was able to convince myself to keep going because it was really about who I was running and walking for."

As a first-time marathon runner, Medina needed extra time to recover afterward. "My left leg felt like it wanted to fall off and I couldn't go back to work that whole week," he said. He even used crutches for a while. "It was well worth it, though," he said. "It was for MDA, after all." With the help of his donors—most of them letter carriers in his branch and his fellow delegates to NALC's 70th Biennial Convention in Los Angeles—his efforts raised \$1,450 for MDA.

Team Momentum participants receive benefits that include team training runs and coaching, team clothing and gear, as well as access to online fundraising tools, special social events and race-day VIP amenities. For more information about MDA Team Momentum, including how to assure your branch receives credit for the funds you raise, send an e-mail to [mda@nalc.org](mailto:mda@nalc.org) or send a letter addressed to NALC MDA Coordinator, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

"I hope a lot more NALC members participate in MDA Team Momentum activities," Medina said. "It was a great experience."

## Everyone gets to bowl

When Hagerstown, MD Branch 443 carriers invited a young girl with muscular dystrophy, Claire Menke, to a fundraising event, little did they know the branch would unofficially adopt Menke and watch her grow.

"Our members feel she is part of our union family and we are always delighted to see her," said Branch 443 Treasurer **Ronda Sisk**. "When Claire attended our first bowlathon, she was disappointed that she could not bowl, too. So the following year, the branch

Hagerstown, MD Branch 443's bowlathon included a special ramp so Claire Menke could take part.





provided her a helmet for safety and the bowling alley worked with us to locate a ramp so she could bowl. This really excited her and us members as well.”

The branch’s fundraising efforts have helped MDA to provide Menke with special equipment that wasn’t covered by her health insurance and for her to attend MDA summer camp, where she made lifelong friends. Menke also experienced a normal teen life, and just turned 22. “As she grew with us,” Sisk said, “we were able to see her through middle school years and on to dating and the prom in high school.”

Menke even participated in the Maryland/DC State Association convention in 2015, where she met many letter carriers, attended work sessions and went to the officer installation banquet.

Unfortunately, Menke’s dream of going to college was delayed when she contracted amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease. MDA also helps people whose lives are touched by ALS, through research and direct support.

“The members of Branch 443 are passionate about delivering a cure,” Sisk said, “and we have seen the progress that MDA has made in research and helping those who need their services.”

### Nothing but fun at MDA camp

Letter carriers in Southern California, including Pasadena Branch 2200, don’t mind bringing their jobs to MDA summer camp. They even bring LLVs.

The vehicles are actually scooters built to look like mail trucks, but they are just as fun for the children with muscular dystrophy who are enjoying a week at the camp in Orange, CA. About 25 carriers from Branch 2200 and neighboring branches volunteer to make the camp experience special in their own way.

“It’s just fun,” Branch 2200 MDA Coordinator **Carolyn Zorn** said. “We get to play.” Zorn was the first letter carrier to volunteer at the camp. Participation over the years has grown to several

dozen carriers from a number of area branches.

MDA camps across the country give children with neuromuscular diseases a chance to enjoy the summer camp experience that other children have, while giving parents a break from the demands of caring for their children. The staff and volunteers have the skills and equipment necessary to meet their needs.

At the Orange camp, the letter carriers bring a few carnival-style games. One of the favorites among the kids is a mini-LLV that a letter carrier built over a wheelchair scooter that kids can drive around. It’s fun and makes for a great photo opportunity.

The carriers also take photos using a photo booth they bring to camp. They transform the photos into postcards that they mail home to the kids’ parents. They also built a mailbox with cups in it for kids to throw balls into—they call it “postal pong.” Many other games and prizes make for a great time for both campers and volunteers.

Zorn said seeing the fun that the kids have is a great reward, but she also has met many parents of campers, including some who need respite from the responsibilities of caring for a child with extra needs. “The opportunity to have a week away from a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week job—they appreciate it so much,” she said.

“This is one job I really, really enjoy,” she added.

### A dream within reach

Naples, FL Branch 4716 just wanted to have someone with muscular dystrophy come to a union meeting to personally accept its annual donation. The local MDA office sent a boy named Dalton Cullison. The members could scarcely imagine how much their bond with Cullison and his family would grow and how they would share in his triumphs and frustrations.

It started when Cullison, who has a common form of the disease called



Pasadena, CA Branch 2200 letter carriers make sure fun is part of the MDA camp experience.



Naples, FL Branch 4716 developed a bond with Dalton Cullison (above) and have worked to support him as he grows older.



For Northeastern New York Branch 358 members, helping Derrick Murphy has become a family affair.

Duchenne muscular dystrophy, showed up to the meeting wearing NASCAR gear. Branch 4716 MDA Co-Coordinator **Matt Naufel** is a NASCAR fan, so he arranged for Dalton to go to his first race at nearby Homestead-Miami Speedway, with the track giving Dalton and his family free admission and the carriers hosting a tailgate party. With the help of MDA co-coordinator **Wayne Fletcher**, Cullison soon became a fixture at all of the branch's MDA bowlathons and other events.

The branch has watched Cullison grow into a young man in his early 20s, despite the prognosis that he would never live past his 10th birthday. Cullison graduated from high school and even participated in ROTC there. He has a job now, but Naufel says Cullison's goal is to attend college and then open his own restaurant.

But for Cullison to fulfill his dreams, he needs treatment to improve his health and extend his lifespan.

At a branch meeting, Cullison's mother told branch members she was grateful for their help and support. Every parent has dreams for their child, she said. The FDA had just approved a new drug, developed with the help of MDA, that could help Dalton, and he had been approved for treatment. Thanks to the hope the drug represents, she said, "I'm living the dream."

However, to date, Cullison has been denied payment for the treatment by Medicaid and other health insurance programs, Naufel said, and Cullison's mother's appeals have been denied. Even worse, there are now efforts in Congress to cut Medicaid.

"I asked her if there is anything I can do or the NALC can do," Naufel said. "She was extremely grateful to the NALC. She commented that it was in part the efforts of the NALC that had gotten the drug approved in the first place. She replied, 'It is now all in God's hands.'"

"I would like to encourage every letter carrier in this country to write their

representatives and lobby for Medicaid and other insurance companies to do the right thing," he added. "We have jobs, great pay, great benefits and we have life. I believe we have room to lobby for people like Dalton's family."

### A family connection

For many branches, the people with muscular dystrophy they help, become like family. For **Michael Curran**, they really are his family.

A few months after Curran volunteered to be MDA coordinator for Northeastern New York Branch 358, his nephew Derrick Murphy, who was 2 at the time, was diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. That gave Curran and his branch a personal stake in MDA.

Having Murphy and some other children with MD involved in branch events "has really helped boost involvement," Curran said. "We've got the community behind us. It's brought everybody together, not only for financial support, but for emotional support—letting the families know they're not in this by themselves."

When it comes to MDA events, Curran and the letter carriers in his branch never seem to tire. They have two golf tournaments a year, both with more than 140 players. They also host bowlathons, fill-the-satchel drives and pub crawls and send carriers to participate in local MDA walks.

The events involve the entire community—along with Murphy, his family and high school friends are often spotted at the fundraisers. The brother of a carrier in the branch was so inspired that he volunteered to organize a regular softball tournament as a branch MDA fundraising event.

Murphy is 16 now and uses a wheelchair. The branch named him its MDA ambassador, and he still participates in the branch's fundraising events. When donors and volunteers see Derrick, Curran said, "They see that this is what it's all about."



# After years on registry, carrier made a match to donate marrow

**A**long with many other volunteers in her town several years ago, Burnsville, MN, letter carrier **Deb Ochetti** responded to an appeal in her local newspaper to help save the life of a stranger with leukemia by volunteering to donate her bone marrow.

She wasn't a match. But that didn't end Ochetti's chance to be a hero, because a record of her DNA was saved in the national "Be the Match" registry.

Four years later, in March of 2015, the Minneapolis Branch 9 member received a phone call: She was a match to someone else who needed a donation.

Ochetti didn't hesitate to help. "I learned that my individual was a very sick person," she said. Ochetti quickly began the process of donating her tissue to help the anonymous stranger.

"There's a lot of legwork leading up to it," she said. "I was amazed." She had to review paperwork to assure she understood the process and risks, and to sign consent forms. Then it was on to the physical exams.

Ochetti, who has carried the mail since 1987, then had to decide between two ways to donate. Traditional bone marrow donation involves a surgical procedure that draws marrow directly from inside the donor's hip bone. The tissue is then transplanted into the recipient. However, a new procedure called peripheral blood stem cell (PBSC) donation extracts stem cells from the blood—special cells that help form new blood that can be donated to the recipient for treatment instead of bone marrow.

She was willing to do whichever procedure the patient required, but the anonymous patient's doctors said either would work, so Ochetti chose stem cell donation.

"It all came down to the need to travel," she said. Bone marrow donation would require her to go to the same hospital as the recipient.

"It was all anonymous, so I didn't know where I would be traveling to," she said. "Thankfully, there was a location where I could donate stem cells" in nearby St. Paul, MN, where the cells could be extracted and then sent to the recipient.

"Had she needed the other, though, I absolutely would have traveled out of state, or even out of the country," Ochetti said.

Ochetti was given a series of injections of a drug that prepared her body for the stem cell extraction by boosting the number of those cells in her blood. On the day of the extraction at the St. Paul facility, a special machine drew her blood, separated and stored the stem cells, and then pumped the blood directly back into her body in a closed loop. The process took several hours.

She experienced a few aches and pains as side effects of the injections, but they didn't last long. "I just looked at it as all the stuff that I endured with my body was a temporary thing, and it would subside," Ochetti said.

"The idea of giving life to someone else? In a heartbeat, I would do it again and go through that," she said.

In recognition of her efforts to save the life of a stranger she had never met, Ochetti's branch presented her with an "Above the Call of Duty" award in 2015; in 2016, her postmaster nominated her for a USPS "Civil Servant of the Year" award.

Donation of bone marrow or stem cells can be used to treat more than a dozen diseases and disorders, includ-



**Deb Ochetti received an "Above the Call of Duty" award for donating her bone marrow to someone who needed a donation.**



ing leukemia and a number of blood and bone diseases.

The Postal Service is a partner of Be the Match, the organization that searches for donors and matches them with recipients. Thousands of postal employees and family members have joined the registry. Collecting a sample for the registry requires a simple swab of the inside of the cheek. For more information and to learn how to join, go to [bethematch.org](http://bethematch.org). **PR**

## Proud to Serve

Proud to Serve is a semi-regular compilation of heroic stories about letter carriers in their communities. If you know about a hero in your branch, contact us as soon as possible at 202-756-7403 or at [postalrecord@nalc.org](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or firefighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the form of concerned letter carriers.

Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they often are the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

## A friend to all in the community

On Jan. 18, Jamaica, NY Branch 562 member **John Quesnell** had just begun his route when a woman walked by with two small dogs. "As I delivered mail to the first house, I heard screaming," the carrier said. "As I delivered mail to the next house, the screaming got louder and more intense," he said.

The carrier couldn't see what was going on, so he walked back to the corner. The woman was standing in the middle of the street holding one of her dogs in her arms and screaming for help. A pit bull had snatched her other dog by the neck and run down the block with it in its mouth.

"The poor woman was beside herself," Quesnell said. Drivers and passersby had stopped to look but didn't take action.

Quesnell ran after the aggressive dog. "I noticed that the pit bull was wearing a collar, so I thought maybe it knows some commands," the carrier said. "As I'm running after it, I was yelling 'Stop, drop it, sit, stay'—pretty much anything I could think of." After chasing the animal for about 20 yards, it dropped the small dog and stood looking at Quesnell.

But when the carrier got within about 10 feet, the pit bull picked the dog up again and took off in a different direction. Quesnell again went running

after it. After about another 20 yards, it stopped and dropped the dog and backed off a few feet.

"It was just enough for me to get in between it and the woman's dog," the carrier said. "I swung my carry bag at the pit bull and yelled at it to get away."

The dog then turned its attention to the woman, who was still holding her other dog. "It made a few aggressive attempts to snatch the other dog," the carrier said.

Quesnell ran to the woman and began yelling at the pit bull. It backed off enough for the woman to escape to a nearby yard, where she was able to secure herself. The pit bull attempted to get into the yard where the woman was, but could not get in, so it took off down the block and went into a yard. A man there closed the gate, locked the pit bull inside and called police.

The carrier then went back to the other dog, which was lying in the street. "As I'm kneeling over the small dog in the street, I was looking for any signs of life—I didn't see any," he said. "It was bleeding from its neck and hind leg."

Quesnell went to the yard where the woman was with her other dog. "I picked the dog up and placed it on a table in the yard," he said. "She was hysterical."

The carrier didn't think there was anything else he could do, so he soon continued his route. The next day, the woman's daughter handed Quesnell a thank-you note from her mother and said, "Your actions saved our dog's life." They had apparently rushed the dog to the vet and it appeared to be recovering.

Quesnell doesn't think he's a hero, though. "My feeling of heartbreak turned into heart lift knowing the dog survived," the 27-year letter carrier and Navy veteran said. "Being a dog owner, I can't imagine the absolute horror and feeling of helplessness this woman must have felt watching her dog being mauled. I'm just happy I was there to help."



Jamaica, NY Branch 562 member John Quesnell was commended for his role in helping a customer and her small dog when they were attacked by a larger dog.





Mark Lyman

## Brave carrier steps in to help

Milwaukee Branch 2 member **Mark Lyman** was delivering to a cluster box at an apartment complex on his route on June 16, 2015, when “a guy came running out to me, crying, screaming,” he said.

The man asked the carrier for a phone and said that he needed help because his girlfriend had just shot herself in the head. Lyman attempted to calm the man and then headed to the apartment with him. They had trouble getting in, so they rang the buzzer until someone let them in.

The two made it to the apartment. “The door was open,” the carrier said. They went in, and the man pointed to the bathroom, where the woman was.

Lyman saw that the bathroom door was closed. “I was banging on the door,” he said. “There was blood pooling under the door.” He attempted to open it, but

the woman was lying against the door. Lyman managed to poke his head inside and could see that she was still alive and moaning.

The carrier was eventually able to push the door open enough get into the bathroom. “There was blood all over the ceiling, the walls, everything,” he said.

He called 911 and talked to the operator, then told the woman that help was on the way.

Then he noticed something of concern: “The gun was still in her hand,” the carrier. Lyman, an Army veteran, knew guns well and gingerly took the gun from the woman, removed the bullets and placed them out of reach.

He then held the woman in an attempt to comfort her and handed the phone to her boyfriend, telling him, “Stay on the line with 911.”

The carrier tried to calm the distraught boyfriend and stayed with the couple

until emergency units responded. EMTs placed the woman on a sheet, lifted her and then carried her to a stretcher. Lyman filled in police with the details he had.

The carrier then washed the blood off of him and went outside. He stayed on the scene for another few hours to continue to answer detectives’ questions as dozens of onlookers watched the situation unfold.

The woman was taken to the hospital, where she was kept on life support long enough for her family to be able to say their goodbyes before she died.

Lyman was commended by the Milwaukee police and fire departments for his bravery, but the 21-year postal veteran brushed off any superlatives. “I don’t know how much of a hero I am,” he said. “I tried to help her. What would you do if that was your daughter, your wife, your sister? I couldn’t stand by.” **PR**

## Eye on the elderly



Bre Anna De Sha

On Saturday, Aug. 6, 2016, Hazelwood, MO Branch 5847 member **Bre Anna De Sha** had just put mail in the mailbox of an elderly customer. “As I was walking away, I heard her banging on the window,” the carrier said. The woman usually sits at her front window, but De Sha did not

see her. She heard the woman through the front living-room window, and when the carrier went up to the house, she saw that the woman was on the floor inside. The customer asked if De Sha could help her, and she directed the carrier to another door that was unlocked. De Sha made her way around the house and inside to her patron. “She said she had fallen at around 6 that morning,” De Sha said. “She was waiting for me to get there.” The woman had gone to the hospital the day before and had misplaced her life alert necklace in the meantime. She did not have her walker nearby and could not get up. “She said she was fine,” De Sha said, but consented for the carrier to call 911. The carrier comforted the woman until an ambulance

arrived. The third-year letter carrier didn’t think her actions were all that heroic. “It’s nice to help someone,” De Sha said simply.

**A**rveda, CO Branch 4405 city carrier assistant **Sean Day** has a daily routine at the house of one of his elderly customers, Dick Leventhal. “He puts the flag up so he could look out from the window,” the CCA said. When he would deliver mail to the customer’s mailbox, he would put down the flag so that Leventhal could come retrieve the mail. Day had a day off and when he next delivered to Leventhal’s house on Oct. 28, 2016, he noticed that the flag was still down and that there was three days’ worth of mail in the box. Leventhal didn’t pick up his mail every

day, but it was unusual for him to leave too much mail in the box. The man usually told Day if he was on vacation. “His car was in the driveway,” he said. “Something’s wrong.” Day knocked on the door but got no response. He then called his supervisor, who in turn asked police for a welfare check. When first responders got to the house, they had to break in and found Leventhal on the floor. “He fainted and he fell pretty hard,” the carrier said, adding that he had been there for three days. Day answered paramedics’ questions and was commended for his concern for his customer. Day took his actions in stride, calling it just part of the job. “We’re out on the streets,” the second-year letter carrier said. “We got to take control [when we see something].” **PR**



# THE FIRST FOOD DRIVES

**M**ore than 25 years ago, then-NALC President Vincent Sombrotto brought together letter carriers, the U.S. Postal Service and the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) with the idea of putting on a nationwide food drive. Over the span of its lifetime so far, the National Association of Letter Carriers' Food Drive has collected more than 1.5 billion pounds of food, helping countless Americans when they needed it most.

Since the drive began, letter carriers in every part of the country have worked with family members, friends, other postal co-workers and allies to use the second Saturday in May as a

day to give something back to the communities where we live and serve.

"All of our food drives have been special," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "The fact that this year marks the 25th anniversary of our first national drive makes this one a bit more special."

To help celebrate the 25th anniversary, *The Postal Record* is taking a look back at how the food drive was created and evolved to be the largest single-day food drive in the world.

## Valley of the sun

It all began with Phoenix, AZ Branch 576. In 1990, Branch President Mike Crowley appointed John Schwander as the food drive coordinator for the branch's local drive held on Nov. 3. Schwander revamped the process to include TV and radio coverage, and would later arrange for then-Scottsdale resident and "Family Circus" cartoonist Bil Keane to create artwork for the drive. Though many other branches helped feed the hungry through food drives or personal donations, it was Branch 576's drive that planted the seed for the national drive.

During the 1991 Arizona state convention, President Sombrotto viewed a videotape of Branch 576's successful food drive format and liked the idea. He invited Schwander and Crowley to share the concept with the AFL-CIO's Community Services Committee—of which Sombrotto was the chairman—at the labor federation's July convention in Washington, DC.

"Vince said, 'This is a good idea. Maybe we could do something more with this,'" explained NALC's original food drive coordinator, Drew Von Bergen.

Von Bergen, a longtime journalist and public relations professional who had worked at the United Press International news agency and as director of public relations for Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH) before joining the staff at NALC Headquarters in 1988. He had been NALC's P.R. director for a few years when Sombrotto led Postmaster General Anthony Frank and the AFL-CIO's Joe Velasquez into Von Bergen's office.

"Drew, we've got something we'd like you to do," Von Bergen recalled Sombrotto saying. "And that's when Vince asked me to put together a pilot drive with the Postal Service, the AFL-CIO's community service arm and the United Way."

## 1991 pilot drive

Von Bergen reached out to 10 branches to participate in the pilot drive, picking branches that were spread throughout the country. "I had selected the 10 cities on the basis of branches I was familiar with for having been good at doing public outreach," he said.

He wanted places that would be good for testing, such as the medium-sized city of Louisville, KY, and also Harrisburg, PA, "because Harrisburg is well known in the marketing field





Right and opposite page:  
The 10-city pilot drive  
was announced in the  
September 1991 issue of  
*The Postal Record*.

of consumer products," he said. "It's known as a very good test city."

The 10 branches that agreed to participate were Harrisburg Branch 500; Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000; Columbus, OH Branch 78; Peoria, IL Branch 31; Louisville Branch 14; Northeast Florida Branch 53; San Antonio, TX Branch 421; Dallas Branch 132; Portland, OR Branch 82 and San Jose, CA Branch 193.

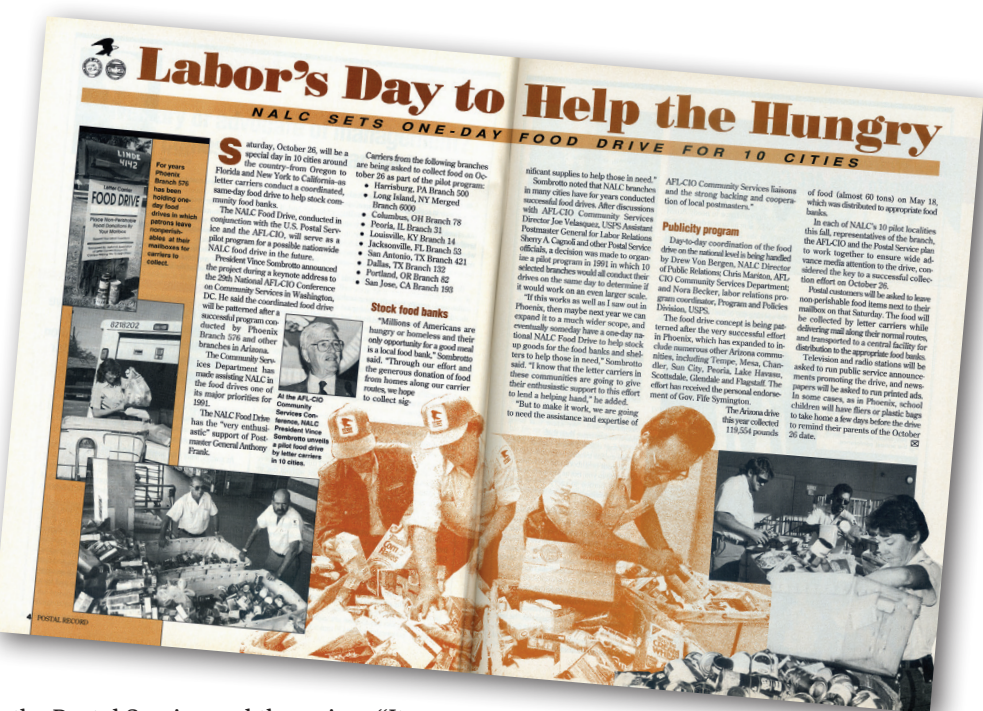
All of the branches Von Bergen reached out to agreed to take part. "I think they all thought it was an honor to be part of the pilot," he recalled. "There were some other branches wishing they could be in it."

Representatives from the Postal Service, the AFL-CIO, the United Way and the 10 branches attended a meeting at NALC Headquarters on Aug. 13, 1991, for an orientation and training session. Also attending were Crowley and Schwander from Phoenix.

"John, I'm having this meeting and I haven't got a clue about food drives," Von Bergen recalled telling Schwander. "You've got to come in here and tell these people how to run the food drive."

Schwander and Crowley showed a video and explained in detail how they put together their highly successful drive. They also offered their counsel to participating branches.

Sombrotto explained the importance of the drive to the NALC Executive Council later that month, telling the group that, if successful, the pilot drive could lead to a more widespread drive the following year and emphasized that such activity was good for



the Postal Service and the union. "It creates a well-spring of good public relations," he said. "It promotes the kind of image we need with the public."

The date of the drive was set for Saturday, Oct. 26. On that day, carriers collected 580,000 pounds of food from postal customers and delivered it to local community food banks. As reported in the December 1991 issue of *The Postal Record*, "Donations far exceeded expectations in virtually every city and the amount collected set local food bank records in several areas."

The Long Island food bank said that it was the largest collection in Long Island's history. "Our warehouse is at maximum

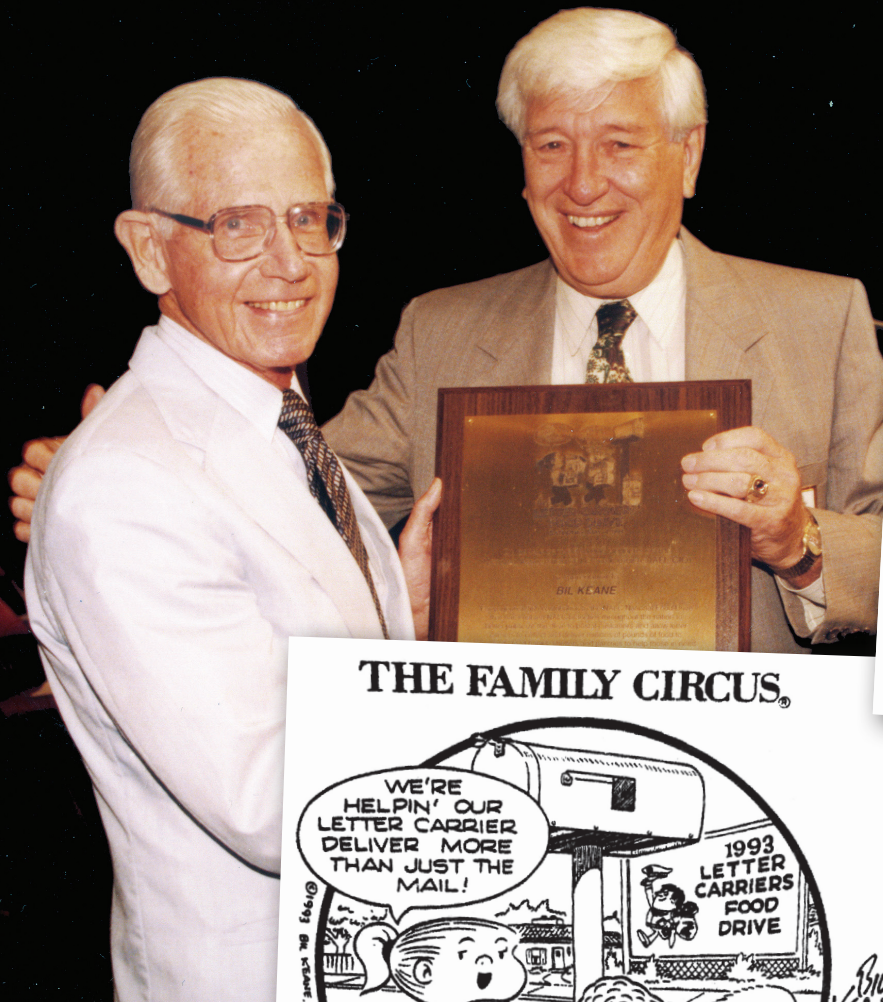
capacity," a San Antonio food bank spokesman said.

"It is extremely heart-warming to know that NALC letter carriers were able to fill the food bins to feed the

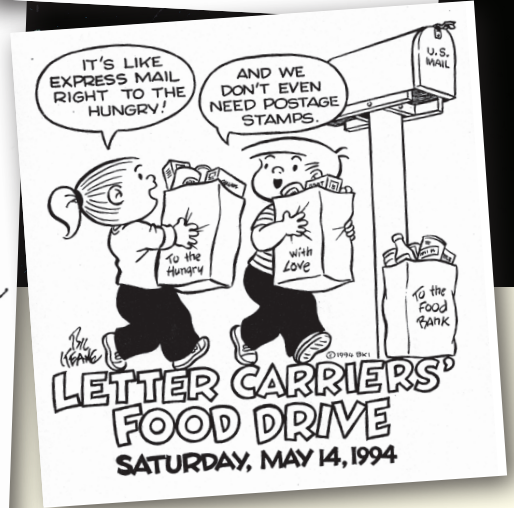
**NALC Director of Public Relations Drew Von Bergen (2nd from r), the original food drive coordinator, organized the 1991 meeting to work out the details for the pilot drive. Phoenix, AZ Branch 576's John Schwander (l) told the attendees how the branch put on its drive.**







NALC President Vincent Sombrotto (r) presented cartoonist Bil Keane with a plaque at NALC's 1994 national convention. At right are Keane's Family Circus cartoons for the 1993, 1996 and 1994 drives.



hungry this winter," said Sombrotto in the magazine. "Their satchels may have been a bit heavier and their day a little longer, but I'm sure these carriers know their voluntary community service will help others less fortunate."

"We could immediately tell all the branches were happy," Von Bergen said. "Everyone involved was happy because it was so successful. Now what are we going to do next? We have to take this nationwide."

### All 50 states

Following the success of the 10-city pilot drive, NALC decided to aim to

have at least one branch from each of the 50 states participate in the next drive. The union also decided that the next drive wouldn't happen until 1993.

"One of the things we learned from the pilot drive was the feedback from the food banks saying, 'That's great. This has been very successful, but we would really prefer you do this in the spring,'" Von Bergen said. With so many Thanksgiving and Christmas food drives, food banks often start running out of food in the spring. And because it would have been too difficult to turn around and do a drive in early 1992, NALC set the first nationwide drive for Saturday, May 15, 1993.

There also was concern over restructuring underway at the Postal Service, but new Postmaster General Marvin Runyon quickly threw his support behind the drive, as all postmasters general have since.

While NALC leaders set their goal for at least 50 branches—one in each state—they achieved that goal and far exceeded it. Some 220 branches collected more than 11.7 million pounds of food that year.

"Each and every letter carrier who participated in this drive should be proud of a job well done," President Sombrotto said at a press conference announcing the results of the 1993 drive.



This was also the first year Bil Keane produced a “Family Circus” cartoon to promote the nationwide drive. Keane, who lived in the Scottsdale, AZ area, had donated artwork for Branch 576’s drive, probably in 1991. “Anything the letter carriers requested of him, he would have done,” Bil’s son Jeff Keane told *The Postal Record* in 2012. “He moved from Pennsylvania to Arizona, basically because he knew that all he really needed was a mailbox to survive.”

“I called Keane and asked him if he would allow us to use a cartoon on a national basis, instead of just in Phoenix, and he readily agreed,” Von Bergen said. He would ask the cartoonist for a new one every year, and Keane was happy to oblige. “It was clear that he was very interested in the drive and what it did to help people and was very happy that so many branches used his artwork to encourage citizens to donate food,” Von Bergen said.

Keane’s generosity, not just in using the day-of cartoon as promotion, but in letting NALC branches use the image on signs, T-shirts and banners, led to the children characters of “The Family Circus” becoming the faces of the NALC food drive.

“Congratulations to all of you,” Bil Keane told the delegates to the 1994 NALC Convention in Atlantic City after receiving a commemorative plaque from President Sombrotto. “Any of you who did not participate, I hope you will be in it next year. The poor and the hungry need our help.”

That spirit continued even after Bil Keane’s death in 2011, as his son Jeff took over the artistic chores on the cartoon and has continued to produce art for the drive.

### ‘Stamp Out Hunger’

The food drive continued to grow in the years following. In 1994, the drive was held on May 14, the first time it was held on the second Saturday of the month, as has become the tradition. Nearly 800 branches collected 32 million pounds of food. In 1995, more than

1,100 branches participated, collecting more than 44 million pounds of food. More than 1,200 branches signed up in 1996, collecting more than 44 million pounds again. There was a huge jump in 1997 when more than 1,400 branches collected 73.2 million pounds of food. The explanation for the drastic increase is simple: postcards.

Starting with the pilot drive, almost all of the promotion was left to the individual branches. NALC Headquarters had posters printed and made them available to the branches, but there were no postcards yet. However, at the local level, some branches and Postal Service managers printed and distributed flyers and postcards.

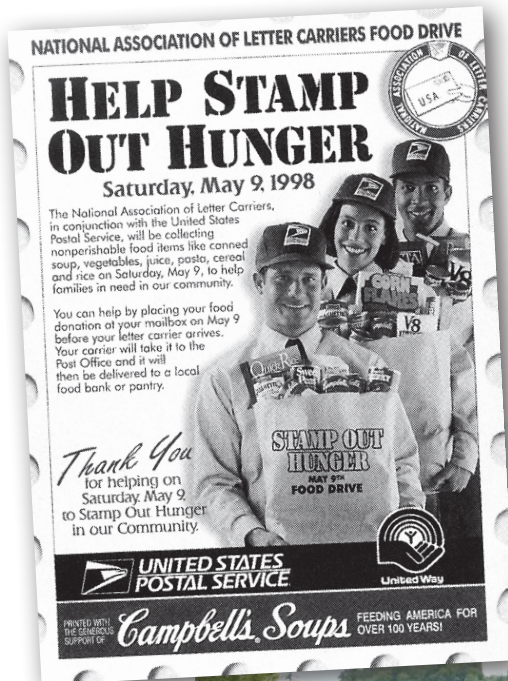
That was the case in the Camden and Cherry Hill areas of New Jersey prior to 1997, where Campbell’s

Soup Company had produced postcards for sending to residents alerting them to the upcoming drive. Von Bergen reached out to the company to see if it would be interested in becoming a national partner, producing postcards for the entire country. The soup company agreed, and the Postal Service allowed NALC to use the special G-10 postage permit to mail them free of charge.

The 92 million full-color cards changed the scope of the drive, magnifying its outreach. “The food drive would never have been as successful as it was without the postcards and other promotions by Campbell’s Soup Company,” Von Bergen said. “This was the largest mailing or one of the largest mailings that was occurring in the country every year.”

The NALC has been fortunate to have the support of national sponsors, such as the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), which has been the premiere partner since 2016, to continue the printing of postcards.

It’s worth noting that the early postcards also marked the first national use of the term “Stamp Out Hunger.” At the time, “Stamp Out Hunger” was simply intended as a slogan. However, the design of the logo made it appear that



**Above: One of the first postcards to promote the food drive nationwide. Right: The postcards continue to be one of the main sources of publicity for the drive.**



25th Anniversary

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF LETTER CARRIERS

Stamp  
Out  
Hunger

FOOD DRIVE

the actual name of the drive was the National Association of Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive.

"'Stamp Out Hunger' was not the official title," Von Bergen said. "The official name for the drive was always the National Association of Letter Carriers' Food Drive. We allowed all kinds of slogans, and one of them happened to be 'Stamp Out Hunger.' Over time, people started calling it the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive."

### Celebrity support

Whether through the assistance of national sponsors, or through letter carrier persistence, several notable celebrities have been recruited to lend their support for the drive over the years. Spokespeople have included Olympic champions, such as gold medal-winning figure skater Sarah Hughes; the Harlem Globetrotters; and actors, including David Arquette (with then-wife Courteney Cox) and the current spokesman Edward James Olmos. Olmos has lent his creative talents for public service announcements in both English and Spanish for last year's drive and this year's drive.

Representatives for the drive have appeared on "Good Morning America" and the

**Celebrities who have promoted the drive include gold medal-winning figure skater Sarah Hughes (below) and actor Edward James Olmos (r), the current spokesman.**

"Today Show." For a long time, Ryan Seacrest promoted the drive on his weekly nationally broadcast radio show.

Professional drag racing driver Courtney Force promoted the drive along with other members of her drag racing family. "I asked Courtney what got her involved, and she said that she'd been doing it for years," Von Bergen recalled. "She was so enthused by a drive they had out there and wanted to do more."

The fact that the food collected stays in the local community has been a big part of the drive's universal acceptance, though that had led to some consternation for Von Bergen. He would hear, "There are two food banks in town—which should I choose?" or "This church says they don't want food to go to that church."

His answer was always the same: "Our policy is to try as best you can to spread the food as wide as you can. It's coming in from everywhere; let's try to spread it as wide as we can," he said.

### A life (and legacy) of its own

The pivotal figures who helped create the test pilot drive in 1991 have moved on or passed away. NALC

well, such as a pathway for new NALC leaders to emerge.

"Carriers who would never show up at a branch meeting would suddenly get involved," Von Bergen said. Many made the progression from participating in the food drive to becoming the branch coordinator to running for branch office.

"You could look at a list of branch presidents now and see how many of them were food drive coordinators—many of them," he said. "Particularly many women, during an era when women were evolving into more leadership roles, this was a way that they could get involved."

That the drive continues to thrive is a point of pride for Von Bergen.

"We never thought it would get this big," he said. "When we started, I thought, 'This'll be nice and some branches will do it.' But it sure caught on."

"I would say that of all the things I've done in my life, the one that I'm most proud of is the NALC food drive," he said.

As NALC prepares for the 25th national drive this month, it's only proper to reflect on how large the drive has grown and how many lives have been improved because of it.

"Volunteering our time and effort to do what we can to help families on our routes struggling with hunger is something that every NALC member can be proud of," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "It's been a fantastic 25 years, and we've collected more than 1.5 billion pounds of food for local food agencies across the country. That's who we are. It's in our DNA. America's letter carriers, delivering hope." **PR**



President Sombrotto died in January 2013, and Phoenix Branch 576's food drive coordinator John Schwander died a month later. Von Bergen retired from NALC in 2010.

But the food drive continues to thrive. Last year's drive collected a record 80.1 million pounds of food. While the effect in the community cannot be understated, there have been side benefits as



# No stopping for Parkinson's disease

**I**n typical letter carrier fashion, adversity only made **Mark Burek** work harder.

In 2007, with seven years of carrying the mail and an additional 21 years in the Navy behind him, the Albany, NY

Branch 29 member was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. He was 49.

Instead of giving up, Burek made the best of the situation. He continued to work for another decade, formed a local benefit group for others with Parkinson's—and even ran a marathon.

Parkinson's disease is a progressive disease—one that gets worse over time—involving the malfunction and death of brain cells. The cause is unknown, but the symptoms may be delayed with medication and lifestyle choices. Parkinson's also causes loss of motor control, leading to symptoms such as tremors, stiffness and loss of balance and coordination. It affects an estimated 1.5 million people in the United States, and is perhaps best known as the disease that afflicts actor Michael J. Fox and that also afflicted the late boxer Muhammad Ali.

When doctors delivered this diagnosis in 2007, Burek had no idea he would come so far. His first thought was that his career was over.

"I didn't know too much about the disease and that's the first thing that popped into my mind," he said. "It was totally a blast in the face."

He soon learned that he still had time to work and enjoy life, and he could take control. "I started doing my own research, and I found out how to prolong and maintain my quality of life, and how to fight the disease," he said. "It progresses over a period of time, and it depends on the person. If you watch what you eat and exercise, you can slow the disease down."

Burek managed to do so while not allowing it to slow him down. He continued to carry the mail for almost another decade. Occasionally, he had to ask for help, but he had the full support of his supervisors and colleagues.

In 2011, he formed a support group called Hope Soars for others in the



**Above: Mark Burek (r) with Michael J. Fox  
Left: Even with Parkinson's Disease, Burek ran the New York City Marathon.**

Albany area with Parkinson's. Hope Soars helps to keep people with Parkinson's active and close to each other through programs such as a stationary cycling class called "Pedaling for Parkinson's," yoga, boxing and other social and fundraising events.

Two years later, Burek fulfilled a lifelong goal by running in the New York City Marathon. "Running the marathon has been something I've always wanted to do, but every time I tried to do it, something came up," he said. He joined other runners with Parkinson's as part of the Michael J. Fox Foundation's team.

"It's actually pretty amazing that Parkinson's could give me my shot at running the marathon," Burek said. "My time was four hours, 11 minutes, which isn't too shabby."

Burek finally retired from carrying mail last year when the New York winter caught up with him. "With Parkinson's, adverse weather will retard your motor skills," he said.

Burek is living proof that people who receive a diagnosis of Parkinson's can thrive for many years. "The diagnosis was pretty devastating at first," he said, "but we got things under control." **PR**



## Proud to Serve

Proud to Serve is a semi-regular compilation of heroic stories about letter carriers in their communities. If you know about a hero in your branch, contact us as soon as possible at 202-756-7403 or at postalrecord@nalc.org. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or firefighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the form of concerned letter carriers.

Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they often are the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

## Carrier not deterred by flaming car

Rapid City, SD Branch 1225 member **Kene Roberts** was driving home from work one day in November just a few weeks after beginning as a city carrier assistant when he saw an alarming sight on the highway: a car traveling in the opposite direction with its bottom on fire in the engine and axle area.

"I turned around as quick as I could," the carrier said. "It took maybe 30 seconds to catch up to the guy."

As he was doing so, he called 911 and gave the operator directions to where they were. At that point, the elderly man driving the flaming car had pulled off the road. Now there was smoke pouring from the windows as flames engulfed the car. "I just feared this guy wasn't going to do well," Roberts, a Marine Corps veteran, said.

Roberts, along with two other passersby, ran to the vehicle. The man and woman who had stopped to help had trouble pulling the man from the vehicle, so Roberts tried a fireman pull by yanking him from under his chest. "I did my best to pull him out," he said. "He kept saying, 'my wheelchair, my wheelchair.'" Roberts retrieved the wheelchair from the trunk and put it near him.

Scared that the vehicle might explode, they quickly got the man as far away

from the vehicle as possible. They asked the man if there was anyone else in the vehicle, and he said there was not.

Roberts said that as a Marine, "We're trained to run toward the danger, not away from it."

Emergency responders soon arrived and put out the fire, which they suspected had started from a mechanical malfunction. The driver suffered some smoke inhalation but otherwise was not injured. "The car burned down to basically ashes," Roberts said.

Despite praise for his heroics, the CCA insisted he is just a concerned citizen. "I feel like anybody would have done it," Roberts said.



## Watching out for her route

Minneapolis Branch 9 member **Shannon Peterson** was delivering her route on June 20, 2016, when she noticed a woman walking on the sidewalk. "I was observing her and she looked like she was struggling a bit."

The carrier pulled over and spoke to the woman to see if she was OK. "She seemed lucid," Peterson said. "She said she was on a walk."

The carrier could see swelling on the woman's body and what appeared to be a dialysis port. She asked her a series of questions, and the woman responded easily enough. She asked her, "Do you need help?" and the woman responded, "No, I'm fine."

Peterson was uncomfortable leaving



Rapid City, SD Branch 1225 member Kene Roberts received media attention for his role in helping a man escape a burning car.





Ray Griffin

her there, but the woman had answered everything correctly, so the carrier finished her route and returned to the office to punch out for the day.

As she was leaving work, Peterson checked her Facebook news feed and saw a story pop up about a local missing person, matching the description of the woman she had met on her route in the same clothing. “It was obviously her,” Peterson said.

She promptly called police to let them know. They asked her about the location and health of the woman, who had apparently walked away from a hospital and had not been heard from. Peterson drove back out to her route while on the phone with the police and found the woman again near the same spot where she had talked to her an hour before.

The carrier reported to police their exact location and stayed with the woman until officers arrived. “She had walked a couple of miles away from her dialysis center and had been walking all afternoon,” Peterson said.

Police took the woman back to the hospital. Later, they called Peterson to tell her that she had greatly helped the woman—that she likely would not have been able to function much longer in her medical condition.

The 17-year letter carrier didn’t consider herself a hero; she said she just tries to watch out for the community. “I think it’s something we all need to be watching out for,” Peterson said.

### Customer’s life in carrier’s hands

Puyallup/Sumner Merged, WA Branch 1484 member **Ray Griffin** was delivering packages on Sunday, Dec. 18, when he saw one of his customers, Mr. Franks, walking up the sidewalk.

When the carrier looped by again, the man seemed to be in a lot of pain and was huffing and puffing. The carrier asked the man if he was OK, and “I heard him moaning,” Griffin said. “I didn’t know what was going on.”

Before Franks could reply, he collapsed to the ground. The carrier saw that Franks had vomited. “He couldn’t breathe, so I was going to start CPR,” Griffin said. “I thought, ‘His life’s in my hands.’”

He called 911 and then rolled Franks to one side and cleared his airway. Two neighbors came outside to help, and the carrier asked that they call the man’s family. They then stayed to assist Griffin. “It was a team effort,” the carrier said.

Franks came to and was talking a little

bit. “He said, ‘I don’t want to die here,’” Griffin said. “He was in a panicked state.” The carrier and neighbors stayed with Franks to make sure he could breathe and was as comfortable as possible.

Emergency crews showed up within a few minutes and took over. When Griffin saw that his customer was in good hands, he returned to his duties.

He later found out that a blood clot had traveled from Franks’ leg to his lungs, which blocked or partially blocked two major blood vessels.

Franks has started calling Griffin his “Ray of sunshine”—playing on the carrier’s name—and wrote a letter to the post office commending the carrier’s actions. “I am writing to commend one of your carriers for literally saving my life,” he wrote. “If Ray hadn’t been there, I could have died. His calm, comforting demeanor helped bolster my spirits while [we] waited for the ambulance. I have heartily thanked Ray since then. He’s my hero and should be recognized as such.”

Griffin, a 32-year postal veteran as well as an Air Force veteran, denied any accolades for his actions. “Anybody would have done the same,” he said. “To me, it was something that I was there at the right time.”

## 🕵️ Neighborhood watch



TyReke McGruder

“I saw three teens walking down the street,” West Coast Florida Branch 1477 member **TyReke McGruder** said as he was delivering his mail route in a retirement community on Dec. 29. The teenagers were milling about the neighborhood suspiciously, checking yards and garages. “My instincts kicked in, like, ‘they’re up to something,’” McGruder said. Soon, the carrier witnessed

one of the group go near a customer’s garage. “I’m watching him the whole time and I see him come out riding a bicycle,” McGruder said. The carrier called police and gave a description and location to them. The next day, the teenagers showed up to a bicycle event the police department was putting on, and officers there discovered the stolen bike. The recovered bike was returned to the

homeowners soon after. The customer told the post office that they were grateful for the carrier’s actions, and that the bike was not expensive but it was her husband’s transportation around the retirement park. McGruder called his actions just part of the job. “We’re the eyes and ears of the whole community,” the third-year letter carrier said. “If I have a gut feeling, I’ll be on alert.”

Oklahoma City Branch 458 member **Reggie Sloan** was interviewed by a local TV station after helping a woman escape her burning home.



## Carrier delivers just in time

While Oklahoma City Branch 458 member **Reggie Sloan** was approaching a duplex on his route to deliver mail on Jan. 27, “I saw smoke coming out of a window,” he said. He approached the burning unit, but said there was too much smoke to reach the door. “It was burning pretty good,” he said.

So Sloan ran to the front of the duplex to alert the woman who lived in the other unit; he knew she was home. “She normally waits for me to get her mail,” he told KWTW-TV.

“I beat on the door,” he said, to no avail. “I wasn’t going to take no for an answer because I knew the woman was inside.”

Sloan continued beating on the door, and the woman finally appeared and said she had been sleeping. He told her, “You need to get out—it’s going to spread pretty quick.”

Neighbors called 911. Firefighters unfortunately found the resident of the burned unit dead in her bedroom.

Though Sloan had continued on his route when he saw that the situation was in good hands, fire investigators later

called him back to the scene to provide information. When the resident he saved saw him, she ran across the yard and gave him a hug. “Thank you for saving my life,” she said.

The third-year letter carrier said he was glad he could be there, but denied any heroics. “I was just in the right place at the right time,” Sloan said. “I would want someone to do that for me.”

## It’s not smart to mess with letter carriers

As Milwaukee Branch 2 member **Scott Peller** was on his route on Nov. 17, he went up to a house to deliver a few packages. While he knocked on the door, two men he didn’t know approached and claimed the packages were theirs.

“You need proper identification,” Peller told them. One of the men grabbed one of the parcels, hit the carrier and started running, telling his friend to grab the other one.

Unscathed, Peller took off after the one who ran. “I told him it was a federal offense and don’t mess around with me,” he said. As the carrier chased the

man, he yelled for neighbors to call 911.

The man called out “Help me, help me!” He threw the package over a fence then began climbing after it, with Peller close on his tail trying to pull him down.

The second man then appeared behind Peller and pulled at him. As the first man ran off, Peller tackled the second. “We were tussling big-time,” Peller said.

The carrier pinned the man to the ground just as neighbors started coming up to them. A tenant from a complex across the street asked Peller, “Do you need any assistance?” and then secured the man on the ground.

Police arrived, and Peller told them he needed to retrieve the stolen package. Soon police dogs and postal inspectors came to investigate, discovering illegal substances inside the packages. Milwaukee police took the first man into custody and took the second to the hospital. While the carrier has not heard an update on the first man, the second one is awaiting trial.

The 20-plus year carrier doesn’t consider himself a hero. “I thought it was just my duty,” Peller said. “I just kept doing what I thought was proper.”

## Eye on the elderly



Dayton, OH Branch 182 member **Eric Haney** was on his route on Dec. 1 when he approached the home of one of his nonagenarian customers. “I was walking up to the door and I heard her screaming,” the carrier said. The woman had apparently fallen the night before and knocked the phone off the hook, and her Life Alert necklace wasn’t working. “She was able to crawl to the front door but couldn’t get

up,” Haney said. “She knew I would come up there.” The carrier attempted to open the door, but it was locked. Haney yelled to the woman that because the door was locked, he would have to break it down to get in. The woman said that was OK, so Haney went for it. Once inside, Haney found the woman lying on the floor and called 911 as well as the woman’s friend and her son. The carrier stayed with his patron

to comfort her until medics arrived. EMTs determined the woman had a sprained ankle, and she underwent some physical therapy following her hospital stay. The woman’s family soon came to the post office to give their thanks for Haney’s actions. Even after receiving praise, the 26-year letter carrier and Navy veteran thinks it’s “silly” to be called a hero, “because I think it’s something anyone would do.”



## Help on the way



Brandy Miller

On Jan. 19, St. Louis Branch 343 member **Brandy Miller** was driving to begin her mail route when she saw someone walking alongside the road in a heavy traffic area. “I saw him stumbling,” she said. The man then fell on the side of the street. “I stopped and I got out and went over to him,” the carrier said. “I put him on his side and made sure he wasn’t biting his tongue.” The carrier was worried he might be hit, so she moved him further away from the street as cars whizzed by, and she called 911. When the man came to, “he didn’t know what was going on,” Miller said. She didn’t want to stress him out, so she comforted the man and waited with him until help arrived. The man apparently has epilepsy and was having a seizure. Paramedics soon arrived to take him to the hospital, and Miller now sees him out and about. The third-year letter carrier said it was second nature to try to assist. “I just think it’s something you should do if you see someone who needs help,” she said.

As Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Crystal Trout**

approached the house of an elderly customer to make a delivery on Dec. 9, “I heard her calling for help,” she said. The carrier looked around the corner and found the woman lying on the icy ground in short sleeves. She told Trout she had taken her recyclables outside and tripped on her front steps. Trout called 911. “It was really, really cold,” the carrier said. “I went inside to get her a blanket to wrap around her.” She also grabbed a rug for the woman to sit on to get off the wet ground. Trout waited with the woman until EMTs loaded her into an ambulance. The woman had broken her shoulder and arm but soon returned home to recover. “I don’t think I’m a hero,” the second-year letter carrier said. “When someone is hurt, you do everything you can to help them.”

On Dec. 27, New Jersey Merged Branch 38 member **Jerell Stanford** was delivering his route when he saw his customer Fay Susskind, a resident of a nearby senior complex, walking down the street. “When I looked back, I didn’t see her,” the carrier said. Susskind had fallen to the ground,

so Stanford ran over to help the woman. “She was bleeding heavily from the face,” the carrier said. “There was blood everywhere.” Stanford helped Susskind up and offered to call an ambulance, but she declined. In the meantime, a passing vehicle also stopped. The driver knew Susskind and volunteered to take her back to the complex. The woman got into the vehicle and Stanford saw that it headed back toward the woman’s building. “I was concerned about what happened still,” Stanford said. “I didn’t just want her to go home.” So the carrier decided to go to the complex and alert the staff, who in turn called 911 to provide Susskind medical aid. He later checked on the woman and found that she was doing all right. The 10-year letter carrier brushed off any heroics, though. “That’s somebody’s grandmother,” Stanford said. “I would want someone to do that for my mother or grandmother.”



Jerell Stanford

One day last September, Eastern Shore, MD Branch 902 member **David Phillips** was delivering mail on his route with a trainee when “we came upon a car,” Phillips said. They noticed that a regular customer, Elizabeth Link, was



David Phillips

sitting inside her car in her driveway. As Phillips approached the woman to hand her the mail, he noticed that Link appeared to be in distress. “I put my hand on the window and told her to put the window down,” he said. “She was drooling and incoherent.” He asked through the car window if she was OK, but the woman did not respond. The carrier requested that she open the locked car door. Link attempted to unlock the doors, but had trouble with her hands and could not get them unlocked. But through the trunk, “We could reach over and unlock it,” the carrier said. “There was a burst of heat escaping from the car.” Phillips called 911 while the trainee relocated the LLV to allow the ambulance entrance to the dirt lane. Both carriers stayed with the customer until the ambulance arrived to take Link to the hospital. The customer apparently had been in diabetic shock. “It was a pretty scary situation,” Phillips said. After Link recovered, she wrote a thank-you note to the post office expressing her gratitude to the carriers for their help. Phillips doesn’t consider himself a hero, though. “It was good to help. I don’t feel like I did anything more than any of my co-workers would have done,” the five-year letter carrier said. “We’re out there every day. We’re basically first responders as mailmen.”

## Neighborhood watch

“I was walking back after a long loop,” Carbondale, PA Branch 163 **Frank Surace** said of his route on Nov. 16, when he saw a toddler standing on the edge of the curb about 40 yards away, appearing ready to walk out onto a busy highway. “I started running after her,” the carrier said. “She had her eye on me, and I said, ‘Don’t move.’” The carrier reached the 2-year-old and picked her up just before she could step



Frank Surace

off the curb. She kept looking at one house, so Surace took the girl to that home and knocked on the door. The girl’s mother answered, crying frantically, saying she thought the door had been locked. She thanked Surace for his actions, but the carrier didn’t think it was a big deal. “Thank God she didn’t get hurt,” the 22-year postal veteran said. “Anybody would do something like that.”

As Painesville, OH Branch 549 member **George Hearst** was delivering his route on May 27, 2016, he saw kids playing with a ball in

the street. “All of a sudden, I saw a kid running toward a car,” he said. The carrier, who is the office safety captain and trainer, quickly ran toward the 5-year-old as a car was traveling fast toward him. Hearst put his hands up to signal the driver. “I grabbed him and stopped the car,” Hearst said. “It was a spontaneous thing. He was going to be hurt.” Hearst carried his young patron to the safety of his mother, who was nearby and kept telling him, “Amigo, thank you.” The second-generation letter carrier insisted that anyone else would have done the same thing. “It’s just amazing what a letter carrier does,” Hearst, a 10-year postal veteran, said. “You see a lot of things. I was glad I was on this route that day. It’s good that God put me in this situation to help somebody.”

Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Kenneth Friend** was going about his route one day in November and as he crisscrossed in front of one house, “I detected a strong



George Hearst

odor of gas,” he said. Suspecting a gas leak, the carrier knocked

on the door and let the homeowner know, and they in turn called the gas company. The resident contacted Friend soon after to thank him for his attentiveness. She said it had indeed been a large gas leak, and his actions may have prevented a tragedy. About a month later on his route at a different house, Friend again smelled the scent of natural gas and notified the residents, who then had their gas line checked out for a leak. The 31-year



Kenneth Friend

postal veteran rejected any accolades for his actions, though. “There’s nothing exciting about this story,” Friend said. “I just noticed something and said something. If it ever happened at my house, I would hope someone would ring my doorbell and tell me.”

“I was finishing up one of my loops and headed to the next one,” South Florida Branch 1071 member **Louie Golden** said of his route on Aug. 31. He then saw two people, a man and woman, tussling with each other and the woman was screaming. “The guy was over her, kick-



**South Florida Branch 1071 member Louie Golden received media attention after he helped police apprehend a man who had allegedly robbed and assaulted his customer.**

ing her, punching her, and trying to grab her purse,” he said. Golden ran over to help his customer. The elderly woman, Betty Ann Curtis, said she had parked her car and was approaching her house when a man came up and knocked on her car window to ask if she had any money. He then tried to grab her handbag. “He dragged me to the middle of the street and I was trying to kick him,” Curtis told the local NBC-TV news affiliate. “It was horrible. I thought he was going to kill me.” Golden quickly took out his phone to call 911. The suspect had started running, so the carrier pursued him in his LLV while on the phone with an operator. “I was in my vehicle and I was able to catch up to him,” he said. “I was giving them turn-by-turn directions.” Police soon arrived to arrest the man, who was subsequently charged with robbery and battery. Curtis suffered some bruises but was otherwise OK. She told NBC how grateful she was to her letter carrier. “I am just so happy,” Curtis said. “We all depend on police officers and law enforcement, but this mailman was my law enforcement and he really helped save my life.” Golden, a fourth-year letter carrier, insisted he was just in the right place at the right time.



## Carrier provides 'neighborhood watch'

On March 15, 2016, Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member **Marcela MacLean** was delivering mail on her route of nine years when she noticed her 92-year-old customer, John Erickson, lying on his front porch. "There was blood everywhere," the carrier said.

As she checked his vital signs she learned he had fallen on the porch and hit his head. "He asked if I could help him up," she said. "He was pretty adamant that he didn't want 911 called."

MacLean noticed that the front door was open, so "I just grabbed him by the back of his pants and got him to his chair," the carrier said. She then found a towel to try to staunch Erick-

son's bleeding.

"I asked him questions to check his memory," she said. "I also asked him to smile and stick out his tongue, to check for a stroke."

Erickson continued to refuse medical attention, so MacLean thought quickly. "I knew his next-door neighbor worked from home," she said. "I asked him to come over, and he did." They then called Erickson's son-in-law, a paramedic, who came to the house.

Erickson's wife came home to find the carrier tending to her husband. "She even cleaned up the blood on the porch so I wouldn't see it," Mrs. Erickson told USPS. "Marcela took good care of my husband until I returned."

Mrs. Erickson later wrote a letter to the post office commending the 22-year-



Marcela MacLean

postal veteran. "Marcela has become a friend through her daily rounds," she wrote. "Neither sleet, nor snow, rain nor gloom of the night—and now I add that neither aiding a fellow customer—will keep them from their appointed rounds."

MacLean, a 23-year postal veteran, doesn't consider herself a hero. "It's not something anyone else wouldn't have done," she said. "The uniqueness of our job is that we're the original neighborhood watch. I'm glad I was there."

## Help on the way



Scott Czerneski

**H**urley, WI Branch 2285 member **Scott Czerneski** was on his route on Saturday, Nov. 5, when he found one of his elderly customers in his usual position. "He was sitting on the tailgate of his truck," the carrier said. He yelled out, "Hi!" but the man didn't respond. Looking closer, Czerneski said, "his mouth was wide open and his eyes were open." The man suddenly started falling forward off the truck. "I caught him before he nose-planted on the ground," Czerneski said. The carrier noticed that the man was having trouble breathing, so he called 911 and stayed with the man until an ambulance arrived

to take him to the hospital. The man had apparently been low on potassium, which made him dizzy and affected his breathing. The man soon returned home to recover. Czerneski said his helpful actions were all in a day's work. "I just do the job every day," he said.

**M**ount Pleasant, IA Branch 660 member **Toi Mills** noticed mail piling up for one of her customers on Oct. 3. "He was usually waiting for me," she said. "He knew my schedule." The carrier knew the customer well, as he was friends with her dad and she had known him a long time. "I knew something was wrong," she

said. Mills decided to call police to ask for a welfare check on the man. When responding officers got there, they found the customer on the floor and took him to the hospital. "He had fallen and couldn't get up," Mills said. The man's brother later called the post office to thank Mills and told her that he had been moved to a nursing home. The 30-year letter carrier doesn't think she's a hero, though. "When you deliver in your hometown, you get attached to the people on your route," Mills said. "It's just what you do when you do your route. You keep track of your customers."



Eugene Udell

## Jumping into action

On Sunday, Nov. 27, New Castle, PA Branch 22 member **Ryan Artman** had just finished delivering packages and had gone to meet his friend Kyle Willis for a late lunch at a sub shop.

As they sat eating at the front of the shop, the carrier noticed something unusual across the street at the Market House, a historic building: Two people were huddled at a bulletin board at the front of the building.



Photo courtesy of *The Meadville Tribune*

**New Castle, PA Branch 22 member Ryan Artman (r), helped stop arson at a historic building while his friend Kyle Willis led police to the suspects.**

When Artman looked over at the building again, the two were walking off, just as flames sprang from the bulletin board.

"I jumped up and yelled for someone to call 911," Artman said. While the sub shop's staff called, he and Willis ran across the street to the fire. Willis chased the alleged vandals while Artman attended to the fire.

"I literally tried batting it down because I thought it was just papers (on fire)," Artman told *The Meadville Tribune*. "Then I realized it was the corkboard."

Realizing his bare-handed attempts were for naught, Artman ran back

across the street to the sub shop and asked, "Where's the fire extinguisher?"

Once he had one in hand, he rushed back across the street and put out the fire for good.

The Air Force veteran told the *Tribune* he had put out fires on airplanes before, "but nothing like this."

Firefighters soon arrived on the scene and checked to make sure the fire had not spread further; meanwhile, Willis eventually managed to lead a police officer to the two people he had followed.

Although Artman and Willis observed two people, only one had been charged in connection with the fire.

Meadville Central Fire Department Capt. Jill Staaf told the *Tribune*, "If they hadn't been there it would've caused more damage. They did a great job." At a city council meeting, Meadville Mayor LeRoy Stearns issued a proclamation recognizing the two "for their heroic acts."

Artman dismissed any accolades. "I didn't really think anything of it," the first-year letter carrier said. "I just did it because it was the right thing to do."

## A little holiday heroism

"I noticed a little smoke coming from a home," Little Rock, AR Branch 35 member **Eugene Udell** said of delivering parcels on his regular route last Christmas Eve.

Since it was wintertime, he thought that the smoke might just be coming from a fireplace. "As I got closer, I began to smell a soot smell," he said. "The whole outline of the roof had smoke billowing out."

The carrier knew an elderly man lived in the home, and there was a car out in

front of the home, so Udell feared he was inside. He knocked. "I heard a noise inside but no one was responding," the carrier said.

He called 911 and told the operator he wasn't sure if anyone was inside. "I was begging them to please come as quickly as possible," Udell said.

The carrier went to the other side of the house and saw that it was becoming more engulfed with flames. "I knocked and knocked," Udell said. He was trying to push open a door to relieve some of the smoke as firefighters arrived.

Fortunately, no one was inside; the resident and his grandson drove up as firefighters began battling the blaze. However, the house was a total loss.

Soon after, Udell helped to coordinate an effort in the community for people to donate items to the family as they began to rebuild.

Family members and friends of the resident spoke highly of Udell, with one stating on a TV news interview, "The mailman knows us very well. He not only cares about our deliveries, but our lives, too."

Udell said he doesn't consider himself a hero, just a fellow human being. "That's just part of my job," the five-year postal veteran said. "There's just no way I could see a fire and not do anything."

## Observant carrier helps elderly customer



Jeremy Jones

One day last winter, Key West, FL Branch 818 member **Jeremy Jones** was delivering his route and came up to the house of a 90-year-old customer who lives alone and is

not very mobile.

"I noticed his mail sitting on the small white table by his front door where I always put it," the carrier said. "When





Daniel Ochoa

I saw that mail there and his Meals on Wheels still there, I got worried. He picks up that mail without fail every day.”

Jones started ringing the bell and banging on the door. “His little dog was running around barking,” he said. “I looked in every window I could but could not see him anywhere.”

He looked around the back but was unable to get into the back yard, so he went across the street to a neighbor’s house and knocked on the door to ask them to check on him. The two went back over to the house, but still couldn’t get an answer at the door. “We were all banging on the windows,” Jones said.

They called police and then Jones continued on his route. Soon after, he saw an emergency vehicle pull up to the man’s door. “I got in my truck and drove back down there,” Jones said.

Police had jumped over the back fence, went in through a kitchen window and found the man. “He had fallen in the back room where no one could see him and was in grave condition,” Jones said. “I was so happy and relieved to hear he was alive.”

A few weeks later, the carrier learned that the man had died after a stay in the hospital followed by rehab.

The carrier doesn’t consider himself

a hero, but said that it was important to check on the elderly in the community. “There’s people all over like that,” the 10-year postal veteran said. “You have to take a few minutes each day to look out for them. I was glad I could help, despite the circumstances of how everything turned out.”

### Marine carrier runs toward fire, not away

On Dec. 19, Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member **Daniel Ochoa** was going about his route when the scent of smoke caught his attention. “I thought someone at the moment was barbecuing,” he said.

But as he turned around on his loop, he saw large plumes of smoke coming from the back of a customer’s house and saw a woman running with a child.

The carrier quickly made his way to the front door and went over to the woman, who was with her 4-year-old granddaughter. He alerted her to what was going on.

“I made sure there was no one inside the house,” the carrier said. “I heard the fire department on the way, but I thought I may be able to help.” Ochoa,

a Marine Reservist who also has taken some firefighting courses, ran to the back yard.

“I was looking for a water hose and saw a propane tank,” he said. It was near the flames, so he quickly moved it, knowing how easily it could catch fire and explode.

Ochoa then grabbed a foam cooler he saw and started using it to scoop pool water to douse the flames. “I bucket-brigaded it,” he said.

Firefighters soon arrived to take over, so Ochoa grabbed his satchel and continued his route.

He found out later that the fire may have started from an electrical issue because the owners recently had work done. “Little did Daniel know, there was a vent to my attic exactly where the fire was,” the homeowner, Shirley Ann Ayala, wrote. “Firefighters said his quick response stopped the flames from going into my attic and actually saved my home. My entire family is so very grateful for his public act of kindness and bravery.”

The first-year letter carrier said that he couldn’t just sit back. “I just have to spring into action,” Ochoa said. “It’s something I’ve been taught.”

## Neighborhood watch

On Oct. 26, Peoria, IL Branch 31 member **Roger Stufflebeam** was carrying his mail route when he noticed an elderly woman in a wheelchair on the sidewalk parked directly behind a large work truck with a driver inside. “He started backing up and wasn’t stopping,” the carrier said. The carrier ran toward the vehicle yelling and waving, and

the truck stopped just inches short of the woman’s wheelchair. “That lady could have touched the back of the truck with her hand,” Stufflebeam said. “He didn’t hit her, luckily.” The driver got out of the truck to see what was going on and said he hadn’t seen her. Stufflebeam checked to make sure the woman was OK before continuing on his route.

The carrier was commended for his actions, but he brushed off any praise, saying he tries to look out for his customers. “Carriers should be aware of their surroundings,” the 26-year letter carrier and Marine Corps veteran said. “We can make a difference in people’s lives. We’re a source of protection for our customers.” **PR**



Roger Stufflebeam

## Eye on the elderly

**B**uffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Anthony Meindl** was on his route on Sept. 27 when he noticed mail at an elderly customer's home was piling up. "I saw some flies," the carrier said. The man did not leave the house much, and previously if the mail accumulated, Meindl would just knock on the door. This time, there was no answer. Concerned, the carrier contacted the apartment complex and asked if they had seen the man. They hadn't, so Meindl called his supervisor and then 911. "I said I was a concerned citizen and asked for a wellness check," he said. The next day, police contacted carrier Meindl to tell him that the customer had been in medical distress and likely would not have survived without him taking action. "He was sitting in his computer chair, unable to walk," the carrier said, adding that the man's feet were rotting and had maggots on them. Meindl has since seen the man up and about, but he doesn't consider himself a hero. "I was just doing my job," the four-year postal veteran said. "I would have done it for anybody."

**A**marillo, TX Branch 1037 member **Shanalee Bernal** was delivering mail to an assisted-living facility on her route on July 30 and approached the apartment of her customer, Uvaldo Gonzales. "He always waited for me," the carrier said. "I always looked for him." But that day, she didn't see

him. "I opened the door and I hollered, 'Uvaldo!'" she said. She found the man lying inside his apartment on the floor. The carrier asked the man if he needed help. "He nodded his head," the carrier said. Gonzales had throat cancer and seemed to be choking and couldn't get up. "I called 911 and waited with him until they got there," Bernal said. "I sat on the floor with him and held him." After the man was put in an ambulance, the carrier returned to her route, but after work she went to the hospital to check on Gonzales. The 19-year letter carrier denied any heroics. "I love my people on my route," she said. "It's part of my job."

**O**n Dec. 17, Galesburg, IL Branch 88 member **Mark Duncan** was delivering to the

home of his nonagenarian customer. "I was walking off her porch when I heard a yell," he said. The carrier opened the screen door and heard her yell again. "I went in to check on her," he said, and he saw the woman lying on the floor. "She had a big knot on her head and her forehead was really black and blue," Duncan said. She said she had fallen and wasn't able to get up, but crawled to the front door to wait for him. "She was really confused and didn't know what time of day it was," Duncan said. The carrier asked the woman if she wanted him to call an ambulance, and she said she'd rather he call her son. Duncan did so, and he came over right away. "Between the two of us, we got her up and sat her in the chair,"

the carrier said. "He said he could handle it from there, so I went on my merry way." The carrier sees the woman regularly, and she always thanks him for helping her. But Duncan denies any heroics. "Any letter carrier will help someone out if they get a chance," the 25-year postal veteran said. "That's what's so great about door delivery."

**"**I heard somebody yell out, 'Excuse me, can you help me?'" Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member **Travis Elliott** said of delivering mail on his route on March 8, 2016. The carrier looked across the street to locate where the woman's voice was coming from. He then spotted his 90-year-old customer, June Stephens. "It looked like she had fallen in her garage," Elliott said. The carrier rushed over and was able to help the woman up to her feet and inside her home. He asked Stephens if she wanted him to call anyone, and "she said that her son was on his way over," Elliott said. Once he made sure that his customer was OK, the carrier continued on his route. Stephens' daughter later called the post office to commend Elliott and tell him she was grateful he was there to assist her mother, who was doing fine. The 10-year letter carrier denied any serious heroics in the matter, though. "I'm not a hero at all," Elliott said. "I just happened to be there at the right time." **PR**



**Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member Anthony Meindl was recognized by Customer Services Manager Lisa Mesler for his role in helping an elderly customer after he noticed accumulated mail.**



## Fending off dogs just part of the job

On Oct. 17, Waipahu, HI Branch 4683 member **Josue Ramirez** was going about his route and saw customer Gina Gertsch walking her Bichon Frise dog along the road.

As the carrier turned the corner in his LLV, “two pit bulls came out of nowhere,” he said. When he looked in his rear-view mirror, he saw the dogs pounce and grab the dog from the woman’s arms.

Ramirez quickly stopped his truck, grabbed a mace can and ran toward the woman. “I told her, ‘Get behind me,’” he said. “I got in the middle, spraying. It happened so fast.” Spraying the dogs in the eyes seemed to work, as they both ran off to rub their eyes on the grass.

The carrier asked Gertsch if she lived nearby and said that he would stay with her and walk with her to her house. When they got there, he mentioned that he had to go back to his truck and asked if she’d be all right.

She said she would, so Ramirez headed back to vehicle. He heard someone yell, “Watch out!” When he turned around, one of the dogs headed right for him. Ramirez sprayed it again, and again it ran to rub its eyes.

Another woman called the dogs toward a gate and managed to get one to run into that yard. “The other one was running around the street,” he said. Someone called 911 and the carrier continued on his route. Neighbors said they didn’t know who the dogs’ owner was.

Police and SPCA representatives soon came; they took the one dog in the yard, but the other had gone into hiding.

Gertsch took her dog to the vet; it had broken a rib and was limping for weeks until it recovered. She later thanked

**Boulder, CO Branch 642 member Adrian Helwig was recognized by local news media for helping to save a customer’s life after the man injured himself outside his home.**

Ramirez for helping her.

The third-year letter carrier and Navy veteran said he considers his actions just a part of the job. “You’re out there in the community every single day,” Ramirez said. “You notice things.”

## Keeping eyes and ears open can help save a life

On the evening of Dec. 5, Boulder, CO Branch 642 member **Adrian Helwig** had finished his route and went back out to relieve a carrier on a route he was not familiar with.

Helwig was in a secluded, dark residential area delivering to a house when “I looked up in a yard and saw a little dog running around. I thought I heard something,” he said. “It was a ‘Help me, please’ three times.”

Following the voice, he came upon the 86-year-old customer outside his garage in 20-degree weather. The man was propping himself up against the garage door. “He was in an awkward position,” he said. “He wasn’t dressed for it. He was in shorts, a baggy T-shirt and I don’t think he had shoes on.”

The patron had apparently fallen when he let his dog out. “He couldn’t get up, he couldn’t walk,” Helwig told local FOX news affiliate KWGN-TV. “I got him up, kind of put him in a bear hug and basically dragged him into the house.”

Once inside, Helwig wrapped the man in a blanket and then asked, “Is there anyone here that can help you?” The man said that his wife was upstairs, so Helwig headed there. The woman was fast asleep and Helwig did not want to wake her, so he instead called 911. The carrier waited for EMTs to arrive before continuing his rounds and went to investigate where the man had been outside. Paramedics soon arrived to take the customer to the hospital, and the man returned home from the hospital to recover a few days later.

The Boulder County Sheriff’s Office commended Helwig, saying the “[victim’s] survival was at risk. Adrian



ADRIAN HELWIG - MAIL CARRIER  
POSTAL WORKER CREDITED WITH SAVING MAN'S LIFE 52° 4:02 9NEWS



Helwig’s awareness, and selfless, compassionate actions likely saved his life.”

Helwig has received lots of media attention and admits that “it’s a feel-good story,” but he doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I pay attention on my route and keep my eyes and ears open,” the 33-year letter carrier said.

## The eyes, ears—and nose—of the neighborhood

St. Paul, MN Branch 28 member **Mike Ochs** was on his route on March 9 and headed to the back of one house for a delivery. Because the mailbox was near a dryer vent, he usually smelled the scent of fabric softener. “It didn’t smell like Downy fresh that day,” he said.

The pungent, woody smell gave him pause and he looked around. “There was smoke just barreling out of the chimney,” Ochs said.

He delivered the mail and when he saw a neighbor outside at his next delivery, he filled him in. The man told him, “They just burn wood, so it’s normal.”

But Ochs was concerned, so the neighbor said he would contact the homeowner. The carrier finished a few more deliveries and was heading back to his vehicle when he saw the neighbor again and asked if he got ahold of the owner.

The neighbor said he hadn’t, so Ochs said he thought, “I better go and knock—it just doesn’t seem right.” He went to the back of the house. “I started knocking vigorously,” he said. “I was looking in the



windows and the blinds were closed.” (He later found out that there were no blinds—he had seen white smoke inside.)

When he opened the storm door to try to knock on the actual door, “all this smoke comes barreling out,” Ochs said. There was still no answer.

As he was reaching in his pocket to retrieve his cell phone to call 911, the owner came out from the garage and asked Ochs what he needed. The carrier told the man that the house was on fire, and the owner called 911. The man’s wife and children fortunately were not home.

As they waited, it appeared that the man was shaking. “I could see that he was going into shock,” the carrier said. So Ochs asked the neighbor to retrieve a jacket for the owner; it seemed to help. “He was happy I took such care,” Ochs said.

Firefighters soon arrived at the scene to put out the fire and clear the smoke.

The 17-year postal veteran doesn’t think he is a hero, though. “I feel like I just care about my fellow man and it’s just what anyone else would do,” Ochs said. “I’m just glad there wasn’t further damage and no one was hurt.”

## Doing what needed to be done

On Oct. 28, Moorhead, MN Branch 1051 member **David Martin** was on the last loop on his route as he went up to his elderly customer Dick Overby’s house. “I opened the slot, put the mail in and started to walk away when I heard him call, ‘Hey!’” he said.

The sound was coming from inside Overby’s garage. The carrier entered the side door of the garage and found Overby stuck between a car and the wall. The customer explained that he was trying to put air in a tire of the car when he tripped and fell—the cord of the air hose had wrapped around his ankle. When he fell, he had also knocked over a large board that landed across his shoulder and leg. He said



David Martin

that he had been there at least two hours. “He said he was counting on the mailman to show up,” Martin said.

Overby did not want to call emergency services; he said he was fine, he just couldn’t get up. “I made sure he wasn’t bleeding,” Martin said. He lifted the board off of the man and removed the hose from around his ankle.

After moving the other items out of the way, “I grasped him by the forearms, had him grab mine, and pulled him straight back from under the car,” the carrier said. “I was repeatedly asking if I could call an ambulance.”

After getting Overby out of the garage, Martin had him lie down on the ground. “I sat with him for a little bit to make sure he wasn’t showing signs of a concussion,” he said.

The carrier then helped the man stand and move to the steps and inside the house. When Overby assured that he was OK, Martin continued on his mail route but stopped at a neighbor’s house to explain what had happened; the neighbor promised she would check on Overby.

Despite receiving praise, Martin said he doesn’t feel like a hero. “I think any carrier in our office would have done the same thing,” the fourth-year letter carrier said. “I was doing what needed to be done.”

## Fire-averse carrier watches out for ‘family’

On July 26, Lynn, MA Branch 7 member **Dan Bean** had just delivered to a house and was driving on his mail route when “I saw a little puff of smoke coming from the corner of the house,” he said.

He looked closer and saw flames between the first and second floors. The carrier quickly went to the fire department on his route, but they were already out on a call. Bean next called 911, and the operator said to make sure that everyone was out of the house.

The carrier then saw one of the residents out walking in the neighborhood. Bean told her, “Your house is on fire. Where is everyone?” The woman made it sound as if everyone was out of the house. “I asked, ‘do you have a garden hose?’” Bean said.

They did, so the carrier grabbed the hose and began trying to spray the flames to put them out as he waited for help. “I could hear the fire truck coming for the longest time,” Bean said. “It took forever, it seemed.” Firefighters soon took to putting out the blaze, so the carrier returned to his route.

A local fire inspector later found Bean on his route to thank him for taking action. The woman’s two children, 95-year-old mother and two dogs had still been inside the home, but everyone was able to get out of the home safely with no injuries. The fire started because of an improperly disposed cigarette and the house had significant damage. Bean also found out that there were two oxygen tanks on the second floor, so the fire could have been a lot worse had it spread.

Despite “unbelievable” media attention, Bean doesn’t think he’s a hero. The Marine Corps veteran and 30-plus-year letter carrier insisted he did what anyone would normally do. “That’s just the nature of us letter carriers,” he said. “We’re not going to let something bad happen without stepping in. We look out for our customers. My customers are my family.” **PR**



## Help on the way

On Dec. 19, Tampa, FL Branch 599 member **Jerry Lewers** was about to start to deliver his mail route with a trainee, fellow Branch 599 member **Taniqua Newkirk**. The carrier dismounted the truck to put in the code to open a community gate when “I heard what sounded like a whisper—a raspy call for help,” he said. He looked over to see an elderly man lying in the bushes next to what appeared to be a water pipe. He cried again, “Help me! Can you help me?” Lewers walked over and asked if he wanted him to call 911. “No one knew he was there,” Lewers said. The man instead held out his hand and the carrier slowly raised the man to his feet. He asked, “Can you take me to where I live?” So Lewers asked where that was, and the man said in the middle of the complex. Lewers asked, “Are you sure you don’t want me to call an ambulance?” but the man declined, so he asked, “Are you OK to walk?” The carrier asked Newkirk to make sure the truck was secure and to wait there. Lewers put the man’s arm over his shoulder and an arm around his waist and started to walk slowly. But when they made it through the main gate and around the corner, “he started to collapse,” Lewers said. “I swooped him up in my arms like a fireman’s hold.” Maintenance staff and the apartment manager pulled up alongside them in a golf cart and showed the carrier which apartment the man lived in. Lewers helped him to his door, where his family

members were waiting to take over. When he saw that the situation was in good hands, Lewers continued on his route. Despite praise, Lewers doesn’t consider himself a hero. “I’m just a mailman who did a good deed,” the 18-year letter carrier said. “Why wouldn’t I want to help?”

**W**est Coast Florida Branch 1477 member **Thomas Phillips** was crossing a street while delivering mail on Sept. 29 when a window salesman who had been going door to door stopped him. As they were talking, they saw a man, Clarence Rideout, out walking his dog. “He suddenly collapsed,” Phillips said. The carrier asked the salesman to call 911 and ran over to Rideout. At that moment, a nurse drove by and stopped to help. “We started chest compressions until paramedics arrived,”



**West Coast Florida Branch 1477 member Thomas Phillips (r) reunited with his customer Clarence Rideout after helping give chest compressions to the man while he was having a heart attack.**

Phillips said. Once the carrier saw that Rideout was in good hands to be taken to the hospital, he continued on his route. The man, who ironically is a defibrillator salesman, spent nearly two months in the hospital and then returned home. One day when Phillips went to deliver Rideout’s mail, he saw a note attached to the mailbox that said, “If you are the mail man that saved my life, please ring the doorbell. You are my angel.” Though Phillips was credited with saving his customer’s life, he doesn’t believe he’s a hero. “I was just at the right place at the right time,” the 24-year postal veteran said.

**F**ort Collins, CO Branch 849 member **Dennis Ketterling** was working at the post office on March 31 when he saw a co-worker, fellow Branch 849 member **Paul Couperus**, who didn’t appear to be doing well after returning to the station. Couperus, who was usually quite jovial at work, was acting out of the ordinary. “He was serious, distressed, pacing back and forth,” Ketterling said. “It instantly struck me as unusual.” The carrier asked Couperus if everything was all right. “He said he



**Tampa, FL Branch 599 member Jerry Lewers (r) was thanked by his customer after he helped the man home after finding him injured.**

had pain in both arms and his chest, and his face was bright red,” Ketterling said. Thinking that the symptoms pointed to a heart attack, the carrier asked if he could call 911. Couperus asked the carrier not to contact anyone, and said he wanted to drive himself to an urgent care center. But as the man’s condition seemed to deteriorate, Ketterling began to insist. “When I said ‘heart attack,’” Ketterling said, “I think he knew what was going on but wanted confirmation.” He called 911 and an ambulance soon arrived. Medics took Couperus’ blood pressure and found it to be dangerously high. The man had stents put in at the hospital and soon returned home to recuperate. Despite praise, Ketterling said it was “ridiculous” to try to call him a hero. “I just picked up on some obvious signals,” the 18-year letter carrier said. “Anyone who knows Paul would have done the same thing.” **PR**

25th Anniversary

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF LETTER CARRIERS

Stamp  
Out  
Hunger

FOOD DRIVE

## Positive early reports for 25th food drive

**F**or the last quarter century, letter carriers have set aside the second Saturday in May as a special day to do what we can to fight hunger in America.

Saturday, May 13, was no exception.

For the 25th annual national Letter Carriers' "Stamp Out Hunger®" Food Drive, NALC members representing more than 1,400 branches worked alongside thousands of family members, friends and volunteers—not to mention their fellow employees in the other postal craft unions and in management—to pick up bags upon bags of non-perishable food left by postal customers' mailboxes.

"We're proud of the fact that this effort led by NALC is the largest single-day food drive in the nation," NALC President Fredric Rolando said, "but we remain saddened that widespread hunger is still a problem in this country."

The president said he draws some encouragement from the union's massive annual effort to fight this ongoing problem—how the drive raises awareness of it and makes a noticeable difference.

The national drive began in 1993, and since then, countless letter carriers and volunteers throughout the country have spent this special Saturday helping to restock food pantry shelves. (A history of the food drive can be found in the May *Postal Record*, available for download at [nalc.org](http://nalc.org).)

The food drive is an especially timely event, since food donations typically peak during the winter holidays and food pantries usually are depleted by Memorial Day weekend. Complicating matters: free or reduced-cost meals for the children of families in need tend to only be available while school is in session, which means that many families often face greater hardship once summer vacation begins.

"Budgets that are already stretched thin have to stretch that much further," Second Harvest of South Georgia's Eliza McCall told WCTV-TV, "so we'll make sure these families use some of this food that we've gotten to bolster the nutrition in their homes."

### A labor of love

For many NALC members, the annual Food Drive Day provides an opportunity for them to do something special for all of their customers.

"I don't just do this as a job," Aiea-Pearl City, HI Branch 4692's Adele Yoshikawa told *Hawaii News Now*. "I'm off today; I do it with a passion to help our community."

Milwaukee Branch 2 letter carrier Ashley Webb echoed that sentiment. "This is a great way for me to give back," she told WITI-TV. "I don't think people really understand that they actually made somebody's day better."

Augusta, GA volunteer Miguel Valdez told WDRW-TV that "just that one meal makes a huge difference in your life," and that for him, the food drive was personal. "I know what it is like to go through that struggle," he said. "I didn't quite reach homelessness, but I know how it is to need a plate and to receive that, and that's why we are here."

Volunteers are often the lifeblood of local food drive efforts, said Sioux City, IA Branch 69 Food Drive Coordinator Carrie Matney. "They just feel so passionate about the cause itself and how it helps the community. It is a ton of work,

Lake Jackson, TX Branch 4723





## South Macomb, MI Branch 4374

but I really love to see it all come together.”

Saturday, May 13, marked Youngstown, OH Branch 385 member Scott Downing’s 23rd food drive. “To see those donations going to the needy people we serve, and who we see every day—it’s really touching,” he told WYTV-TV.

“It’s good to give back, because as we’re walking through the neighborhoods we see the need in certain neighborhoods,” Great Falls, MT Branch 650 letter carrier Marcus Delgado told KRTV-TV. “We see the need out there for struggling families, veterans, the elderly—I mean, it’s everywhere there is a need for all these services.”

Customer generosity seemed to rule the day, at least as far as Kalamazoo, MI Branch 246 member Gary Hall was concerned. Hall told *Three Rivers News* that he visited about 20 houses at a time, and on average, one house per trip left 15 to 20 non-perishable food items for collection. “I felt great about it,” he told the newspaper. “The fact that the food stays right here, I think is a bonus.”

## Blue skies, gray skies

A variety of factors can determine how much food gets collected from one year to the next, not least of which is the weather, something obviously no one can control. Although Mother Nature largely cooperated with food drive efforts across the country on May 13, a late-spring snowfall threatened to make things interesting for letter carriers in New Hampshire. Meanwhile, rain dampened efforts—but not spirits—in portions of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Georgia, among others.

“The community supports us in so many ways, so we know that they’ll recognize that maybe things didn’t go as well” as far as the weather is concerned, Second Harvest of Savannah, GA’s Mary



Jane Crouch told WTOG-TV.

Meanwhile, in California’s sunny Central Coast region, food drive volunteer Wendy Lewis told KSBY-TV that “it looks like it’s our best year ever. We heard from carriers and post offices around the county that their docks are filling up with food and it’s the most they’ve ever seen.”

Rural letter carrier Wayne Watts told Lawton, OK’s KSWO-TV that the food drive means a little extra work, but it’s worth every pound that gets picked up. “Sometimes we actually have to bring food back before we finish the day and go back and deliver our routes again because it just gets too crowded” in his postal vehicle, he said.

“It seems like every year the need is growing,” Minneapolis Branch 9 Food Drive Coordinator Samantha Hartwig told the *Star Tribune*. “This food drive really helps out a lot of families in the community.”

Elyria, OH Branch 196 President David Lozano estimated that 60 letter carriers from his branch took part in the all-volunteer event. “We had city carriers, rural route carriers and clerks helping out,” Lozano told *The Chronicle*. “It’s a team effort. These guys go above and beyond—they get the mail delivered and they’re picking up food at the same time.”

Josephine County, OR Food Bank Director Kevin Widdison credited the food drive’s “huge success” in his area to several elements all coming together: “The generosity of the community, the hard work of the letter carriers and the people who were willing to volunteer



Duluth, MN Branch 114





Top: Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100  
Above: Mass. NE Mgd. Branch 25

New Castle, PA Branch 22



their Saturday afternoon at the Food Bank's warehouse," he told KDRV-TV. "Everyone who participated played an integral role in the success of this event."

Springfield, MO Branch 203 President Tom Carter told KOLR-TV that so much food was coming in to his post office, he was worried volunteers would run out of places to store it. "This amount exceeded our expectations and proves once again that our community cares about each other," he said.

Fort Myers, FL Branch 2072 Food Drive Coordinator George Sciascia estimated his branch had collected around 300,000 pounds of food. "Although the final tally is not in yet," he told the *Naples Herald*, "preliminary reports from some of the various post offices indicate an increase of at least 10 to 20 percent over last year's results."

The food drive has a special meaning for longtime Reading, PA Branch 258 Food Drive Coordinator Paul Purcell. "I know what it is like to grow up in a situation like that (without enough to eat)," Purcell told the *Reading Eagle*. "It is heartwarming to be a part of this food drive."

### Teamwork triumphs

"While letter carriers lead this effort," President Rolando said, "there is simply no way that we could do it alone." He thanked this year's national sponsors for stepping up: The U.S. Postal Service, the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), United Way Worldwide, the AFL-CIO, AARP Foundation, Valpak and Valassis.

UFCW and Valpak were instrumental in the production of the millions of postcards that found their way into every mailbox in the country, while USPS

generously donated the use of its G-10 postage permit for the mailing of not just the postcards but also of specially marked food drive bags made available to many areas of the country thanks to strong local sponsor partnerships.

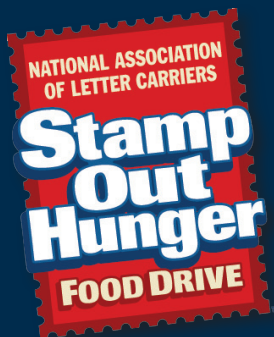
"In all the years we've partnered with the letter carriers, we've never seen this much food," Feeding America West Michigan's Ken Estelle told *The Rapidian*. "The fact that we had strong media coverage this year, along with the postcards and collection bags the carriers distributed for us really made the difference."

Online promotion also gave the food drive a "signal boost." Posts to the Stamp Out Hunger Facebook page were viewed by at least 1.4 million people in the weeks leading up to the drive, while posts on Twitter containing the #StampOutHunger hashtag were seen by 44.5 million users of that platform in that same timeframe. More than half a million social media users saw the Thunderclap message promoting the food drive on the Friday before, a message that received perhaps millions of additional Facebook shares and Twitter retweets. And the new, public-facing stampouthungerfooddrive.us website provided numerous visitors with timely food drive information, including the public service announcement featuring actor Edward James Olmos and a page containing answers to frequently asked questions.

Through 2016, the food drive has delivered to food pantries a total of more than 1.5 billion pounds of food—a figure that includes last year's record figure of 80 million pounds collected. Final totals from this year's silver-anniversary drive were due after this magazine went to press; a more detailed report will appear in a later edition of *The Postal Record*. **PR**







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