

2017



OF THE
YEAR
AWARDS

National Association of Letter Carriers
Washington, DC

Wednesday, October 4, 2017

Honoring

Branch Service Award: Springfield, IL Branch 80

**Unit Citation Award: Evelyn Woodward and James McKay
of Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56**

Humanitarian of the Year: Deborah Ochetti of Minneapolis Branch 9

Special Carrier Alert Award: Holly Allen of Charleston, WV Branch 531

Western Region Hero: Daniel Ochoa of Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100

Central Region Hero: Donte Cotton of Dayton, OH Branch 182

Eastern Region Hero: Clinton Parker of Connecticut Merged Branch 20

National Hero of the Year: Matthew Lamb of Johnstown, PA Branch 451

Opening Remarks

Prayer

Welcome

Greetings from distinguished guests

Importance of Heroes of the Year Awards

Presentations

Branch Service Award

Unit Citation Award

National Humanitarian of the Year

Special Carrier Alert Award

Regional Heroes

National Hero of the Year

Closing Remarks

This year's judges

Richard Bowers

Fire Chief

Department of Fire and Rescue

Fairfax County, VA

Christopher Godfrey

Chief Judge and Chairman

ECAB

U.S. Department of Labor

Kelly Temple

Director, Labor Engagement

United Way Worldwide

Springfield, IL

Branch 80



2017 BRANCH
SERVICE AWARD

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



Jon Calloway with Lizzie Chamberlain and her mother, Lori

The ambassador, 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**, the branch volunteered to help.

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

The branch set up an account with about \$800 in seed money to buy items for a raffle, including an Apple Watch, an iPad and a \$100 gift card. After watching carriers and postal employees eagerly buy raffle tickets, the branch decided to also sell some in a nearby grocery store. That effort quickly sold 800 \$5 tickets.

The fundraising continued with a trivia night. The branch secured the Knights of Columbus hall for a nominal fee and a firefighter donated his services and equipment to host the trivia event, which was open to the general public. The event turned out 180 people, 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."

Lizzie Chamberlain selected the winning tickets, and she ended up drawing her own name to win the iPad, thanks to the 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 branch had never tried to host something this large," said Branch 80 letter carrier **Donald Van Etten**, who helped organize the event. But with the help of several other volunteers, the fundraising efforts raised a total of \$7,846, which put the family over the top in its effort to buy the wheelchair-accessible van.

"The members' willingness to support such a great cause is a true testament to the generosity of the letter carrier," Van Etten said. "Our expectations for the fundraiser were modest and we managed to exceed them in every way. It is an awesome thing when we can all come together for such a great cause."

Van Etten, a 32-year letter carrier and four-year Navy veteran, stressed that teamwork made the event a success. The judges agreed, honoring Branch 80 with NALC's 2017 Branch Service Award. "The branch displayed great teamwork," they said. "It brought the whole branch together."

Evelyn Woodward & James McKay

Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56



2017 UNIT CITATION AWARD
HERO OF THE YEAR

“I heard this weird scream,” recalled Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Evelyn Woodward** about an event that occurred on June 30, 2016. She was working in the union office at the post office and had just gone off the clock.

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 went to check out the situation and found a clerk lying on the floor. “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 as she 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 shouts, fellow Branch 56 member **James McKay** rushed over as well. The two carriers rolled the woman onto her back and lifted her head up. “She had bit down on her tongue so hard, we couldn’t get her mouth open,” Woodward recalled. Woodward checked her pulse but couldn’t detect it.

“We need to start CPR,” McKay said.

Woodward held the woman’s head so she wouldn’t choke on her own blood. McKay, who is also a former EMT with the local fire department, began performing chest compressions. “She started breathing again,” McKay said. Then the woman came to and sat up. McKay and Woodward tried to keep her lying down to prevent any further injury and asked her questions to keep her awake until paramedics showed up to take over.

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

But Woodward, a 30-year letter carrier, 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.”

The judges saw heroism in their actions, though. In bestowing NALC’s 2017 Unit Citation Award on McKay and Woodward, the judges said they were impressed by the pair’s ability to stay calm and handle the situation, and to work together. “Teamwork and engagement—that’s what saved a life,” the judges said.

James McKay (l) and Evelyn Woodward



Deborah Ochetti

Minneapolis Branch 9



Along with many other volunteers in her town of 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.

Ochetti, who has carried 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 marrow is then transplanted into the recipient. However, a new procedure called peripheral blood stem cell (PBSC) donation extracts stem cells from blood—special cells that help form new blood that then can be donated instead of bone marrow to the recipient for treatment.

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.

Ochetti was given a series of injections of a drug that prepared her body for the stem-cell extraction by boosting the production of those cells in her blood. On the day of the extraction at a St. Paul, MN, 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.

"I woke up that morning with so much joy and excitement in my heart," she said. "Just knowing that this simple act could possibly give life to another individual—wow, what a blessing."

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. "I would like to encourage others to do the same. You won't regret it."

In naming Ochetti NALC's 2017 Humanitarian of the Year, the judges called her actions "selfless," and praised her for her willingness to help a stranger. "She wasn't a match the first time, but she still gave a donation to a stranger, even though it wasn't her original plan," they said.





2017 SPECIAL CARRIER ALERT
HERO OF THE YEAR

Holly Allen

Charleston, WV Branch 531

Charleston, WV Branch 531 member Holly Allen was delivering mail to an elderly customer on a Saturday in August 2015. He knew that the woman had knee issues, and because she lived about 150 feet from the street, Allen would always bring her mail directly to the house. On this day, the carrier realized he had not seen her in a while, so he said, “I

opened the door and heard her yelling, ‘Mr. Mailman, is that you?’ ”

Allen responded, and found the woman lying face down. She told him she had slipped on some spilled pickle juice in her kitchen and broken her hip. She had crawled toward her phone but could not reach it, and ended up lying on the floor for several hours.

At the woman’s request, Allen contacted the woman’s granddaughter and stayed with his customer until the granddaughter and emergency personnel arrived. “She was so thrilled that I would even stay with her,” Allen said.

An ambulance arrived soon after, as did the granddaughter—who immediately smelled natural gas in the home. Her grandmother had accidentally turned on the stove, filling the house with the potentially dangerous gas. They were able to turn it off without incident.

The woman had surgery for her broken hip and recovered in a nursing home. She is back home and greets Allen every day when he brings her mail.

“I was so happy I was able to help a little bit,” Allen, a 21-year veteran of the Army, Air Force and Air National Guard, said. But the 18-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.”

The judges, though, consider him a hero. They noted that Allen is a great example of why people in distress in their homes often look for their letter carrier for help, and they named him the recipient of NALC’s 2017 Carrier Alert Award. “Day in, day out, the letter carrier is the person who’s going to look out for them. In times like these, that’s very important,” the judges said. “His alertness to trouble, combined with his genuine love for people, prompted him to help this customer when she needed him.”



Daniel Ochoa

Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100



The pungent odor of smoke captured the attention of Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member **Daniel Ochoa** as he was going about his route on the morning of Dec. 19, 2016. “I thought someone at the moment was barbecuing,” he said.

However, as the carrier turned the corner to complete his park-and-loop, “I noticed the source of the smoke,” he said. “I saw a woman carrying a child run from the house, where I also saw large plumes of smoke.”

Ochoa quickly made his way to the front door and went over to the woman, who was with her 4-year-old granddaughter. He told her that he had seen the source of the fire.

“I made sure there was no one inside the house,” the carrier said. “I could hear sirens at a distance but thought I could do more to help.” Ochoa, a Marine Reservist who also has taken some college-level firefighting courses, ran to the back yard, which contained a swimming pool.

“I was looking for a water hose and saw a propane tank,” he said. It was near the flames, so he quickly moved it, fearing that it could catch fire and explode.

Unable to locate a garden hose, Ochoa scanned the yard, saw a foam cooler and started using it to scoop pool water to douse the flames. “I bucket-brigaded it,” he said.

The carrier continued until the blaze was completely quelled and firefighters arrived. Ochoa saw that the situation was in good hands, so he checked on the grateful homeowner before grabbing his satchel and continuing his route.

He found out later that the fire might have started because of an electrical problem near where 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 to the local postmaster. “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.”

Judges said during deliberations that Ochoa had performed multiple actions that made him stand out as NALC’s 2017 Western Region Hero

of the Year. “Anyone who would be willing to walk by a propane tank that could blow up is a hero,” they declared. “He put his life at risk and is very courageous.”

The first-year letter carrier said he was “surprised” to be awarded the honor, but couldn’t just sit back knowing that he could help. “I just knew that I had to take action,” Ochoa said. “It’s something I’ve always been taught.”





Donte Cotton

Dayton, OH Branch 182

A loud bang interrupted the conversation Dayton, OH Branch 182 city carrier assistant **Donte Cotton** was having with a supervisor outside their post office on the evening of April 5, 2016.

When they looked in the direction of the sound, “We noticed a transformer spark and utility pole shake,” the carrier said.

The two immediately made their way around the office’s postal vehicles to see what had happened. “We were greeted by a vehicle that was lying on its roof,” Cotton said. The car had hit the pole, causing the transformer to malfunction and spark.

Unfazed, Cotton ran to the vehicle.

A moment later, the driver got out of the car and she appeared concerned about something in the back seat.

“I realized there was a toddler in the rear of the vehicle moving around,” Cotton said. “My main concern was the little kid. My fatherly instincts kicked in.”

The supervisor called 911 as the carrier quickly approached the vehicle from the passenger side, crawling through a tapestry of broken glass. “I lay on my back to proceed to get the girl out of the broken window,” Cotton said.

He then handed the child to her mother and tried to comfort both of them while waiting for medics to arrive. The youngster and her mother were taken to the hospital and treated for non-life-threatening injuries.

Cotton, who also recently received media attention for attending to a woman on his new route after she was beaten during a break-in at her home, doesn’t think his actions were a big deal. “I wouldn’t call myself a hero,” the second-year letter carrier said.

The Heroes of the Year judges thought differently and marveled at how the carrier put himself in danger to help. “The car probably had fluids leaking,” they said. “He was going into an unknown situation to rescue a baby.” That’s why they named Cotton NALC’s 2017 Central Region Hero.

While Cotton said it “made me feel great to be recognized for a good deed,” he noted that he was “not looking for praise.”



Clinton Parker

Connecticut Merged Branch 20



2017 EASTERN REGION
HERO OF THE YEAR

Dec. 6, 2014, started out like any other for Connecticut Merged Branch 20 member **Clinton Parker** as he began to deliver mail on his route.

Soon, though, the carrier was surprised by a call from local law enforcement: They wanted his help with a police standoff happening nearby.

Parker, who has 30 years of experience in the Army and the Army Reserves, got a police escort to the scene but didn't learn 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. The carrier readily agreed.

Arriving on the scene, the letter carrier saw a neighborhood cordoned off. "He had fired off a shot and he had barricaded himself," Parker 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 with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was threatening himself and others. As part of their effort to apprehend the soldier, police ordered the neighborhood's electrical power cut.

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

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

Parker entered the home with an officer and began to counsel the soldier—beginning 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 soldier's eventual peaceful surrender, Parker accompanied him, 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 added.

In a memo, the Watertown, CT Police Department 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."

Parker is no stranger to confronting conflict on his mail route. In the 1990s, he helped police capture a mugger who allegedly had tried to steal a woman's purse from a supermarket parking lot as part of a mugging spree. In that situation, the carrier chased down the man, took his car keys as he tried to flee, and detained him until police arrived.

In naming Parker NALC's 2017 Eastern Region Hero, the judges cited the carrier's role in his community and their appreciation for a soldier helping a soldier. "He was trusted in the community, even by police," they said. "Being a hero became a habit of his. He clearly acted without any regard for his own personal safety, and he does not give up very easily."

Despite the praise for his actions, Parker brushed off any accolades for having helped defuse the tense 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."





Matthew Lamb

Johnstown, PA Branch 451

The scent of smoke in the air alerted Johnstown, PA Branch 451 member **Matthew Lamb** as he was delivering the Rucoskys' mail on Nov. 21, 2016. "It was snowing, so I assumed the home just had a wood burner going and I continued on," he said.

But as he delivered a package on a nearby street, "I looked back and could see flames from their porch," Lamb said.

Concerned, Lamb ran over to the Rucoskys' front porch and knocked on the door. An elderly woman, Helen Rucosky, answered. The carrier helped her out of the home and to a safe distance across the street. "I asked if there was anyone else in there," he said. At first, she said no.

The carrier called 911 as he grabbed out of the garage a fire extinguisher, which failed to work. The 911 operator asked him about others inside.

"I double-checked with the woman that the house was empty," Lamb said. "It was then that she told me her grandson was sleeping upstairs. I told the dispatcher this as I began looking for a way in."

By then, the fire had spread, blocking access to the kitchen door. "I climbed over the railing at the far end of the porch and tried the side door," the carrier said. "It was locked and the fire was spreading. Glass around me was breaking, and burning debris from the porch ceiling fell and hit me on the back."

Held back by heat and smoke, Lamb jumped off the porch and continued looking for another way in. "I was trying the basement door when I heard a shout for help coming from around the house," he said. "I ran over where I saw Adam, the grandson, sticking his head out of a second-story window. Black smoke was pouring out around him as he coughed and gasped for air."

Lamb was determined to help.

He yelled to the 20-year-old Adam that his grandmother was outside and safe and that he was trying to get to him, but that most of the entrances seemed blocked.

Thinking quickly, Lamb told Adam to jump down and he would catch him.

"He climbed through the window as I positioned myself below him," the carrier said. "He jumped down and I caught him and broke his fall."

The two men then made their way around the burning home to where the grandmother was waiting.

"I stayed with him and tried to keep them calm until the fire department arrived," Lamb said. "When the fire trucks showed up, I directed them to the nearest hydrant."

Helen's husband, Robert, a former volunteer firefighter, had not been home, but



as he returned and saw fire trucks near his house, he rushed to the scene.

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

Once Lamb knew that the fire crews had the situation under control, he returned to and finished his regular route, insisting that he had just been 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.”

The Heroes of the Year judges disagreed. “He really put himself in life-and-death straits,” they said. “He acted with no regard for his own personal safety and made not one, but two attempts—incredible.”

The trio of judges had no qualms in naming Lamb NALC’s 2017 National Hero of the Year, an accolade that the carrier called “a great honor.”

But the carrier summed up his actions simply: “I was just trying to help out one of my customers.”





National Association of Letter Carriers

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