

# FOR HEROES, LOOKING OUT FOR THE COMMUNITY 'COMES WITH THE UNIFORM'

2013



OF THE  
YEAR  
AWARDS

NALC's 2013 Heroes of the Year pictured  
with Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe  
and NALC President Fredric Rolando

**“W**e are gathered here today to honor some of the men and women who have gone above and beyond while delivering the nation’s mail—stepping in and stepping up, helping someone in crisis and perhaps saving a life. Perhaps saving more than one life,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said as he welcomed the large audience to the 2013 NALC Heroes of the Year Awards luncheon.

“It is, in short, about recognizing what is exceptional about our nation’s letter carriers in terms of the public service they render, day in and day out,” he said.

The event was held on Oct. 10 in the nation’s capital, with attendees

including the union’s resident national officers, the postmaster general and other top Postal Service executives, and members of Congress. The annual event highlighted the special acts of courage and compassion by six individual NALC members and five branches that represented an entire district of carriers. Rolando called them “some of the most dedicated carriers to wear the uniform.”

Before presenting the awards, Rolando thanked the panel of independent judges who reviewed the stories about heroic and humanitarian acts published in *The Postal Record* between July 2012 and June 2013. The judges who went through these stories were: Bud Biscardo, AFL-CIO Community Services





liaison at the United Way of America; Richard Bowers, chief of the Fairfax County, VA, Department of Fire and Rescue; and Richard Daschbach, chairman and chief judge of the Employees' Compensation Appeals Board at the U.S. Department of Labor.

Rolando also recognized a number of special guests, including President Jeanette Dwyer of the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, Postal Regulatory Commission Chairman Ruth Goldway, and PRC Commissioners Nanci Langley and Robert Taub. He then introduced newly elected AFL-CIO Vice President Tefere Gebre.

"I think all letter carriers are heroes. You step up," Gebre said. He also talked of the important work labor does to fight for better pay and equality for all Americans, adding that the reason he came to America from Ethiopia was because of its status as a land of freedom and opportunity. That's work that needs to continue, and letter carriers are doing it, he said.

Rolando then called on Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe, who congratulated the honorees. "I want to thank you for your actions, whether they were heroically saving someone, humanitarian deeds, community activity," he said. "That says so much about postal employees, and you represent the Postal Service on a daily basis."

Donahoe also took a moment to recognize NALC's leaders for their work in the partisan atmosphere of Washington. "I also wanted to say thank you to Fred for his leadership in a very tough time that we face here at the Postal Service," he said. "You know, we don't agree on everything—you might find

that hard to believe," he joked, before adding seriously, "but Fred has done an outstanding job of trying to bring the issues to Congress and the White House in a way that gives an opportunity to solve them."

The partisan bickering in the nation's capital was mentioned several times through the event, which was held during the federal government shutdown and the controversy over raising the debt limit. Rolando contrasted Congress with the Postal Service, pointing to the 83 percent favorable view Americans have of USPS, while Congress has its lowest approval rating in history at a mere 10 percent.

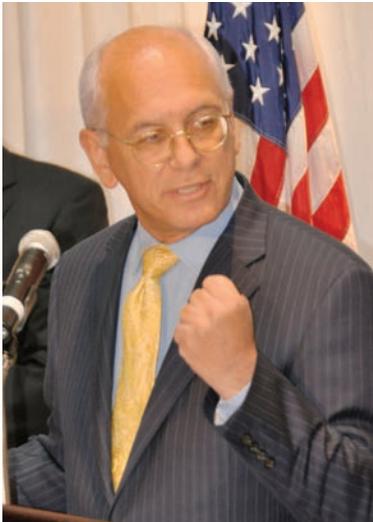
Rolando explained why the Postal Service, and especially carriers as the face of the USPS, are so trusted by the public. "While our primary mission is to deliver the mail—indeed, we deliver 40 percent of the world's mail—we are closely connected to the communities we serve," he said. "We watch as families grow, as customers age and as neighborhoods evolve. We see every corner of this country's daily life."

He highlighted all we do, from performing the country's largest one-day food drive, leading the fight against muscular dystrophy, and preparing and training to deliver medicines and vaccines quickly in case of biological attack.

"Occasionally, when circumstances demand, we do a whole lot more than that," he said. "We do so not because we are supermen or superwomen, but rather because we are in neighborhoods six days a week. We know when something doesn't seem right—and we are often the first on the scene."



**NALC President Fredric Rolando spoke of the importance of having letter carriers in all of the country's communities six days a week.**



Rep. Paul Tonko (D-NY)



Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe



AFL-CIO Vice President Tefere Gebre



Rep. Chris Gibson (R-NY) congratulates the winners of the Branch Service Award.

“And when asked about it, the carrier typically says that he or she did nothing noteworthy; that any carrier would have done the same; and that it’s just part of the job,” he said. “For so many letter carriers, looking out for the families and the community simply comes with the uniform.”

Rolando then recounted each hero’s story to the audience. Their stories are found in the following pages of this issue of *The Postal Record*.

Reps. Paul Tonko (D-NY) and Chris Gibson (R-NY) congratulated and thanked the Albany postal district branches whose food drive two weeks after Hurricane Sandy struck sent 13 tractor-trailers worth of food donations to help the relief effort for hard-hit New York City (see story, page 20).

“You’re a great connection for your communities,” Tonko said of all carriers. “This connectedness is on grand display today. Letter carriers were the first neighborhood watch for this country, something of which we can be tremendously proud.”

“Our letter carriers represent all of the greatness in our country,” Gibson added. “You are your brother’s or sister’s keeper.”

After telling the stories, President Rolando presented an award certificate and—for the first time—a special lapel pin the hero can wear to highlight the distinction.

In an effort to do more to recognize the heroic actions of carriers who look out for their community, NALC will award smaller “HERO” pins to each carrier whose story appears in the monthly Proud to Serve section of *The Postal Record*, along with a special letter of commendation from President Rolando.

The honorees were selected from among 125 nominees, whose stories of

heroism and community service were published over the course of a year in this magazine. Those stories were collected into a booklet, *A Year’s Worth of Heroes*, which was distributed to the attendees.

“I’d like to thank all of you for celebrating these carrier heroes with us,” Rolando said in closing. “We hope that as you see carriers on your street wearing the light blue uniform of the United States Postal Service, you think of the dedication and the caring, the strength and the courage, that you’ve heard about today.

“Every day on the job, they exemplify the spirit and the purpose of public service for all Americans. And sometimes, on the route, they are—truly—our heroes.”

## HEROES IN THE MEDIA

Reports on the heroes were run in various media outlets in the days following the event. Both Hearst and McClatchy, which own newspapers throughout the country, had features on individual heroes in their local regions as well as national coverage.

Articles appeared in the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, Houston *Chronicle*, San Antonio *Express-News*, *The Daytona Beach News Journal*, *Miami Herald*, Columbus *Ledger-Enquirer*, Belleville *News-Democrat*, *The Wichita Eagle*, *Lexington Herald-Leader*, *Royal Oak Patch*, *Albany Times-Union*, *Charlotte Observer*, and several Ohio and South Carolina newspapers and TV stations, among other outlets.

You can read all of the coverage, as well as watch videos of the heroes telling their stories on the NALC website at [nalc.org/commun/heroes/2013.html](http://nalc.org/commun/heroes/2013.html). **PR**

# JASON JONES

## CLEVELAND, OH BRANCH 40

Near the end of his route each day, Jason Jones of Cleveland, OH Branch 40 would bring mail to 91-year-old Jack Clair, who lived alone. During the three years Jones had walked the route, Clair greeted Jones for a brief chat nearly every day.

One day, Clair didn't come to the door. When he failed to appear the next day as well, Jones was worried. He looked around and saw no footprints in the snow to indicate that Clair had left the house, and his car was still there. So Jones called the police.

The next day, Jones still saw no sign of activity at the house—no footprints, car in place. So he called police again, and waited for authorities to arrive. After forcing their way into the house, rescue personnel found Clair on the floor, malnourished and dehydrated. He was taken to a hospital, and a few

days later he was moved to a rehabilitation facility to recover. Jones visited him there, though Clair was still too sick to respond.

The judges noted that Jones had paid attention to clues that others might have missed. "His story exemplifies the importance of letter carriers in looking after the elderly, disabled and vulnerable by using their powers of observation," they said. "Even after he thought it was taken care of after the first call to police, he sensed something wasn't right, and he didn't give up." That determination makes Jones the NALC Special Carrier Alert winner for 2013.

"It's an honor and a privilege," Jones said about receiving recognition for his actions. "I didn't do it to get accolades. I value life and I value the lives of others—it's my job to be out there and pay attention." **PR**



2013 SPECIAL CARRIER ALERT  
HERO OF THE YEAR

Jason Jones receives his lapel pin from President Rolando.





2013 BRANCH SERVICE  
HERO OF THE YEAR

## ALBANY, NY DISTRICT BRANCHES

It takes months to plan the annual NALC food drive, but after Hurricane Sandy struck New York City and threatened food supplies, the letter carriers in the Albany District in upstate New York held a Saturday food drive just two weeks later.

After quickly organizing the food drive in cooperation with Albany District managers, letter carriers collected the food on Nov. 10, 2012, filling 13 postal tractor-trailers with donations for the people of the New York City area. Those same trucks had brought mail from New York City for processing in the wake of the storm, which had put several postal facilities in its path out of action.

On behalf of all carriers in every branch who participated, presidents from the five largest branches in the Albany District accepted the award: Albany, NY Branch 29; Syracuse, NY Branch 134; Binghamton, NY Branch 333; Northeastern New York Branch 358 and Utica, NY Branch 375.

“We weren’t looking for any recognition,” Branch 358 President William Cooke said. “We had lots of friends and co-workers who were being hit.

We may be a few hours away, but we’ve built strong friendships with our brothers and sisters in downstate New York, so we did what we do best—a food drive.”

Using the same media contacts and partnerships they rely on for the annual food drive each May, letter carriers and Albany District managers got the word out to the public and organized the logistics for collecting and transporting food along with the mail. The hardest part, Cooke said, was getting the food down to New York and getting it unloaded and processed by food banks overwhelmed by the disaster. The problem was solved in part by replenishing food banks on the outskirts of the city that already had sent their own relief supplies to New York.

“We know that it made a difference,” Cooke said, “and we’re glad to do it.”

“Everyone stepped up and stood out in the face of disaster,” the judges said, “and through it all, the mail still got delivered. There are a lot of heroes involved in this one.” As a result, the judges named the five branches as co-winners of the Branch Service Award. **PR**

Left and below:  
Images from  
the special  
food drive



Below: Presidents from  
the five largest branches  
accepted the award, but  
recognized the effort from  
the whole postal commu-  
nity in the district.



# PAM PONTIUS

## NORTHEAST FL BRANCH 53

Letter carriers know their routes. As Northeast Florida Branch 53 member Pam Pontius was going about her route on Jan. 9, 2012, she saw something amiss. “I noticed a white van repeatedly driving around my area for over 30 minutes stopping and looking at houses,” she said, adding of the occupants: “They didn’t live on my route.” A man driving would stop and point at various houses, and a woman would jump out and go and knock on doors, over and over again. “This is shady,” Pontius thought to herself.

At the end of the street, Pontius watched as they got an elderly couple to answer the door. Pontius knew the couple and was worried. “I grabbed a handful of mail and walked over to the house,” she said. She heard the woman say they could clean the couple’s house, and then offer a discount if they did it that day. Pontius was very suspicious and shook her head “no” to alert the couple.

The 29-year postal veteran had a local police detective’s number programmed in her phone, so she gave him a call. “There’s a couple casing the neighborhood,” she told him. “Can you come check it out?”

Officers were dispatched, and the van and suspects were located. When questioned, only one of the suspects could produce a valid ID and neither could explain their activities or why they were in the area.

The woman had active warrants out for two counts of child neglect and witness tampering, and the driver had active warrants out for sexual battery on a child and witness tampering. The couple’s 12-year-old daughter—of whom they did not have legal custody—was also in the vehicle, and there was a pickup order for her had been issued by the county. (The child was later reunited with her grandparents, who are her legal guardians.)

“The observations and quick actions of Pam enabled the apprehension of two wanted felons, the recovery of a missing child and the probable prevention of other criminal activities by these individuals,” South Daytona Chief of Police William Hall wrote to the local postmaster. “In today’s society, it is too often said that folks don’t get involved and turn their eyes away when they see things. This is not the case with Pam Pontius, and because of her actions, criminals in two counties have been incarcerated.”

Our judges agreed. “There was intervention at two levels. She really sniffed out the situation and connected the dots,” they said in naming Pontius the Eastern Region Hero. “This really shows letter carriers’ affinity toward their patrons. Her job is more than just a series of mailboxes.”

Pontius, a second-generation letter carrier, is quick to brush off any accolades. “I was just doing my job,” she said. “I was just protecting my people.” **PR**



2013 EASTERN REGION  
HERO OF THE YEAR



Pam Pontius receives her award from President Rolando.



2013 CENTRAL REGION  
HERO OF THE YEAR

## JAMES BARTON

### HOPKINSVILLE, KY BRANCH 836

“I came up to a stop sign and happened to see a cop car on the side of the road and a group of people gathered around,” Hopkinsville, KY Branch 836 member James Barton said of a day in August 2012 when he was out on his route. Barton then saw a fight break out between a police officer and a suspect who was trying to evade arrest.

The police officer was wrestling with the man and was using a stun gun to try to subdue the suspect. “The man was a little bigger than the officer and even though the officer was using a taser gun on the man, it did not seem to have any effect on the man,” he said.

Relying on his six years of experience as a military police officer in the Army, Barton jumped out of his vehicle to help. “To me, it wasn’t a big deal. We were trained how to do it,” the carrier said.

The suspect then grabbed onto a nearby van. “We got the guy loose from the railing and down to the ground,” the carrier said—but the man continued to try to evade arrest by not offering his hands to be cuffed. “I placed my knee on the back of his legs and began to talk to him, trying to distract him, and finally got his left arm out. Then he just gave up and gave us his right arm so we were able to cuff him.”

As Barton headed to his mail truck to continue his route, the scuffle successfully handled, a plethora of backup police vehicles showed up.

Barton, a 13-year postal veteran, was recognized at a city council meeting by the mayor and police chief for his acts. The carrier doesn’t think he’s a hero, though. His only thought was to help the officer. “It just came as an instinct,” he said.

In selecting Barton as the Central Region Hero, judges said, “This veteran’s training helped (him) achieve what he did in a very intense situation. There was direct intervention, and he was a part of the solution.”

Barton said he appreciates the honor, though he downplayed what he did. “It just came natural to go help him,” he said. “I couldn’t just sit there and watch it.” **PR**



James Barton receives his award from President Rolando.

# DANNY THOMPSON

## HOUSTON, TX BRANCH 283

Smoke emanating from an air-conditioning window unit of a house caught Houston, TX Branch 283 Danny Thompson's eye as he was delivering the mail on the morning of June 26, 2012.

As he was continuing with his route, Thompson thought it was strange that no one had come outside to inspect the A/C unit, so he approached the house a second time. By now, the smoke had intensified. It was smoldering and dense.



Thompson told the crowd that he thanked God for putting him in the right place at the right time.

When he knocked on the door of the Watts family home, two children, ages 12 and 14, answered. "I told them to go check that room out, because there was a little smoke coming in from that room," Thompson said. "But once I saw that the smoke was a little bit more intense, I wanted to maybe check it out for myself."

The children were locked behind burglar bars, though. "They didn't have a way to get out," Thompson said. "They passed the key to me through an opening."

Soon the malfunctioning A/C unit burst into flames. Thompson then entered the burning house and escorted the children and the family dog out.

"He busted the door open. The smoke came out," fire survivor L.J. Watts said. "He told us to exit, so we ran out."

Thompson made sure everyone was outside the house.

"I went around the side of the house and cut off power from the main switchboard," Thompson said. "Then I called 911."

The house soon became engulfed in flames, and eventually burned to the ground. But by the time firefighters got there 10 to 15 minutes later, everyone had escaped unharmed.

The children's room was on the opposite side of the house, and they had been asleep, so if it hadn't been for the carrier, they might not have known about the fire. "All I cared about was getting everyone out. I knew the house was on fire," Thompson, an Army combat veteran, said. "I knew the children were there, not knowing what was going on. I just had to do what I needed to do. There is nothing to compare to a human life."

The family was grateful to Thompson for his actions. "I would just give him a big hug and a kiss, because he saved my niece and nephew's life," Laverne Hargrove, the children's aunt, told a local TV station.

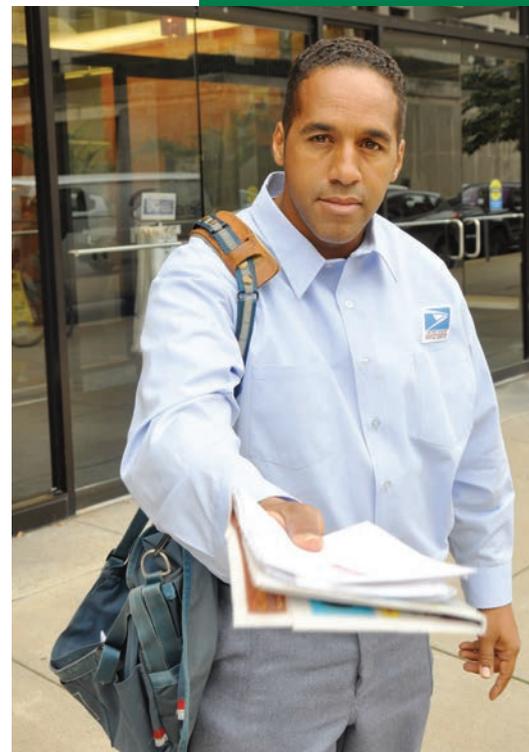
The city of Houston recognized the letter carrier with a proclamation by Mayor Annise Parker declaring Aug. 9, 2012, "Danny Thompson Day."

In choosing Thompson as the Western Region Hero, judges said Thompson's "quick, decisive action made for a successful outcome. He reacted intuitively and instinctively."

But the eight-year postal veteran maintained that he was just in the right place at the right time. "We're like the first line of defense," he said. "I feel confident that any other carrier in my building would have done the same thing." **PR**



2013 WESTERN REGION  
HERO OF THE YEAR





2013 HUMANITARIAN  
HERO OF THE YEAR

## JOHN DICK ROYAL OAK, MI BRANCH 3126

Letter carriers often strike up friendships with customers, but for Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126 member John Dick, one friendship became a chance to celebrate a life all the way to its end.

Dick bonded with Gregg Glowacz when the carrier, a motorcycle enthusiast, noticed Glowacz's motorcycle while delivering the mail. But when Glowacz suffered an aneurysm—a burst blood vessel—in his brain, Dick delivered mail, including cards and letters from well-wishers, to his friend's hospital bed. He continued to visit Glowacz's bedside through a seven-month hospitalization.

Glowacz finally made it home, but his health was still declining and he was unable to walk or speak. He used a laser pointer mounted on eyeglasses to point to letters and words on a communication board. To raise money for his expenses, Dick planned a motorcycle poker run, with Glowacz riding in a sidecar. But his friend missed the ride when he was stricken with pneumonia and sent back to the hospital. Feeling

his heart weakening, Glowacz used the laser pointer to tell his wife he wanted to go off his feeding tube and go home to die.

But before the end, Dick was determined to give Glowacz the motorcycle ride he had promised. He and some friends carried their dying friend to the sidecar. "We took him on what he knew was his last ride," Dick said. After the ride, Dick joined Glowacz, his wife and neighbors at his home to celebrate his life. As Glowacz had requested, they later held a motorcycle-themed funeral to say goodbye.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed," the judges said. "He stuck with his friend to the very end and made his last moments special." For that, the judges proudly named Dick the 2013 Humanitarian of the Year.

"It was quite surprising," Dick said of the award. "It's really humbling. It's one of the few times I can remember being speechless." Dick plans to accept the award in honor of Glowacz, and he is busy planning a memorial motorcycle ride. **PR**



John Dick with  
Gregg Glowacz



Vicki Glowacz, the widow of Gregg Glowacz, (l) and Dick's wife Jackie traveled to Washington to see John Dick receive his award.

# DAVID TOZZOLINO

## FREEHOLD, NJ BRANCH 924



A car veering out of control on a residential highway jolted Freehold, NJ Branch 924's David Tozzolino into action while on his route on March 29, 2012.

Realizing that the driver was in trouble, Tozzolino began running toward the car, which was now swerving across lanes of traffic and then crossing over the median into oncoming traffic.

"I recognized the car as (belonging to) someone from my own route," he said. "I just chased the car. I knew it was going to hit something."

As the vehicle crossed over the divided highway out of control, it struck a parked car in the driveway and then hit the house. Tozzolino ran to the house and climbed over both cars to get to the driver, which was difficult because the driver's-side door was wedged between the parked car and the homeowner's fence.

The carrier heard a strange noise. "I thought the air bag was going off," he said. But soon he realized that the car had struck the homeowner's natural gas utility meter—causing a serious gas leak. Tozzolino could hear the gas leaking, and the smell was overwhelming.

David Tozzolino said that he wanted to honor all of the carriers who hadn't been recognized for their heroic actions while on the job.

His friend who works at a business a few doors down from there came to the scene. "You gotta get out," he told Tozzolino.

Without regard to his own safety, Tozzolino, a former Marine, knew he had to get the driver out of the vehicle. With his foot, he pried open the driver's-side door as far as he could.

"She wasn't majorly injured, so I pulled her out," he said. The woman tried to go back to the car for her purse, keys and a few other possessions, but the carrier told her, "That's not important right now," and led her away from the house through the back yard.

It was soon discovered that a person was inside the house at the time. That resident didn't know what was happening. "They thought it was an earthquake," Tozzolino said.

The 17-year postal veteran said he did nothing extraordinary. Tozzolino thanks his wife, Patricia, and Branch 924's Carol Ford, who brought attention to this story, for their support. "I don't think it was a great act of heroism," he said. "I know there are a hundred stories out there of people who could be named national hero."

Others beg to differ about what he did.

"This was an extremely hazardous and life-threatening situation—not only to those inside the house, but to the letter carrier as well," the judges said in selecting Tozzolino as the National Hero of the Year. "It was great ingenuity to use his foot, and then removing the one occupant to a safe zone was an incredible act."

The family of the driver sent him a card to express their gratitude. Tozzolino was just glad that no one was hurt. "That's all I can ask for," he said. **PR**



2013 NATIONAL  
HERO OF THE YEAR

