

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 202-662-2420 or at postalrecord@nalc.org. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

Honoring heroic carriers



Carlos Vlaun

Heroism, 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 their 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.

Cry for help alerts carrier

One day in May while on his route, **Anthony Scardino** of South Jersey, NJ Branch 908 was delivering to the house of an 85-year-old woman who he knew lived alone in Stratford.

"There's a woman that's been living there forever," the 18-year carrier said. "She's a retired schoolteacher."

After putting the mail in the box and preparing to leave, Scardino heard a cry for help. Upon investigating, he was able, through the screen door, to see the woman lying on the floor.

She asked him, "Could you please help me?" He quickly called 911 and stayed with her until paramedics arrived and took her to the hospital.

The woman's daughter, who lives about 45 minutes away, wrote a note to the postmaster to thank Scardino. "I cannot stress enough how commendable it was that he chose to get involved," she wrote. "Without trying to be too dramatic, I do believe it's quite possible that his actions helped save her life."

She said she had been visiting her mother every three days and told him that her mother had fallen shortly after her most recent visit.

"I wouldn't have gotten to her for another three days and she could have lost her life," the woman told him, adding that though the woman was wearing a medical alert necklace, she hadn't been in a state to use it.

"She was very grateful," Scardino said.

After being checked into the hospital, doctors discovered that the woman had had a stroke, which likely caused her to fall.

The daughter didn't just write a nice note for Scardino—she also brought him a large bag of goodies from the grocery store where she works.

"I was in the right place at the right time," Vlaun said. "Somebody needed help and I called 911."

A rescue during a route inspection

San Antonio, TX Branch 421 member **Carlos Vlaun** was driving his LLV in the middle of a route inspection in May when he saw a car swerve, almost hit a pole near a fast-food restaurant and bang into the curb.

The 24-year carrier pulled his LLV next to the inspector and said, "I have to find out what's going on with the vehicle in front of me."

The inspector responded, "You're in the middle of a route."

The carrier told the inspector, "Look at what's happening." The car just kept going at the curb, bumping it.

The inspector told him to do what he had to do.

Vlaun walked up to the car and found an unconscious woman behind the wheel, her foot on the gas pedal, and a Chihuahua jumping on her chest. Figuring that something was wrong with her chest, he got into the car with her and made sure she was still breathing. He pulled the car out



Jillian Hess

of the road and called 911. Having served in the Army before joining the Postal Service, he said that his training kicked in as he was doing CPR while waiting for the ambulance to arrive.

“Once I felt calm enough and I was like, OK, now it’s time to go back to work and just continue to deliver the route,” Vlaun said.

Later, he found out that the son of the woman he helped save had posted on social media about the rescue and was trying to find out who had helped his mother. It turns out that she had had a heart attack while driving. Since Vlaun doesn’t have social media, and he hasn’t talked to her, but people told her that she had been assisted by the letter carrier.

As for the route inspection, “Believe it or not, they took that time off my route,” he said.

Carrier helps attacked dog

Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Jillian Hess** was on her route on July 26 in the town of Tonawanda when she heard the sound of a dog attack. She turned and saw a man near two fighting dogs across the street. He had been walking his dog when another dog came running out of a customer’s house and attacked the first dog.

The man “managed to get the dog off of his dog and then he started screaming, ‘Help!’ And I saw blood on his hands,” the two-year letter carrier said. “He appeared to be in shock.”

Hess ran over and since the man didn’t have anything to stop the bleeding, and since she was wearing an undershirt, she removed it and used it to compress the dog’s ear. A neighbor appeared and offered to give them a ride back to the man’s house, since it was a good distance away.

“And the whole time, I’m trying to calm him down because he was clearly in shock and he didn’t know what to do,” Hess said. “I was like, just calming him down, constantly telling him, ‘It’s going to be OK’ and he’s going to be OK. There’s a lot of blood and it’s just because of the ear. Ears are very vascular. So, if they get caught or something, they bleed a lot.”

The woman who owned the attacking dog came out of her house and asked what happened. When she found out, she secured her dog inside her house.

Hess helped the man and dog into their car and then continued her route.

The neighbor later followed up and told Hess that the woman had paid for the emergency veterinarian treatment.

Meanwhile, the owner of the dog who was attacked told the carrier that his dog had gotten stitches and is doing much better. “I am just so thankful for her willingness to run in and quite literally give the shirt off her back to help someone in need,” the man wrote to the postmaster.

“I’m a huge animal lover, so of course I’m going to help,” the carrier said. “I just think that it’s important for letter carriers to help people or animals in need, as long as the situation is safe. I think we make a huge difference and on a daily basis, whether we realize it or not.”

Odor of natural gas alerts carrier

Joseph Morales Caraballo of Western Massachusetts Branch 46 was making a delivery to a house in April when he opened the glass storm door to get to the mail slot in the exterior door.

“As soon I opened the glass door, a very strong smell of gas hit me,” the carrier said.

He immediately began knocking on the door and windows to see if there was anyone in the house. Getting no response, and worried that someone might be passed out, he looked through the windows and saw a light on, but couldn’t tell if anyone was at home.

“I was so scared, thinking that maybe somebody’s inside the house,” the carrier said.

He saw some neighbors and told them what was going on. They contacted the homeowner, who was out of town on vacation. They then called the fire department.

Firefighters arrived and entered the house to deal with the leak, and made sure no one was in the house.

“So, thank God for that,” Morales Caraballo said.



Joseph Morales Caraballo (left) jumped into action when he smelled natural gas on his route in April at the home of a customer who was out of town.

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Carrier helps woman screaming for help

Jeremy Burnett, a nine-year letter carrier, was delivering to an apartment complex on his route in Wichita, KS, in July when he heard a scream. It was difficult to tell where it was coming from, and the



Branch 201 carrier initially thought it was just kids playing in the distance. However, he soon realized that it was a woman screaming for help.

"I couldn't live with myself if I just ignored that," Burnett said.

Burnett followed the sound and checked each floor of the

three-story apartment complex. After reaching the top floor he hadn't found anyone, but the screams continued. When he got back to the first floor, he found a woman in her 90s with her apartment door cracked open. She had fallen out of her wheelchair.

"I, kind of, tried to comfort her, and reassured her that I was going to get her some help," Burnett said. "I was glad that I found her." He also assessed her for injuries to see if there was any way he could immediately help her.

Then, Burnett called emergency services and explained the situation to them. He waited with her for EMTs to arrive before continuing on his route.

Letter carrier helps man being stabbed

Brian Meyers Sr., a 15-year letter carrier, was delivering mail on Aug. 13

when he heard a man screaming for help.

The Johnstown, PA Branch 451 carrier saw two men wrestling in the side yard of a house on his route. One of the men appeared to have stabbed the other.

"I didn't think about nothing," Meyers said. "I just went up and took the guy down. Just to help him, that's all I thought of doing."

Meyers quick action prevented the assailant from stabbing the other man again.

"I just grabbed his arm and threw him straight down to the ground and jumped on him and held him there," said Meyers.

He subdued the man until the police, who had been called by someone who heard the commotion, arrived. "I had the situation under control," Meyers said. Once officers arrived, Meyers answered their questions, and the victim was taken to the hospital. Police soon charged the suspect with felony aggravated assault.

Meyers talked to the man after he returned from the hospital—and learned that the man had two big gashes on his stomach, and that the knife had just missed his spleen.

House fire interrupts carrier training

On Sept. 12, Centennial, CO Branch 5996 carrier **Roy Zuniga** was going about his route with **Becky Koch**, who was shadowing Zuniga for a day before going to Carrier Academy. As they were driving the route, they spotted heavy black smoke.

"I was like, 'Oh no, this is not good,' " the four-year letter carrier said.

As they approached the home, they realized that there was a fire in between the two houses. Zuniga called



Roy Zuniga (left) came across a fire between two houses (above) while delivering mail. He and his trainee called 911 and then evacuated the residents from the burning buildings.

911 and told Koch to start knocking on the door of one house while he knocked on the other.

A woman answered one door. She was unaware of the fire and quickly evacuated the house with her baby, husband and two dogs. In the other house, the carrier evacuated a couple, their 21-year-old daughter and a dog.

Once emergency personnel arrived and the carriers saw that the situation was in good hands, they continued on the route.

"I've never seen a fire like that before," Zuniga said.

Zuniga and Koch's actions were potentially life-saving, but the homes were almost completely destroyed by the fire.

Zuniga spoke to one of the families and learned that they wanted to remain in the area even though they couldn't stay in their house.

"So, what I told him was, 'Look, I drive my route every day,' " Zuniga said. "Every house that I see for sale or whatever, I will take a picture. I will text it to you or I'll grab a flyer."

Their carrier came through again. "They just bought a house on my route," he said.

Carrier helps crying toddler

As **Keith Minchillo**, a Branch 55 carrier, was approaching a house one day in April in Woonsocket, RI, he heard a child crying. Investigating further, the 24-year letter carrier saw a toddler face down in an alley, where the child had fallen from an open window about 10 feet above.

"I was in shock that a baby would actually fall from a window," Minchillo said.

Seeing no one around, "I rubbed the baby's belly and talked to him, told him it was going to be OK," Minchillo said.

During that time, he called 911.

“At one point the baby stood up and looked at me and gave me a big hug—put his arms out to give me a big hug,” Minchillo said. “So, I hugged the baby back and he stopped crying.”



Keith Minchillo

The ambulance soon arrived, and paramedics assessed the boy’s condition. Fortunately, there were only minor injuries. Once Minchillo knew the boy was safe after the incident,

he continued on his route.

Minchillo was unable to find out how the toddler had fallen from a window, but he noticed that the family moved out just a few weeks later. Nonetheless, he said he was happy he had been able to help.

Letter carrier helps severely ill co-worker

One day in May in Magnolia, DE, **Patrick Raymond** arrived at work a little earlier than usual. The Southern Delaware Branch 906 carrier spotted his co-worker and friend, **Dan Miller**, standing outside his truck coughing and struggling to breathe.

After assessing Miller’s condition, the 17-year letter carrier asked their supervisor, Michelle, what to do. She told him to take Miller to the hospital, despite Miller’s reluctance.

While Raymond was driving him to the emergency room, Miller lost con-

sciousness. At the hospital, Miller was immediately laid on a gurney and CPR was performed. His heartbeat resumed a few minutes later, and he was soon admitted and put on a respirator.

“It felt really surreal, like it wasn’t happening,” Raymond said.

Miller had severe double pneumonia and heart issues, and, after this incident, he had to always wear a life vest for his heart and was unable to continue work as a letter carrier.

He is thankful for his co-workers’ actions, though. “Lacking either of them or the rescue crew at the hospital, I would not be here today,” Miller wrote to *The Postal Record*. “They saved my life, and I want people to know about it.”

Raymond reflected on his friendship with Miller, saying, “I don’t feel like a hero. I just feel like I was there for my friend. Thank God I was there, and I’m glad he’s doing better.”

Carrier warns family about fire

Brittany Nowak was walking her regular route one August day in South Buffalo, NY, when she saw small flames and smoke coming from a house’s upstairs patio, which she initially thought was from a lit cigarette.

The Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member called 911 and



Patrick Raymond

knocked on the front door of the house after realizing that the fire had expanded. She helped evacuate the family and two dogs from the house. The woman living there

initially tried to extinguish the flames herself, but Nowak told her that it was time to get out.

“I didn’t expect it to be as bad as it was,” the six-year carrier said. “I was relieved and just grateful they all got out.”

After ensuring that everyone was safe and making sure the fire department got there, Nowak continued with her route. The fire caused significant damage, leaving the upper part of the house uninhabitable. The building ended up being condemned, and the residents had to move out.

Letter carrier saves man trapped in burning car

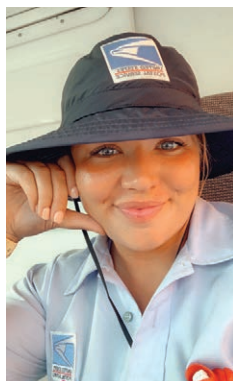
Tesfaye Deyasso was driving home from work in St. Louis Park, MN, on April 18 around 6:30 p.m. when he witnessed a man driving off the highway and into a highway barrier. As the car smashed into a pole, the front caught on fire.

“Everything happened within, like, a second,” the Minneapolis Branch 9 member said.

The four-year letter carrier pulled over and ran up to the car. Seeing that the driver was unconscious, Deyasso attempted to open the door, but it was locked.

Deyasso finally got the attention of the driver, who unlocked the door. With the help of some good Samaritans, Deyasso got the door partly open.

“We tried our best to open the door [farther], but it was like six inches from



Brittany Nowak

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Tesfaye Deyasso

the barrier... so we could not let him out," Deyasso said.

Deyasso told everyone to try to find something to break open the window. One person tried using a large piece of plastic he had found on the ground, but it didn't work. Finally, a highway assistance person arrived with a device that could be used to open the window. The group hoisted the driver out of the car and to safety.

Seconds later, the rest of the car, including where the driver had been sitting, burst into flames.

"I think, like, maybe 20 seconds later the whole car just burned," Deyasso said.

Seeing the driver was in good hands, Deyasso, who was feeling the effects of the spreading smoke, left the scene. For the next six hours, Deyasso struggled to breathe and wheezed due to smoke inhalation. As he was driving back, he recalled it being so bad that he called a doctor, who instructed him on how to slow his breathing.

The smoke had been intense enough that one of the Samaritans had to go to the hospital with the driver due to

smoke inhalation, Deyasso said. The driver is doing fine now, having sustained only minor injuries.

The local Fox affiliate aired footage from a dashcam that captured the incident.

"A lot of people think that we only deliver mail and packages, but I would like to let them know we can also save a life," Deyasso said. "We can help people."

Carrier performs CPR

Brandon LaRoach, a seven-year carrier, was delivering on his route on Halloween when he spotted something spinning. The Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 carrier realized that it was a man in an electric wheelchair spinning out of control in the middle of the street. LaRoach then saw the man fall out of the chair. The carrier immediately reacted, driving down the street to help and calling 911.

"I flew over in the ProMaster," LaRoach said.

Once he arrived on the scene, he recognized the man as Mr. Knowles, a customer with whom LaRoach chatted nearly every workday. Knowles was lying on the ground unconscious and had no pulse. LaRoach promptly began rounds of CPR and a passerby soon stopped to help.

"[CPR] kind of takes a lot out of you," LaRoach said. "Once one of us was getting kind of tired, we would switch then."

After 30 to 40 minutes, the responding EMTs had been considering pronouncing him dead, but at the last moment, they found Knowles's pulse.

"It felt amazing when he got a pulse," LaRoach said.

Unfortunately, Knowles died of a heart attack a day later. Knowles's

family was happy that they had been to spend his last day with him and say their goodbyes.

"In my opinion, I don't even think I deserve [recognition], but ... his family still, like, thanked me because of what I did," LaRoach said. "They were able to say goodbye to him."

Hearing alarm, carrier alerts fire department

Michael Pentico, an eight-year carrier, was at the beginning of his route one day in May in Des Moines, IA, when he heard a beeping noise from a house. The Central Iowa Merged Branch 352 carrier thought that it was probably nothing, so he finished a couple more deliveries and on his way back decided to see if it was still beeping.

"If it was still going off when I came back around, I was going to stop and check," Pentico said.

He went up to the window, which was open, and could clearly hear the beeping of the fire alarm and could also smell smoke.

He went to the front door and knocked, but no one answered. Pentico called 911 and operators sent out the fire department. Firefighters told him he didn't need to stick around, so he continued his route.

Later in the day, one of the firefighters stopped him to thank him. The firefighter told him that without his intervention there could have been "a full-blown house fire," Pentico said.

Although there were no people in the house, there was a dog, cats and reptiles. The heat lamp used to keep the reptiles warm was what had caused the smoking. **PR**