

Proud TO SERVE

Heroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or fire fighters. 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 are often the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

Heat + humidity = stroke

Deborah Schadt sensed something was awry as she watched a supervisor escort a fellow letter carrier to his car early on a steamy August morning.

Obviously woozy, Steve Bergeson was sitting in his running car in the employee lot when Schadt, president of Waterloo, Iowa Branch 512, checked on him moments later. She urged him to go back inside, where it was much cooler, but Bergeson assured her that if the car's air conditioning didn't help him feel better, he would call his wife and ask for a ride home.

Schadt went back into the Waterloo Post Office and tried, unsuccessfully, to reach Bergeson's wife by phone. Fearing for Bergeson's safety, she then called for paramedics, who quickly arrived and transported the by-then-delirious letter carrier to the hospital.

Emergency room doctors quickly diagnosed the 17-year veteran carrier as a victim of heat stroke and rushed him into intensive care. Two days later, after Bergeson's condition improved, a doctor told the carrier that if Schadt had not

called 911, he would have been dead by noon.

Iowa Gov. Thomas J. Vilsack presented a certificate of recognition to Schadt for her cool-headed, life-saving actions.

Carrier protects pre-teen from strange man

A man trailing behind a letter carrier kept repeating a few bizarre questions: "Do you want my phone number?" he asked. "Will you give me a ride somewhere?"

The carrier, Ames, Iowa Branch 1081 President **Jeff Coleman**, ignored him and finished his relay. But he couldn't shake the discomforting thought of the strange man roaming the neighborhood and harassing others. Returning to his previous loop, he found the man following a 12-year-old girl home from school. Fearing for the girl's safety, Coleman maneuvered his LLV between the man and the pre-teen.

"Is this guy bothering you?" the carrier asked. The girl nodded.

The seven-year NALC member asked her to step closer to the LLV and called his postmaster, who patched him through to a police dispatcher. When an officer arrived at the scene, he restrained the odd fellow and then took him to the station for questioning. At the officer's request, Coleman then escorted the shaken girl to her home a few blocks away.

"I'm glad I was in the right place at the right time," the PTF carrier said.

He wasn't the only one. Later that week, a plate of freshly baked cookies greeted the carrier on his rounds, compliments of one very grateful seventh grader.



Waterloo, Iowa Branch 512 President Deborah Schadt shows off the award presented to her by Gov. Tom Vilsack for her life-saving actions.



Moon Choi of Rockville, Maryland Branch 3825 responded to a patron's faint cries for help.

Faint cry enough for him

Although other companies deliver parcels to neighborhoods, letter carriers deliver much more, including acute attention. Take Rockville, Maryland Branch 3825 member **Moon Choi**, for example. After a UPS employee unsuccessfully attempted to deliver a package to a house, he returned to his brown truck and left the area. But when Choi rang the doorbell, a faint cry from inside stopped him in his tracks. Straining his ear toward the door, he made out a male voice calling, "Help me! Help me!" The man had fallen and needed medical assistance.

The carrier immediately called 911 from his cell phone. Within minutes, paramedics arrived and Choi continued his deliveries. Thanks to the carrier's keen sense of hearing, the man received prompt treatment and was later released from the hospital.

Carrier's bid to save terrier

Around noon on a late October day, **Bryan Ellingsworth** of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Branch 500 spotted smoke rising above a house on the next street on his route. At first, he dismissed it as coming from a chimney, but as he approached, it became obvious that house's second floor was on fire.

Ellingsworth used his cell phone to call 911 and notify local fire fighters. He then sprinted to the porch and knocked on the slightly open front door. No one answered, but

the concerned carrier entered and began to search every room he could get to for anyone who might still be in the house. As it happened, 19-year-old Jennifer Grandon was quietly working on her computer in a back room, unaware of the fiery drama unfolding above her.

Ellingsworth quickly hurried her outside, and the young woman confirmed that the house was empty, except for a small terrier.

Grabbing a flashlight, Ellingsworth dashed back inside to rescue the confused and frightened pooch, which was cowering behind a bed on the second floor. Upstairs, the carrier crawled on his stomach to stay below the smoke and tried several times to coax the dog out of hiding. The terrier, however, was too frightened, and ultimately Ellingsworth was forced to retreat. Sadly, the dog did not survive, but local fire fighters gave the letter carrier credit for saving Grandon's life—not to mention limiting damage to the house.

Funds found

New Haven, Connecticut Branch 19 member **Angelo Catone** received more than outgoing mail from a patron one afternoon last fall when he found an envelope stuffed with bank deposits—mostly in cash—nestled among the usual stack of letters and bills. Upon noticing the error, the 21-year NALC member swiftly contacted the customer and arranged for the envelope to be returned to her.



Donald Bennett has made quite the name for himself in the small community of McMurray, Pennsylvania. Last August, the Pittsburgh Branch 84 member noticed that James Garbera's mail had not been picked up for several days, although his truck was still parked in the driveway. Bennett asked a neighbor if he had seen the elderly resident recently, but the man had not. The neighbor, sharing the carrier's concern, began searching for Garbera and discovered him disoriented and wandering down the street from his house. He was taken to the hospital for necessary medical care.

In January, the carrier's astute observations once again alerted him to trouble. An elderly patron's garage door was open and daily newspapers had not been retrieved. Bennett peeked through a window and spotted the resident inside the house on the floor, where she had fallen the day before. After calling 911, the 23-year NALC member stayed by the woman's side until emergency personnel arrived.

As the letter carrier for the Ryder Assisted Care community in Humacao, Puerto Rico, NALC member **Jose Torres Colón** believes it's part of his job to keep an eye on the elderly residents. Fortunately, he was in the right place at the right time when 80-year-old Esperanza Hernandez took a tumble on the sidewalk outside the main building. Colón, of San Juan Branch 869, rushed to her aid. Flagging down a security truck, the carrier asked for the driver's help. The pair obtained a wheelchair and wheeled the woman to the community's hospital for treatment.

In a letter to Branch 869 President Carmelo Montañez, a community representative wrote, "We are profusely grateful for the humanitarian gesture that Mr. Torres Colón performed. We congratulate you for having such an efficient and sensible member."



Rigoberto Labrada of South Florida Branch 1071 rescued a family from a house filled with deadly carbon monoxide gas.

Deadly air

"The best decision the Postal Service could have made was to have mail delivery after Hurricane Katrina cut across Florida," said South Florida Branch 1071 member **Rigoberto Labrada**. "You never know when you will be needed to help someone." The 17-year carrier did just that when he rescued a family from a house filled with deadly levels of carbon monoxide.

It was the day after Katrina swept over the state last August, and many of Labrada's patrons were without electricity. He spotted a frightened woman frantically knocking on doors and stopped to find out what was wrong. The woman, a housekeeper for one of his patrons, had arrived at work to discover her employers and their children lying in bed unconscious. Unable to rouse them, the woman called 911 but dispatchers were unable to understand her heavily-accented English.

Labrada reached emergency personnel on the phone, entered the home and followed the dispatcher's instructions until help arrived.

The carrier later learned the family had been running a generator in the backyard to power essential items, but had left a sliding door slightly open, allowing toxic carbon monoxide fumes to enter the home and poison the family.

The customers were briefly hospitalized and

released. A few weeks later, they visited Labrada at the post office to personally thank him for his swift and life-saving actions.

Water rescue

It was the splashing and shouting that brought **Carmelo LaSalle** to Spring Creek on an early summer afternoon. The 34-year-old member of Brooklyn, New York Branch 41 was working his route near the Belt Parkway when he spotted a young man down by the water, shouting, "Alberto! Alberto!" Two boys had been fishing for crabs in a dangerous part of the creek when 17-year-old Alberto Cruz, who could not swim, wandered in up to his shoulders and slipped. He panicked, and was soon struggling to stay above the surface. His friend unsuccessfully tossed out a crab net for Cruz to grab onto, while LaSalle rushed to the side of the creek and yelled to the drowning boy to stay calm.

Using his cell phone, LaSalle dialed 911 but could not get through. Thinking quickly, he called his station and told his supervisors to place the emergency call for him. Later, LaSalle told reporters that as crucial moments ticked by, Cruz had "moved a little bit toward the shore, and then he just stopped" and slipped under the water. Rescue divers arrived, pulled Cruz out of the water and rushed him to a nearby hospital.



Letter carrier **Maureen Reid** was delivering mail to Birchwood Condominiums when she saw an elderly woman collapse in a nearby parking lot. Reid, a member of Bridgeport, Connecticut Branch 32, called 911 from her cell phone and rushed to the woman's side.

Afraid that the woman may have injured herself in the fall, she advised her not to move and remained with her until paramedics arrived.

When Sioux City, South Dakota Branch 69 member **Gordon Faber** heard a cry for help, he followed the sound to a patron in distress. An 80-year-old woman had fallen coming out of her front door. "Thank goodness you're here," she told Faber, and explained that she

had been lying on the ground for 45 minutes. The carrier called 911 and the woman's daughter and waited with her until an ambulance arrived. The woman underwent surgery for a broken leg and spent a week in the hospital before returning home.

When one of **Joe Conforti's** elderly patrons failed to pick up her mail, the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Branch 84 member grew concerned and contacted the police. They found the woman in bed, where she had been lying for a week, too weak to move. Thanks to the carrier, the woman was quickly transported to a hospital for treatment. Paramedics credit Conforti with saving his patron's life.



Tulsa, Oklahoma Branch 1358 member Greg McElroy battled a spreading garage fire with a garden hose.



Excused absence

It was only when shop steward **William Lawless** notified officers of Syracuse, New York Branch 134 that he couldn't attend a branch meeting that his union brothers and sisters learned of the carrier's run-in with thieves months earlier. The reason he couldn't make the meeting? His presence was required at a Civilian Recognition Ceremony held by Syracuse police to honor citizens who help keep the city's streets safe.

Lawless, a 21-year NALC member, noticed two men breaking into a house on his route. After asking a business owner to call 911, he surreptitiously followed the pair until police caught up. Once the carrier positively identified the thieves, they were arrested and later connected with two additional burglaries in the area.

"I've worked the same route for more than 18 years," Lawless said at the ceremony. "When things aren't right, I spot it."

Family's guardian carrier

It was just before 6 a.m. one muggy August morning when fire erupted in a small three-story home in Paterson, New Jersey. Within minutes, the blaze had spread to two other houses in the row, destroying everything in its path and eventually leaving 23 people homeless. Most of the residents were still slumbering soundly at the time, oblivious to the dangerous situation unfolding around them.

Fortunately, Paterson Branch 120 President **Joseph Murone** was already awake—in fact, he was making an early morning delivery in the neighborhood.

"I noticed smoke pouring out of a house, and I thought, 'Let's take a look,'" said the 22-year NALC member. "I couldn't believe there was no one outside."

The carrier pulled his LLV over, ran up the steps, and pounded on the door as the fire leapt in front of his eyes.

"I was doing everything I could to wake people—yelling and screaming, banging on the windows," Murone remembered.

"We were sleeping and suddenly there was banging," resident Waleska Morales recalled. "I said, 'Who's kicking on my door at this time of day?'"

The woman, her sister-in-law and three young children raced outside as the flames jumped to an adjoining structure.

Although two of the houses were completely destroyed and a third heavily damaged, no one was injured, thanks to Murone's quick thinking.

"Thinking back on it, I'm starting to believe he was an angel," Morales told *The Herald News*. "I mean, what's a mailman doing around at that hour anyway?"

Quick search, quick hose

Driving up a street on his route, **Greg McElroy**, a member of Tulsa, Oklahoma Branch 1358, noticed smoke coming from a house. In the front yard, a screaming woman held a child who appeared to be burned. McElroy parked his vehicle and sprinted to the house, as the hysterical woman clutched the youngster. The letter carrier went inside to look for other occupants and the source of the smoke. When he returned to the yard, the woman assured him that the house was empty. McElroy then grabbed a garden hose and went back inside to extinguish the fire, which had started in the attached garage.

Tulsa fire fighters soon arrived and administered first aid to the burned child while making sure the fire was out. Later, the Tulsa Fire Department formally recognized McElroy for his calm and quick action. ✉

The front door was open at patron Charlie Lou Bennett's house, so **Steve Rempala** decided to walk the elderly woman's package up to her front door. The decision turned out to be fortuitous. There was no response when the Michigan City, Indiana Branch 455 member knocked at the door and called the woman's name. Thinking the situation unusual, he peered inside the house and spotted Bennett unconscious on the landing of the stairs. The carrier called an ambulance and stayed with the woman until paramedics arrived. Before continuing his route, he also notified neighbors and asked them to call family members. Some might have stopped there, but Rempala also visited the hospital later that evening, concerned about his patron's condition.

Bennett's condition improved over the next few days, and she was able to talk and laugh with friends and family members. Sadly, she took a turn for the worst and died a short time later. But her family members, touched by the carrier's actions, wrote a letter to the local paper to thank him.

"Had Mr. Rempala not followed his instincts and cared enough to take the actions that he did, we firmly believe that she would have died alone," they wrote. "We will forever be grateful for the very precious gift that was given to us that Saturday by Mr. Rempala—the gift of just a little more time. Thank you with all our hearts."

Galesburg, Illinois Branch 88 member **Donna Santiago** was worried when patron Mary St. George had not retrieved her mail for a few days. There was no answer at the door, so the 21-year carrier called St. George's daughter, Cindy Dawson, from her cell phone and asked her to come over. When the two women entered the house, they found the older woman lying on the floor and called 911. Thanks to the carrier's timely intervention, the woman was treated and recovered fully. A plant and a thank-you note greeted the carrier at the post office the following day from the grateful daughter.