

Proud TO SERVE

When most people picture a hero, visions of fire fighters, police officers or soldiers come to mind. But some think of a different person, also in uniform: their letter carrier.

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

A hostage in her own home

"I need you to call the cops. My grandson is inside and he's been holding me prisoner," the elderly woman calmly told her letter carrier, **Brian Birch**.

The Denver, Colorado Branch 47 member had been delivering mail across the street when the woman had called to him that she needed help. Birch hurried over, thinking the 94-year-old needed assistance getting off the porch.

The 29-year-old carrier was stunned by her words. He briefly thought that the woman might be delusional. That notion was quickly dispelled, however, when the grandson came out on the porch and demanded that his grandmother go back inside.

"She grabbed the rail and refused to go back in," said Birch. "She told me that he wanted her property and that he was trying to kill her."

The grandson tried to convince the carrier that the woman was crazy and that he should continue his route. But Birch innately knew the woman was telling the truth and refused to leave.

While her grandson was inside, the

woman relayed to the carrier that her grandson refused to let her use the phone or leave the house, and rarely fed her. She had managed to slip out of the house unnoticed when he was distracted with some house repairs.

"Promise me you'll call the police," the woman pleaded to Birch. "I'm scared to death. I may be 94, but there's nothing wrong with my mind."

The NALC member called 911 as soon as he returned to his LLV. Police arrived and arrested the grandson after the woman's story was verified. Officers later told Birch it was fortunate that he intervened when he did, as the elderly woman was living in squalid conditions.

"I'm just glad I was there to help," the letter carrier said. "I only wish I had known sooner."

Carrier a pro at fire detection

"I was just at the right place at the right time," **Charmaine Fitzpatrick** said of hearing a faint beeping sound while carrying mail on her route in Mentor, Ohio.

"It sounded like a smoke alarm, and I thought I smelled smoke," she said. "I wasn't sure, since it was the season people use their fireplaces."

Just to be on the safe side, the Mentor Branch 4195 member took action. No one was in the house, so Fitzpatrick notified a neighbor who called 911. Fire fighters discovered that a heat lamp over an iguana tank had toppled onto a now-smoldering carpet, causing the house to gradually fill with smoke.

Fire department officials credit Fitzpatrick with saving the house from destruction. And this isn't the first time the carrier has stopped a potential blaze, either—she was noted in the May 2005 *Postal Record* for a similar incident.



Denver, CO Br. 47 steward **Kari Meltz** (l) notified the branch office that Brother **Brian Birch** (r) rescued a woman from elder abuse.

Baby trapped on board

It's a mother's nightmare. It was a sweltering summer day in Texas when Vicky Green locked her keys—and worse, her son—inside her car. Although a window was cracked open, within minutes the temperature inside the vehicle was approaching 100 degrees. A small crowd had gathered around, but no one was sure of the proper action to take, concerned that breaking the window might accidentally injure the baby. Dallas Branch 132 member **Larry Torme** spotted the commotion from across the street and decided to investigate. With a little contortion, he was able to maneuver his arm into the car through the slightly open window and open the door. After passing the infant to his shaken mother, Torme continued his deliveries, to the amazement of the crowd.

The next day, Green contacted the post office to thank the carrier for his fast and flexible reaction. "I was glad to help," the carrier replied.

Thumbs-up says thanks

Although **Duane Durand** couldn't understand the woman's words, there was no mistaking that something was seriously wrong at the Davis Road apartments.

"A mother came running out of the building screaming," the Massachusetts N.E. Merged Branch 25 member said. She led him inside, where a young boy lay unconscious on the floor in the hallway.

"He was really hot to the touch," the carrier remembered. He scooped up the youngster, carried him inside the apartment and called 911. He stayed with them and soothed mother and child until paramedics arrived. The boy, who apparently experienced a seizure, made a full recovery.

Durand received a commendation from the Postal Service for his actions and endured some good-natured ribbing from his union brothers and sisters.

"I didn't want to make a big deal out of it," the modest carrier said. "Everyone in the post office teases each other enough as it is." But he gladly accepts recognition from one source—the family.

"It's nice to do that part of my route now. When I come to their apartment, the boy and his mother come out and wave," he said. "We don't speak each other's language, so we can't really talk, but she gives me the thumbs-up to say that the boy's okay."

Twenty-two letter carriers from throughout the Philadelphia District were honored for their quick thinking and courageous actions at the Postal Heroes Recognition Ceremony last fall. Special guests included then-Region 12 National Business Agent Timothy O'Malley and Postmaster Judith Martin.

- ◆ The honorees included: **Philip Sibley, BuxMont Br. 920**. A crowd had gathered around a two-year-old boy wandering the streets in his socks. The child was unable to tell authorities his name or where he lived but Sibley recognized the child from his route and led police to the child's home. His mother had been taking a nap when the boy wandered off.
- ◆ **Art Gallagher, Philadelphia Br. 157**. Gallagher watched as a man took a parcel from a patron's front steps and put it under his jacket. "Put it back! I saw you take it," the carrier yelled. He called 911 and reported the incident, then cornered the man in a white truck where he had tried to hide. Gallagher restrained the thief until police arrived.
- ◆ **Marlo Collier, Sue Flynn, Steve Klemmer, Philadelphia Br. 157**. The would-be purse snatcher picked an unfortunate spot to launch his attack—right across the street from the Fox Chase Post Office. When the three carriers heard the woman's cries, they chased the thief and his girlfriend down the block and Flynn called 911. Although the duo eluded immediate capture, police later arrested them.
- ◆ **Stan Dylinski, Philadelphia Br. 157**. When three children tried to steal another girl's scooter, Dylinski confronted them and wouldn't let the young hoodlums leave with the hot wheels.
- ◆ **Kurt Brown, Willow Grove Br. 2771**. A large dog escaped from his fenced yard, jumped over another chain link fence and grabbed a small Sheltie by the back of the neck. Brown heard a neighbor screaming at the sight and raced to the smaller pooch's aid. He quickly maced the larger dog, causing it to drop the Sheltie from its jowels.

Other carriers recognized for a variety of services to patrons were: Joseph Barnes, Willow Grove Br. 2771; Joseph Bry, Philadelphia Br. 157; David Carfagno, SE PA Mgd. Br. 725; Joseph Costello, Philadelphia Br. 157; Walter Debes, Philadelphia Br. 157; Deneen Eaddy, Philadelphia Br. 157; Michael Flynn, Philadelphia Br. 157; Willie Jenkins, Bux-Mont Br. 920; David Ling, Philadelphia Br. 157; Bob Metz, Bux-Mont Br. 920; Mark Neal, Philadelphia Br. 157; Robert Pakstis, Philadelphia Br. 157; Steve Phillips, Philadelphia Br. 157; Joseph Ryan, Great Valley Mgd. Br. 4317; and Vincent Sadonis, Lehigh Valley Br. 274.



Long Island Merged Br. 6000 member Troy Gallagher stopped a runaway minivan from rolling backwards into a busy intersection.

Ed Stever, *NY Metro Area Update*

Runaway minivan

The woman had stopped briefly to drop off mail in a collection box in front of the Lawrence Post Office. It was a humid summer morning, so she didn't think twice about leaving the air-conditioner running for her two children in the backseat when she got out. But the woman also made a dangerous mistake—she failed to put the minivan in park or set the brake.

The vehicle started rolling backward into the street with the two children strapped inside. The mother's screams attracted the attention of letter carrier **Troy Gallagher**, who had just left the post office to begin his route.

Without a second thought, the Long Island Merged Branch 6000 member launched into action. The driver's side door had swung open, so Gallagher jumped behind the wheel and slammed on the brakes. He then maneuvered the van into a parking spot. The shaken woman thanked the carrier profusely, but left without giving her name.

A crossing guard who watched the incident from across the street wrote the postmaster to praise the carrier's quick actions.

"I couldn't believe how this young man responded

so immediately," she wrote. "His heroic response prevented a terrible catastrophe."

The nose knows

Cleveland, Ohio Branch 40 member **Christine Dougan** was convinced she smelled natural gas near patron Inga Primuth's house and promptly informed her. But when the gas company crew checked the area, they found nothing.

A few weeks later, the carrier caught another whiff of the distinctive odor in the same spot. "I insisted there was a gas leak somewhere—I was certain," Dougan remembered.

Primuth called the gas company again, and this time a leak was found—an enormous one that had spread all the way from the street to the house.

"Christine's sense of smell prevented what might have been a catastrophic situation for our family, our home and our neighbors," wrote Primuth in a letter to the postmaster. "She is our hero."

The carrier's keen sense of smell also came in handy a few months later when she smelled gas at another patron's house, leading to the discovery of yet another leak.



Mary Koogler will never forget that day last May. "I was at my refrigerator putting some meat away and my left leg just gave out," the 77-year-old remembered. She fell to the floor, breaking her ankle. For the next hour, the elderly woman hollered for help.

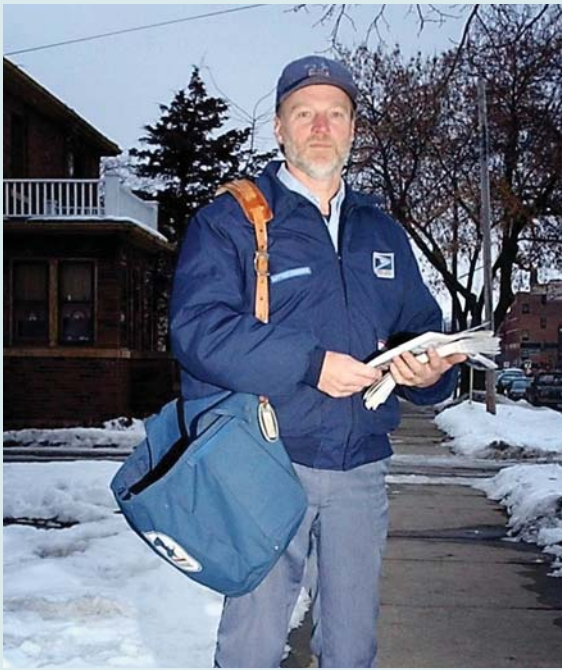
When **Eric Haney** arrived to deliver the mail, children living next door told the carrier that they heard someone screaming inside the apartment and didn't know what to do. The Dayton, Ohio Branch 182 member found Koogler and immediately called an ambulance and the woman's son. When EMTs arrived, the 15-year carrier helped them lift his patron onto the gurney.

For his actions, Haney has received a num-

ber of awards, but he maintains "it's not a big deal."

"It's just something I would expect anyone to do for me," he said.

Alexandria, Virginia Branch 567 member **Thomas Boughton** found elderly resident Walter Edwards after he had slipped and fallen in his house. After calling 911, Boughton not only stayed until aid arrived, he calmly talked with the customer through the medical examination up to the point emergency personnel were ready to take him to the hospital. After work, the carrier returned to the neighborhood to apprise neighbors of the situation and ensure Mr. Edwards's family would be notified.



Concerned about one of his patrons, Mankato, MN Br. 90 member Daryl Steffan checked on the woman after work.

Pat Christman,
Mankato Free Press

Good Samaritan

“Your postal carrier **Brian Woodward** deserves to be recognized by the Postal Service as a good Samaritan,” patron Betty-Lou Lewis wrote in a letter to the Bangor postmaster. The Central Maine Merged Branch 391 member heard a smoke alarm while delivering mail to Lewis’s house one late October day. The carrier immediately called 911. He feared his patron was still inside the residence, as her car was still parked in the garage. Fortunately, Lewis had received a ride to an appointment and was not at home.

She returned to find the house filled with fire fighters, but the fire was out.

“The house had suffered smoke damage, but thanks to Brian’s competence, it is still standing,” Lewis wrote. “He deserves my sincere and heartfelt thanks.”

A timely life-saver

It was a wintry February day and a woman had stepped out of her Jeep to remove snow and ice from the windshield. But she failed to put the vehicle in park, and it suddenly lurched backward, trapping her leg under the right tire. **Gerald Bower** of Lincoln, Nebraska Branch 8 heard the woman’s screams and raced to her aid. The first one on the scene, he attempted to lift the Jeep off her leg, and was soon joined by a few other men. Together, they were able to raise the Jeep just high enough to release the woman from the tire’s firm grip. Thanks to Bower’s strength and determination,

the woman suffered only minor injuries.

The carrier modestly chalked up his actions to the weather and mail volume. “Running a little behind schedule put me at the right place at the right time to help a person in need,” said Bower, who visited the woman a few days later.

Blown away

It was an extremely windy day in Pocatello, Idaho and anything not securely tied down could easily become airborne. When a woman looked out and saw her trash can fly across the driveway, she ran outside to retrieve it. But as she grabbed the runaway receptacle, a gust of wind caught hold of her, pushing her backward and causing her to fall under the weight of the can.

Trapped between the garage door and her car, no one heard the woman’s cries until her letter carrier, **Sherm Hansen**, came up the driveway with the mail.

“Thank God you’re here,” she exclaimed. The Pocatello Branch 927 member helped the resident up and into her house and asked if she needed him to call 911. She replied that she would be okay after a brief rest.

“It is a credit to the post office that people like Mr. Hansen are alert to the needs of those they serve,” the woman’s husband wrote in a letter to the local postmaster.

“Thanks to him, my wife is doing well and would like to express her sincere appreciation for his actions.” ✉



“Things just weren’t quite right,” said Belleville, IL Mgd. Branch 155 member **Gary Schroeder**. He knew his 77-year-old patron picked up her mail regularly. But mail had begun to accumulate in the box. Schroeder contacted the police, who obtained a key to the house and found the woman incapacitated.

To recognize his life-saving actions, Schroeder’s wife (and fellow Branch 155 member) Judy surprised him at the station with a sheet cake decorated with a picture of a super hero.

Daryl Steffen, a 25-year member of Mankato, Minnesota Branch 90, had an elderly patron who used to greet him at the door nearly every day. But then days went by, and there was no sign of her. Concerned, the carrier decided to check on her after work one chilly December afternoon. When Steffen knocked at the door, a faint voice called from inside, “Don’t leave.”

Peering in, Steffen spotted her sprawled on the kitchen floor. He raced next door and called the police. Thanks to the carrier, the woman made a full recovery.

When letter carrier **Bill Steffus** arrived at the house of an elderly patron, he found two neighbors trying to aid 87-year-old Marie Chester, who had suffered a serious fall near her foyer door. Unfortunately, she was blocking the entrance, making it impossible to enter the house. The neighbors had called paramedics and were telling Chester through the foyer window that help was coming.

But Steffus had a better idea. The Cape Atlantic, New Jersey Branch 903 member used a stepladder to climb to the kitchen window and shattered the glass with his bare hands. He then crawled carefully through the broken window and calmed and comforted the woman until emergency personnel arrived. Thanks to the carrier, his patron is making a slow but steady recovery.