

Proud TO SERVE

“I could see fire in the door jamb and running across the ceiling. Then a big chunk of the ceiling came down and I caught a glimpse of the guy’s leg.”

—Branch 500 letter carrier Tim Foote on rescuing his neighbor from a burning house

Heroism, like the mail, comes in many forms—think of police officers or fire fighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the shape 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.

Persistence pays off in nailing down gas leak

Athens, Ohio Branch 997 member **Charlie Rose** detected the smell of natural gas in a neighborhood on his route and called the local gas company. Despite investigations, no leak was found. The smell “seemed to be migratory,” resident Tom Hirst told *The Messenger*. Rose, however, was certain the smell was becoming stronger as the days passed, so he took it upon himself to alert his nearby customers, who also confirmed the scent and contacted the gas company as well. With each complaint, Columbia Gas personnel checked the vicinity, but could never detect a leak.

After about nine months of the on-again, off-again odor, the smell of the natural gas became heavy and constant for more than a week. After yet another investigation, a leak was finally discovered in a house along Rose’s route. “The

nature of the leak was not dangerous to life or property,” a gas company spokesman said, “but we still wanted to get the leak fixed quickly and were able to do so.”

Residents appreciated their carrier’s efforts. “We owe a big thank-you to Charlie Rose for being persistent in keeping this problem on the radar,” resident Cynthia Kaldis wrote to the newspaper. Rose, no stranger to heroic acts, once assisted a person in cardiac arrest and also helped police track down a suspect during a foot chase (see the June 2008 *Postal Record*). Rose said he’ll continue to look out for his customers as he walks his route. “I know that if someone sees something wrong in my neighborhood, I’d want them to help me,” Rose said.

Neighborhoodly rescue

Relaxing and watching a football game on TV one evening, **Tim Foote** was startled to hear his daughter yelling from the den. He ran to find out what was wrong and discovered she was panicked by the sight of a neighbor’s house being engulfed by flames. Even though he was barefoot and wearing just a hooded sweatshirt and gym shorts, the carrier (and former fire company captain) raced to the home. He broke in through the garage door and, once inside, dropped down and began crawling around.

“I could see fire in the door jamb and running across the ceiling,” he told the (PA) *Patriot-News*. “Then a big chunk of the ceiling came down and I caught a



glimpse of the guy's leg." Foote had spotted his 78-year-old neighbor, David Jauss, unconscious on the living room floor. He immediately pulled the man out of the blazing residence to safety. Fire fighters on the scene said Jauss likely wouldn't be alive if not for the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Branch 500 member's actions.

Aid a long time coming

A man sprawled head downward on an outdoor stairway alarmed High Point, North Carolina Branch 936 member **Mike Thompson** as he was making his rounds. He rushed over and saw the man was experiencing seizures and having trouble breathing. The customer's foot was caught on a step, and he was laying on the spiral steps on his back, shaking, with his arms thrown out to the side. Thompson called 911 and, as he was waiting for emergency crews to arrive, he followed the directions from the 911 dispatcher.

"I held him up on my chest, and I kept my right hand below the back of his head so his head wouldn't go back," he told the *High Point Enterprise*. The man kept seizing and was breathing abnormally in the minutes they were waiting. "The dispatcher said, 'Just keep doing what you're doing until the ambulance gets there.' It seemed like forever for me," Thompson said. EMS officials told him if he hadn't held him up, the customer would have choked on his tongue and wouldn't have made it.

MARTIN CHRISTIANSEN NOTICED ONE Thursday that an elderly customer hadn't picked up her mail. After a weekend off, he returned to his route and saw that the mail receptacle was filled to the brim. The carrier knocked on the 92-year-old patron's door. When he heard no response, he called his station manager, who called police. Paramedics soon arrived at the residence, and the patron was found collapsed on her floor, where she had been for several days. The Northeastern New York Branch 358 member was commended for his decisive action in securing life-saving aid for his customer.

AS SHE WAS ATTEMPTING TO DELIVER A certified letter on a cold winter day, carrier **Deborah Baxter** heard cries for help coming from the house next door. She headed in that direction and found Peter Fornall lying on the ground, his face bleeding after injuring his nose when he fell on an icy patch. The Hudson Valley Merged, New York Branch 137 member immediately called 911 and stayed with the customer until emergency personnel arrived.

T-6 CARRIER DENNIS DONNELLY WAS on his rounds when he discovered an elderly customer who had fallen on his driveway. The man was unable to get up, and had lain there for several hours in snow and cold temperatures before being found. The Warwick, Rhode Island Branch 3166 member called 911 and paramedics took the 89-year-old to the hospital, where he was treated for cuts and severe hypothermia. The customer's daughters live out of state and, since he had no records with him, the hospital was unable to contact them. When regular carrier **Mark Padien** returned to the route the next day, he noticed the mail piling up, an abnormality for the customer.

Padien consulted with fellow NALC member Donnelly, then with a neighbor, who was able to contact the man's daughters. The family expressed their gratitude for Donnelly and Padien's attentiveness and willingness to help.

HEARING SOMEONE CALLING FOR HELP as he was on his route, **Craig Newman** went toward the voice. Venturing into a customer's back yard, he found the elderly resident on the ground, where she had fallen when she got tangled in her dog's chain. He called upon a neighbor to get a blanket and stayed with the customer until an ambulance arrived. The woman's family later paid a visit to the post office to thank the Kansas City, Kansas Branch 499 member for his quick response.

WHILE DELIVERING MAIL ONE DAY, Chicago, Illinois Branch 11 member **David Olivier** saw an elderly customer fall while crossing a street. The woman had fainted and Olivier quickly rushed to her aid, warning approaching motorists and staying by her side in the street as she regained consciousness. Once she recovered, the carrier continued to keep the customer out of danger by helping her finish crossing the street. After she promised to seek medical attention, Olivier finished his route.

WHEN MICHAEL LANGELIER NOTICED untouched mail in a customer's box, he knocked on the door. In response, the elderly customer inside began yelling for help. When a police officer arrived at the residence in response to Langelier's report, he discovered the elderly woman incapacitated on her living room floor, having fallen the day before. The officer credited Langelier, a Rochester, New Hampshire Branch 990 member, with saving his customer's life.

HELP on the Way

While in his LLV along his route, Jim Daley saw a power company meter reader trying to fend off two pit bulls. He immediately drove to the scene and, while staying in the vehicle, he opened the left side door and asked the man if he wanted to jump inside. The meter reader leapt onto the letter tray and told the carrier to drive away from the dogs. The Carmichael, California Branch 4494 member saw that the man's arm was bleeding heavily, so he called 911. An ambulance, a sheriff's deputy and the fire department all arrived at the scene shortly to deal with the situation.

To deliver a package to customer Sallie Henthorne's house one afternoon, carrier **Kevin Smith** knocked on the door. The customer called out that she was paralyzed and asked Smith to come in the side door to help her. Ordinarily, Henthorne gets around normally, but Smith found her lying on her couch. He helped her sit up and gave her some water. Thinking she was OK, he left to finish his route. Around 3 p.m., he felt he should check on her again. He found her lying down again and helped her up to walk to the bathroom, but Henthorne stumbled and had to lie down again. The carrier asked the customer for her son's phone number to call for assistance, but she was disoriented



Dayton, OH Br. 182 member John Kurtz was honored for assisting a customer who had fallen in the snow. Pictured (l-r) are Br. 182 President John J. Oross, Kurtz, Dayton Postmaster Darryl Myers and Br. 182 Secretary Bob Shade.

and could not remember it. Smith, a Centennial, Colorado Branch 5596 member, called directory assistance to get the number, and in turn, the son called 911. Paramedics took Henthorne to the hospital where she was found to have suffered a small stroke. Following rehabilitation, she returned home. "I thank Kevin and God that I am here today," Henthorne said.

Pat Dalton-Graham was in her car when she suddenly found herself gasping, extremely short of breath. She was able to get the attention of carrier **Karla Boots**, who was nearby. Boots called 911 to report the woman's condition—it turned out to be a heart attack—and stayed with her until the ambulance arrived. Boots spoke to Dalton-Graham in a soothing voice, insisting she keep breathing despite the strain. Dalton-Graham, who had had triple-bypass surgery, was later told during rehab that she would have only had a short time to live if not for the quick response of the Kansas City, Kansas Branch 499 member.

John Kurtz was delivering his route on a cold December day when he found a customer who was very ill, lying in the snow outside of his trailer, unable to get up. The Dayton, Ohio Branch 182 member had a neighbor call 911 while he stayed with the man until EMTs arrived. Kurtz is credited with helping to save the patron's life.

Making deliveries during a January rainstorm, **Christine Cole** saw Helen Buonviri fall on her porch steps. The carrier rushed to the customer's side and called both 911 and Buonviri's daughter. The Virginia Beach, Virginia Branch 2819 member remained with the woman and kept her calm until the rescue squad arrived. The customer had sustained a fractured wrist and multiple abrasions to her head, arm and knee. Buonviri wrote a letter to the Postal Service, say-

ing the USPS is fortunate to have employees like Cole who perform duties that were neither required nor expected, but reflect favorably on the entire organization.

Walter Hayes was delivering mail near an elementary school at the end of the school day when a car came speeding down the street, striking a child. Without delay, Hayes ran down the steps of a home four houses away and across the street to the injured child. Hayes lay over the child to keep him warm on the cold February day and calmed the youngster until paramedics came. Once the St. Louis, Missouri Branch 343 member knew the child was in safe hands, Hayes got up and went back to delivering mail. The carrier was commended for being an outstanding employee and a good citizen.

When Bottineau, North Dakota Branch 5675 member **Wayne Olson** approached the mailbox at customer Dorrel Ellis' home, he saw that the customer was lying partly in the snow and partly on the step, dressed in just a shirt and pants in minus-25-degree temperatures. Seeing Olson coming, Ellis called, "Hey, Mailman, can you help me?" He explained that he was partially disabled and couldn't get up. Scattered on the snow near him were a couple of outgoing pieces of mail he had been trying to put into the box. Olson helped the man out of the snow and into the house. Ellis said he was OK, but Olson had someone check on him later. Since Ellis' mailbox was in the back of the building, had Olson not come to deliver the mail, he could have been left out in the elements for many hours, since he was not visible from the street.

As Tim Hill was delivering a package, something unexpected happened: The customer passed out when he opened the door. The carrier instinctively caught the man before he hit the ground, cushioning

his fall. The Mid-Michigan Branch 256 member called 911 and waited with the man until help arrived. Later, Hill found out that the customer had a hemorrhaging vein that caused him to lose a great deal of blood, and if he had not arrived, the patron may well have lost his life.

Going along her route as usual, **Johnetta Martin** came across a maintenance man, who asked about a certain customer. Martin had noticed the mail piling up at the woman's residence, which was unusual. The man told Martin that the young woman's father had contacted his office with concerns of his daughter's well-being. Armed with their combined knowledge, the two approached the apartment and aggressively knocked on the door. Receiving no answer, Martin encouraged the man to go further and open the door. Finding the woman lying on the floor inside, they quickly called authorities. The St. Louis, Missouri Branch 343 member was commended for being a vigilant and caring member of her community.

After finishing the daily delivery to **John Soloninska's** house, **Ryan Richards** turned to leave. Then he heard a faint voice calling his name. Soloninska was on the floor with his head propped up against the front door, telling the carrier he needed an ambulance. Richards gingerly entered the home and helped the man up to the sofa. Before he collapsed back on the couch, the customer handed the carrier some papers to give to the paramedics when they arrived. The Wheeling, West Virginia Branch 66 member made sure the man was as stable as possible before he ran up the street to notify the fire department. Soloninska, who hadn't eaten anything for a few days, said he had been waiting for someone to come to the door. Richards was commended for easing his customer's condition and rendering assistance. ☒

Kids' after-school shortcut leads to a watery peril

A 9-year-old Forth Worth, Texas, girl was walking home from school with her 7-year-old brother, but instead of heading through the park as usual, they decided to take a shortcut along a canal. A heavy, wintry rainfall had swollen the normally placid waterway into a quick-moving stream. When the boy's lunch box fell into the water, his sister tried to save it, but she lost her footing and was swept off by the current in the direction of an underground storm drain that stretched for seven blocks. "I was trying to say, 'Hayden, help me! Help me!'" the girl, Brittany, told a local news affiliate in describing her struggle. "I felt like I was stuck in ice."

A resident saw the commotion as he was driving by, hurriedly stopped his vehicle and jumped in to try to save her. While he managed to grab the girl, he found himself unable to escape the rushing water. The girl continued crying out for help, which caught the attention of letter carrier **John Hinojosa**, who had noticed the children earlier as they walked along the canal. Quickly assessing the situation, he scanned the area for a rope, limb or other object to use to pull the pair out. The only thing he spotted was an extension cord at a nearby house. He flipped the cord to the man, who secured it around himself as he held onto the girl. Try as he might, the wet cord made it impossible for Hinojosa to get a good grip to pull them out, so he laid on the ground and simply held on for dear life until the fire department arrived.

Once he knew everyone was safe, the Fort Worth, Texas Branch 226 member continued on his way before news media arrived on the scene.

A cause for pride

When Coeur d'Alene, Idaho Branch 1260 member **Isaac Fish** made his way through the snow to open Eugenie Simons' mailbox at her front door, he started to get an uneasy feeling. It was obvious she had not checked her mail for a couple of days, plus there was a parcel, and Fish knew she always checked her mail right away. "I just had a funny feeling," he told the *Coeur d'Alene Press*. "I thought I'd better knock on her door, and, if she's OK, then no big deal—I'll just say 'hi' and talk to her."

When he tried the door, Fish thought he heard a muffled voice in reply, but couldn't make out the words. He checked with neighbors, who thought Simons had a caretaker, but Fish thought it strange that the caretaker wouldn't have picked up the mail. The carrier called the police who, after investigating, called the fire department to force entry.

Simons was found on the floor, disoriented, having gone without food or water for five days, and her dog, faithfully waiting nearby, was shaky and hungry. The elderly customer was taken to the hospital for treatment. "I felt like God must have had his hand in it, to have me there and give me the feeling and the drive and determination to get it taken care of," Fish said. "He did the right thing," said Coeur d'Alene Postmaster Dave Hoover, "and we're very proud of him." ☒

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

While on her route, Patricia Jeffers-Clark noticed her customer Ms. Johnson in respiratory distress. The carrier calmly helped the woman climb the three flights of stairs to her apartment so she could retrieve her asthma medication. Johnson later wrote a letter to the local postmaster to express her gratitude for the Jamaica, New York Branch 562 member's help.

While delivering his usual route, Donald Nelson heard the distinctive sound of a vehicle collision and turned toward the scene just a short distance away. A tractor had been rear-ended, causing it to turn over and spill toxic material on the driver. Nelson, along with another passerby, ran to the scene and grabbed a garden hose to wash the driver down and remove his

clothing. The Omaha, Nebraska Branch 5 member was commended for his instinctive reaction and his role in helping to minimize the man's exposure to a harmful substance.

While delivering mail on her route, PTF Traci Van Hying detected the odor of gas. She tried in vain to contact the residents by knocking on the door. When she got no response, she left a note with their mail and notified the gas company about the odor. The gas company came to investigate and discovered a leak in the customer's home. The resident later called the post office to express her gratitude to the Fort Madison, Iowa Branch 403 member for saving her life and her home.

Entering a local credit union to deliver its mail, Steve Short felt a gun being poked into his back. The man who brandished the weapon told Shorts to "keep moving." The carrier kept his cool and the two kept walking, approaching a teller at the counter. The robber demanded money and quickly fled the scene without harming either the carrier or teller. FBI agents soon questioned Short, and the Indianapolis, Indiana Branch 39 member told them everything he could. Afterward, he returned to his route and finished the day's rounds. Short was commended for his coolness that helped to avoid a potentially more dangerous situation and was praised for being a conscientious citizen.

Santa Barbara, California Branch 290 member Shiloh Holguin took action when she smelled natural gas at a residence. Since no one was home, she left a note with the customer's parcels on the porch, alerting them to the probable leak. When the customers discovered the note later that evening, they realized that they, too, smelled the strong odor and called the gas company. Representatives arrived 15 minutes later to shut off the gas, and a leak was isolated and repaired the next day. Holguin was commended for her conscientiousness toward the customers in her community. ✉

Smoke and flames shooting out a house on her route spurred **Theresa Conner** into action. The carrier hurried to the scene, where she found a customer who was recuperating from surgery at home by herself. Conner, a North Oakland County, Michigan Branch 320 member, quickly helped the woman outside and called 911. Fire fighters appeared in a few minutes and the blaze was brought under control within a half-hour. The fire occurred when the patron mistakenly thought she had turned off the stove before she went to take a shower. It caused an estimated \$75,000 in damage, but there were no injuries. "The mail carrier took decisive action to prevent a tragedy," Fire Captain Joe Slawek told the *Oakland Press*. Conner brushed off praise, saying, "It was just a fluke. You never think you are going to see something like that, and I just happened to be there."

Standing at the door waiting to deliver a parcel, Julie Knight suddenly realized the house was full of smoke. She turned the doorknob, which was unlocked, and yelled inside to see if anyone was there. When no one answered her shouts, she immediately called 911. Five fire trucks arrived soon thereafter. Fire fighters found a man sleeping inside and were able to get him out of the house safely. The man's wife had apparently had been cooking and left without turning off the stove. Knight, a Lincoln, Nebraska Branch 8 member, was praised for her efforts in helping to avert a disaster.

While delivering his route at a housing project that is a part of Southern Illinois University campus and houses fami-





Alan Holder of Southern Illinois Merged Br. 1197

lies from all over the world, **Alan Holder** was alarmed when he heard a smoke detector blaring. Holder was soon approached by a woman who asked for his help because she didn't know what to do. He quickly went to her apartment to investigate, finding a

grease fire that started in a pan on her stove. The Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member grabbed a fire extinguisher and went to work, quelling the blaze. Holder received credit for preventing extensive property damage and the possible displacement of eight families. "He conducts himself in a highly professional manner," said housing officer Elyse Crowell. "It is a great pleasure to have him as our mail provider."

While delivering mail to a patron's house, **Ralph Vigorito** detected smoke and immediately called 911. By the time fire fighters arrived, smoke was pouring out of the mail slot. They broke down the door and managed to keep the fire from spreading beyond the kitchen. Vigorito, a Paterson, New Jersey Branch 120 member, was recognized for his quick reaction, which helped save his customer's home.

A beeping alarm alerted letter carrier Jacqueline Jefferson that something was wrong at a patron's house. She ran inside and headed for the living room, since she knew the 80-year-old woman spent most of her time there. Jefferson saw spreading flames as she grabbed the woman's wheelchair, and she pushed her out the door and as far as she could away from the burning house. "It was something instinctive," she told the *Indianapolis Star*. "I wasn't thinking. I puffed up my nerves and did



"It was just a fluke. You never think you are going to see something like that, and I just happened to be there."

—Branch 320 letter carrier **Theresa Conner**, who helped a patron escape her burning house

it. I can't believe it happened." The woman's son, who was upstairs, tried to help Jefferson but was driven back by the flames. Instead, he jumped from a second-story window and landed uninjured. With fire crews on hand and a neighbor tending to the patron, the Indianapolis, Indiana Branch 39 member decided her work at the scene was done and finished the rest of her route. Fire investigators determined the fire was caused by improperly discarded smoking materials.

Detecting the scent of burning wood on his route, **Michael Costantini** decided to walk around the homes in the area. When he discovered smoke seeping from the side of one home, he rushed to the door and knocked to alert everyone they should evacuate. The residents heeded the Kalamazoo, Michigan Branch 246 member's warning and escaped just before the building burst into flames. Costantini is credited for potentially saving the lives of the building's residents, who did not realize the house was on fire.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Branch 458 member **Christy Self** was on her route when she spotted a fire in a customer's back yard. She hurriedly notified the householders and surrounding customers. Only a few sheds were destroyed by the blaze, but the fire had made its way right up next to the house when she knocked on the patrons' door. That April day, Oklahoma experienced wild fires all throughout the state, and winds topped 60 mph. Fire fighters were stretched out on other calls in the area, so by alerting the residents in time, Self helped to prevent a major fire. The carrier received many thanks from grateful neighborhood patrons. ✉

DENNIS WAISATH NOTICED HIS CUSTOMER, JoAnn Yoder, had not picked up her mail in two days. He alerted the elderly customer's neighbor and together they went to check on her. They entered the home to find her immobilized on the floor, having suffered a fall three days earlier. The Keokuk, Iowa Branch 371 member stayed with Yoder until an ambulance arrived.

COMING UPON AN ELDERLY CUSTOMER, Mrs. Pavloff, sitting on the ground near her house on a cold day and unable to get up, carrier **Tracey Hood** enlisted the help of a neighbor. Together they managed to get the woman back into her home. Pavloff had broken her arm and might have been marooned out in the cold for hours had it not been for the Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member's attentiveness.

A NOISE COMING FROM THE GARAGE OF A house on his route alerted carrier **Ricardo Howell**. As he started down the driveway, the garage door started opening, then closed, but the noise was louder and, finally, the door opened completely. Homeowner Blanche Seraphine was on the floor of the garage. Howell immediately asked the elderly customer what was wrong and covered her with his coat. Seraphine said she had fallen and been on the floor for some time. The Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Branch 84 member went inside to get blankets to warm his customer. Howell also called his station and asked the window clerk to contact police. While waiting, Howell made sure Seraphine was comfortable and didn't need anything. When the ambulance crew arrived, they found the elderly woman had broken her hip. Howell was credited with saving the woman's life.

ON HIS ROUTE ONE DAY, **SHAWN REED** heard a faint noise at a house—which was possible mainly because he didn't hear the customer's dog barking. Familiar with the customer's habits, he grew concerned and looked into the breezeway of the home to see 82-year-old customer Violet Kavanaugh laying helpless on the floor. Trying to open the front

“He really is amazing. This is one example of how much your 40-odd cents for a stamp buys you.”

—Lisa Kavanaugh praised Branch 196 member Shawn Reed after he found her mother injured on the floor and waited with her until help arrived

door, he found it was locked, so he ran around the house and jumped a fence to get in through the back. Kavanaugh had let her dog out and subsequently tripped on a rug in the breezeway coming back in. Even though she had broken her arms and shattered her knee cap, Reed was surprised at how alert she was. The Elyria, Ohio Branch 196 member covered the customer with a blanket and called 911, waiting with her and comforting her until the ambulance arrived. He also called her family to let them know what happened. “He really is amazing. He was really alert to what was going on,” Kavanaugh's daughter, Lisa, told the *Oberlin News-Tribune*. “This is one example of how much your 40-odd cents for a stamp buys you.”

THE DAY AFTER RAMONA RICHARDSON made a routine delivery to her patron, Ms. Fosler, she noticed the mail had not been picked up, and neither had a package or the newspaper. Becoming con-

cerned, the Lincoln, Nebraska Branch 8 member knocked on the door, but got no reply. She went to the neighbor's house to notify her that something might not be right, then continued on with her route. Paramedics soon arrived to find Fosler on the floor after falling the previous day. Richardson was commended for looking out for her customer's well-being.

DEBRA ALLRED NOTICED THAT AN ELDERLY customer hadn't picked up her mail or newspaper for at least a couple of days. As she continued along the street, her instincts kicked in and she hurried back to the home. Her knocks on the door drew no response. Finding the door open, Allred entered and discovered the woman on the floor, weak and dehydrated, where she had been for about two days, unable to move. The Coeur D'Alene, Idaho Branch 1260 member called 911 and made sure her customer got the help she needed.

WHILE DELIVERING HIS PARK AND LOOP route, **Bill Sullivan** noticed something out of the ordinary. He usually sees Mrs. Segal several times a week, but her mail and a perishable UPS package had gone untouched for two days. Concerned, the carrier checked with the neighbor who cuts Segal's lawn. Sullivan and the neighbor immediately went back to the house and found the elderly customer lying unconscious and cold on the floor, having suffered a stroke a couple days earlier. Help quickly arrived after a call to 911, and when he knew his customer was in good hands, Sullivan continued on his route. The New Castle, Delaware Branch 4015 member was commended for looking out for his patrons.

AS SHE DELIVERED HER ROUTE, **KIRA BETTS** suddenly heard someone yelling for help. She followed the voice and found an elderly customer lying on her garage floor. The woman had fallen and hit her head and was bleeding profusely. Betts, a Lansing, Michigan Branch 122 member, called for an ambulance and stayed with the woman until it arrived. ☒