

2008

# Heroes of the Year

## 5 carriers share top honor others to be recognized at awards ceremony

**A**n unprecedented five letter carriers from a single branch, who all helped rescue scores of senior citizens from a building fire, have been named NALC's 2008 National Heroes of the Year and will join five other members selected for special recognition at an awards ceremony in Washington, DC.

In announcing the honors, NALC President William H. Young said, "No one is more aware of what goes on in this country's neighborhoods than our members. Letter carriers visit every address in America, six days a week, and by touching every mailbox, they also touch countless lives."

Young noted that hundreds of members are recognized each year in the Proud to Serve section or other stories in *The Postal Record*. Since 1974, the union has chosen Heroes of the Year "as a way of calling special attention to the bravery and generosity letter carriers show each and every day," he said.

Members of Congress, plus leaders from the Postal Service, NALC's sister postal unions and other labor organiza-

tions, have been invited to attend the awards luncheon September 18 in Washington. Complete coverage of the ceremony will appear in a future *Postal Record*.

As usual, this year's Heroes were selected by a panel of independent judges with diverse backgrounds—Director Shelby Hallmark of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs, U.S. Department of Labor; Chief Phil Guercio of the Montgomery County, Maryland, Department of Fire and Rescue Services; and Jordan "Bud" Biscardo, AFL-CIO Community Services liaison at the United Way of America.

### *A team effort*

Selected as National Heroes of the Year were five members of Greater East Bay, California Branch 1111, who each played a role in saving more than 100 elderly men and women from a three-alarm fire that threatened to destroy their apartment building. Never before have so many carriers been cited for their combined actions.

Last October, **Alan Girard** was the first to spot the smoke and flames exploding from a second-story window of the building, which is on his usual route—and also happens to be next door to the post office where he works. Without hesitating, Girard, who hails from a long line of fire fighters, used his passkey to enter the secure building, pulled the fire alarm, then began racing through hallways, alerting the residents to their peril.

Fellow carriers **Rick Quinonez** and **Gilbert Rangel** were at the post office when they also saw the fire break out

The judges are (from l) Phil Guercio, Jordan "Bud" Biscardo and Shelby Hallmark.



## LETTER CARRIER COLA: \$1,498

and they rushed over to help evacuate the residents. Soon, two other Greater East Bay members, **Karen Hill** and **Tanya Joseph**, joined in the rescue efforts, checking the building's upper floors and assisting residents down several flights of stairs to safety.

### *Humanitarian honored*

For Humanitarian of the Year honors, the judges picked High Point, North Carolina Branch 936 member **David Lundy**. Like many letter carriers, Lundy has gotten to know the people on his route quite well. He grew concerned when it became apparent that one of his elderly patrons was having trouble taking care of herself—and had no one around to help her. Enlisting the aid of his wife, Carolyn, Lundy set up a regular schedule to check on the woman after work while they tried to locate her family.

It took nearly a year, but the Lundys' persistence paid off when they were at last able to place the woman in a nursing home, where she could get the food and medical care she desperately needed.

### *Regional heroes*

Chosen as Western Region Hero was **Raymond Rivera Jr.**, of San Antonio, Texas Branch 421. Rivera was off-duty at home when he saw two pit bull dogs that had escaped their owner's grasp make a beeline toward two small girls. Rivera instantly raced to intercept the animals, and managed to pull off one dog that had savagely latched on to the face of one of the girls. While a neighbor restrained the other canine, Rivera maintained a choke-hold on his struggling captive for nearly 45 minutes before animal control authorities responded. The injured girl needed more than 100 stitches and hours of reconstructive surgery.

Cedar Rapids, Iowa Branch 373 member **Dean Dunkel** was named Central

Region Hero. Dunkel was on his way home from work in a rain storm when he saw a vehicle ahead of him hydroplane off the road and slide down into a stream. When the car came to a rest, it was wedged upside-down and nose first against a storm drain, with rushing water assaulting it from every angle. Dunkel crawled toward the wreck and tried to calm the driver, coaxing her to unbuckle her seat belt and to move toward the relative safety of the car's back seat area. From there, he managed to help her escape from the vehicle.

Eastern Region Hero honors go to **Paul Gereffi** of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida Branch 2550. Gereffi was driving to the next stop on his route when he noticed two men struggling behind an office building—with one man's shirt apparently drenched in blood. The letter carrier first called the police, then drafted an onlooker's help to separate the men until authorities arrived. It turned out that an unhappy employee had attacked his boss with a steak knife and Gereffi's timely intervention helped terminate a potentially deadly situation.

**Rhonda Russell**, a member of New York City, New York Branch 36, was selected for the Special Carrier Alert Award. Russell suspected a case of identity theft when she noticed that an 85-year-old customer was getting more than the usual number of credit card solicitations. The woman had, in fact, been confined to a nursing home for several months. Investigators found that a number of credit cards had been activated for the patron, her deceased daughter, and for a man not related to either woman. More than \$12,500 had been pilfered from the woman's savings and someone had applied for a second mortgage on her home. Police eventually charged the white-collar bandit with a number of crimes, including identity theft and grand larceny. ☒

**T**hanks to their union contract, city letter carriers received a cost-of-living adjustment equaling \$1,498 annually effective for the pay period beginning August 30 (pay date September 19). The COLA is the equivalent of \$57.60 per pay period or 72 cents an hour.

The COLA, announced August 14, is the third of eight semi-annual inflation adjustments included in the 2006-2011 National Agreement negotiated for carriers by the NALC. With the adjustment, annual pay for top rate letter carriers (CC Grade 1, Step O) is \$52,749. Carriers will receive a 1.9 percent general wage increase—the third of five in the contract—on November 22.

An updated pay chart appears on page 112 and also is available on the union's website, [nalc.org](http://nalc.org).

The latest COLA is the largest in terms of dollar amount in letter carrier history. It was based on the change in the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) between January and July, a period that saw a sharp increase in food and fuel prices.

The accumulation toward the 2009 retiree COLA was 6.2 percent based on the July CPI. The actual amount will reflect inflation between the third quarter of 2007 and the third quarter of this year. The projected 2009 COLA for Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA) beneficiaries was 5.1 percent, based on the latest report. ☒