

Proud TO SERVE

In this modern age, with greed and violence staples in the news, examples of courage and compassion are more important than ever. Across this nation, letter carriers are often the first to discover people in need due to accidents, attacks or fires. The following reports are offered to honor the actions of all NALC members whose quick thinking and sharp reactions have saved lives.

Apartment inferno can't deter carrier

It was an ordinary day on the job until letter carrier Andres Ortega heard a woman's screams.

Seeing smoke rise from a second-floor apartment door and window, the South Florida Branch 1071 member turned off the circuit breakers for the building and then ran up to the apartment where the woman was still screaming. Ortega guided her out to the hallway and placed her in the care of a neighbor before returning to the apartment to make sure no one else was inside.

Grabbing a fire extinguisher, Ortega ran in and out of the apartment several times, gulping and holding deep breaths to avoid the heavy smoke, as he battled the kitchen grease fire. By the time the extinguisher ran out of flame retardant, the letter carrier's eyes were stinging.

Ortega, an asthma sufferer, was treated at the scene for smoke inhalation by paramedics, who told him to rest for the remainder of the day.

When the nine-year letter carrier reported to work the next day, his non-scheduled day, he told fellow union members he didn't think he was a hero. Other letter carriers would act in the same way,

Ortega said, because it was the "humanitarian" thing to do.

Relief from fire a 'clothes' call

Letter carrier Jerry Burton heard a smoke alarm going off while making a delivery.

"I rang the doorbell," the Elyria, Ohio Branch 196 member said. "The people who live there use oxygen, so I was really concerned. I didn't see any smoke, but when no one answered the door, I ran to the neighbor's house."

Burton and the neighbor, a local police officer, spotted smoke seeping out around the eaves of the house. After calling 911, "we both hurried back," the carrier said. "He kicked in the door and the place was filled with smoke. We stuck our heads inside and yelled—no answer." It turned out no one was home.

The fire department arrived within minutes and snuffed out a fire in a clothes dryer in the basement. The blaze caused an estimated \$15,000 in damage to the home and its contents.

"I went by later to check on things and they were throwing out piles of burned laundry and clothes," said Burton. "I just happened to have been there at the right time."

Van's failure to stop puts carrier into motion

While moving his LLV up to the next segment on his route, Bruce Foster saw the aftermath of what appeared to be a nasty car crash a short distance away. Foster, a 21-year member of Syracuse, New York Branch 134 and a former emergency medical technician, rushed to the scene and quickly pieced together what had happened: A van failed to stop



South Florida Branch 1071 member Andres Ortega, with branch President Mike Gill, receives a crystal eagle award for his bravery.



Staten Island, NY
Br. 99 member
Henry Rodriguez.



for a stop sign, plowed into a car, and the force of the impact wound up knocking both of the vehicles into a nearby front yard, taking out a street sign in the process.

Drawing on his EMT training, the letter carrier determined that only the driver of the car had been seriously injured. "He had a large gash on his forehead, a bloody nose, and was bleeding from his mouth," he recalled. Foster held a small cloth to the man's head wound and kept him conscious and talking.

Meanwhile, a bystander pointed out that the car's gas tank had ruptured and was leaking fuel. Knowing that it can be dangerous to move an injured accident victim, Foster assessed the situation and concluded that everyone was a safe distance from the car, even if the gasoline should somehow ignite.

Soon, "I heard sirens in the distance," the carrier said, "so I knew emergency responders were on the way." Once the rescue squad arrived and took over at the scene, Foster climbed back into his vehicle and went back to work delivering mail.

Carrier keeps his cool in explosive situation

Letter carriers see a lot of odd things on their customers' porches, but rarely do any of those items turn out to be deadly weapons.

When San Diego, California Branch 70 carrier Jim Bucci climbed the steps of the home of one of his patrons, he spotted something that instantly flashed him back to his days as an employee with the Department of Homeland Security—what appeared to be an unfinished bomb.

HEARING SCREAMS for help while delivering his route prompted letter carrier

Henry Rodriguez

to dial 911. His 81-year-old customer, a diabetic, had recently had leg surgery. When her legs gave out while doing laundry in the basement, she was unable to get up and lay on the floor for four hours until the Staten Island, New York Branch 99 member heard her calls and came to her assistance.

AFTER DELIVERING MAIL TO A HOME on his route, Jerry Croteau looked up the block and noticed an elderly woman nearby who had fallen down in her driveway and was struggling to get up. Croteau, a member of Maine Merged Branch 92, ran over to her and saw that she had hit her head in the fall. The carrier used his cell phone to call 911 and remained with the woman, keeping her calm until the rescue squad showed up.

DETROIT, MICHIGAN BRANCH 1 CARRIER Clarice Goodwin was delivering mail on a chilly spring day when she happened upon an elderly gentleman lying on the ground, his face in a ditch. Goodwin instantly recognized the man as one of her customers. The man explained he had slipped and injured himself while walking along side the ditch. Goodwin helped him back up on his feet and made sure he was okay before she continued her route. Later, the man's wife of 60 years wrote Goodwin, praising what she called the letter carrier's "heroic measures."

MARK WRIGHT ALWAYS TRIES TO CHECK in with his elderly customers daily as he delivers the mail. So when he couldn't find 84-year-old resident Mary Harman one afternoon, he knew something was wrong. "I was worried about her condition because I knew she was elderly. I knew if she had fallen, she might have broken a hip or gotten hurt real bad," the Columbia, South Carolina Branch 233 member told WLTX-TV. "That was my biggest

thing: getting her help as quick as possible." When police entered the customer's home, they found her lying on the floor after being assaulted and suffering cuts and bruises.

WHILE ON HIS ROUTE, LETTER CARRIER John Bergen heard cries for help coming from a residence. An elderly woman living alone had fallen and was unable to get up. Finding the door locked, Bergen dialed 911 and stayed to talk with and comfort the scared customer until help arrived. After paramedics arrived and rendered aid to the injured woman, they thanked the Garden Grove, California Branch 1100 member for coming to her assistance.



IT WAS A JUNE mid-morning in the Denver, Colorado suburb of Aurora, and the temperature had already climbed to 90 degrees. Centennial Branch 5996 letter carrier

Theresa Fitzgerald handed 84-year-old Marge Gibson her mail and continued her route. A short while later, the letter carrier was delivering across the street when she heard a faint cry for help. Not seeing the source of the cries, she continued looking until she spotted the elderly customer. She had fallen on her way into her home and was lying on her driveway with scraped and bloody feet and elbows. When she could not help the woman up, the carrier went to a neighbor's home and asked her to call 911. Fitzgerald stayed with the injured woman until emergency personnel arrived. "Had Theresa not happened by, I'm not sure how long my mother would have been there with no help," said Doreen Rathburn, the customer's daughter. "Theresa seems to keep an eye on the neighborhood as part of her appointed rounds. I sincerely appreciate her kindness and willingness to assist." ✉

FIRE & RESCUE

Black smoke filling the sky above the attic vents of an apartment building caught the eye of letter carrier James Thomas as he was walking a loop on his route. The Dothan, Alabama Branch 1630 member rushed to the next-door apartment to call for help, and then returned to the burning apartment to find the tenant, who was in the back yard working in the flowerbeds and unaware of the fire. Firefighters arrived quickly and kept the blaze from spreading to other apartments in the complex.

Robert Cupp noticed smoke coming out of a nearby mobile home's swamp cooler while delivering mail on his route. Since the residents were not home at the time, Cupp immediately contacted authorities, and the local fire department dispatched a team of three fire engines and 12 firefighters. They were able to put out the fire, which was started by the family's wood stove, before it engulfed the home. The Pueblo, Colorado Branch 229 member was credited not only with helping to save the home from major damage, but saving the lives of the family's pets as well. ☒

"I knew as soon as I saw it that it was an IED, an improvised explosive device," Bucci said. Even so, "I calmly delivered the mail so I wouldn't raise the suspicions of the residents inside," he recalled. Fortunately, it was the carrier's last swing of the day, so once the delivery was made, he immediately returned to his office to report what he saw.

Station managers alerted the authorities, who quickly descended on the location to secure the area and to arrest the would-be bomb maker. Later, it was discovered that

the only missing ingredient from the device was a crucial one—gunpowder.

"It's not something I ever expected to see while delivering the mail," Bucci said, "but I am glad that I knew what to look for."

Divine timing

Monday began just like any other day for David Deel of Roanoke, Virginia Branch 24, with heavy mail. The letter carrier, a diabetic, knew how long he could go without eating and planned on taking a break for lunch just after finishing an apartment complex early in the afternoon. But for some reason, he decided to continue on with his deliveries.

As Deel rounded a street corner, he saw his 18-year customer Vickie May lying beside her lawn mower, which was still running, yelling for help. Another person across the road was trying—unsuccessfully—to call for help using a cell phone.

Getting out of his mail truck, Deel ran to help in any way he could. He saw that May's foot had been severely injured by the machine, retrieved a towel from his truck and began to

apply pressure to the wound. He contacted 911 and continued applying pressure as he tried to talk to his customer to prevent her from going into shock.

A few minutes later an EMT arrived, followed by a rescue squad. May was hospitalized and later had to have her foot amputated.

"The Lord blessed me with those people (being) right there," May told *The Roanoke Times*.

Deel echoed that sentiment. "I believe God uses people to help others," he said. "I don't consider myself a hero; I was just there at the right time. It's a wonderful feeling when you can make a difference in someone's life."

Daring rescue takes two trips

At home on his day off, letter carrier Leonard Waters was told by his fiancée that she had just seen a terrible accident not far from where they live. After calling 911, Waters immediately drove to the scene, where he found a car ablaze in a ditch. The unconscious driver had been thrown from the vehicle, but Waters heard the faint cry of an infant trapped in the car, held in place by the chest restraints of its car seat. Quickly assessing the situation, the Manhattan, Kansas Branch 1018 member drove home and retrieved a knife. Racing back to the crash, Waters entered the burning vehicle, cut the restraints, and pulled the baby to safety just seconds before the car was engulfed in flames.

Makeshift fire hose

Besides the usual tools of the trade, letter carrier Charlie Brogan also carries with him on his route his skills as a volunteer fire fighter. One day, the member of Southeast Pennsylvania Merged Branch 725 noticed smoke coming from a customer's back yard. That signaled a large enough problem, but complicating matters were the three small children playing outside in the next yard over.

The letter carrier sprang into action and asked another neighbor nearby if he could borrow a garden hose. Brogan turned on the water, doused the flames, then made sure the fire was completely out before he headed back out to continue delivering his route. ☒