

Proud to Serve is a semi-regular compilation of heroic stories about letter carriers in their communities. If you know about a hero in your branch, contact us as soon as possible at 202-662-2851 or at postalrecord@nalc.org. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

Honoring heroic carriers

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

Alert carrier saves patron's home from fire

On Feb. 4, Fresno, CA Branch 231 member **Esmeralda Carrillo** was delivering mail on her swing route. When she got close to a home to put the mail in the box, she said, "I could hear the smoke alarms in the house." Then she smelled a burning odor.

She rang the doorbell to try to alert the residents, but did not get a response. She also noticed that there were no cars in the driveway. She called 911 and waited for the fire department to arrive.

Firefighters were able to break through a gate to gain access to the back of the house. "There was smoke all over the home," Carrillo said. "They were able to put fans in to blow the smoke out of the house." Fire officials discovered that the residents had left food cooking on the stove. Luckily, the fire was put out before it could do more than cause smoke damage. "I'm glad no one was inside the house and in any danger," the carrier said.

Carrillo said that she was glad that she was there at that time, since it wasn't her normal route. She asked the regular carrier, Bill, if he would check on the family the next day, and they asked him to extend their thanks. The next time Carrillo was on this route, the young boy who lived there brought her flowers and thanked her for her help. "The family is always cheerful that they still have their home," the seven-year postal veteran said.

Before becoming a letter carrier, Carrillo was a police dispatcher. "I got to

learn about safety and being there for others," she said. As a carrier, she has come across situations on her routes such as customers having seizures, fights in the street, and helping elderly customers who are injured—and she hasn't flinched. "You see a lot of things happen," Carrillo said.

"I love my job," she said. "I'm glad I'm able to be there to help in any way I can. Someday it might be us who needs the help."

Brave carrier wrestles dog to save customer

On March 14, Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **John Clark** was delivering to a home on his route like normal. "One of my customers and her daughter were walking their 12-pound dog," Clark said. All of a sudden, a pit bull, Daisy, that lives at the house the carrier was delivering to, charged through the invisible fencing toward the woman and her small dog.

Clark was surprised, given the fact that Daisy was normally a sweet dog and he hadn't had any issues with her. The pit bull had jumped on the customer's back and began attacking her. "I wrapped my arms around Daisy and tossed her across the yard," Clark said. But that didn't stop the animal—the dog went after the woman again, so Clark pulled the dog off once more.

Meanwhile, Daisy's owner came outside with another dog, a Chihuahua, and a leash, but tripped on the leash and fell as this was going on. That dog also approached the woman, but "I swiped at it and got it to run away," Clark said.

The woman suffered injuries on her forearm and puncture wounds on her leg and hands. "She had crushing injuries and had a tooth go completely through her ring finger," Clark said.

The carrier checked in on her three times throughout the day to make sure she was OK. "It was a minute, minute-and-a-half ordeal, but you just react," the postal veteran said.

He insisted to other carriers who were in awe of his actions, "You'd do the same if it happened to one of your customers."

"She had crushing injuries and had a tooth go completely through her ring finger."

—Branch 210 member John Clark speaking about the customer he helped to save from further injury during a dog attack

Fire and rescue

Flames erupting from the deck of an apartment building greeted Wahpeton, ND Branch 1388 member **Darrell Boreen** as he went about the first delivery of his route on June 4. He knocked on the closest door, but the person didn't answer, and the carrier assumed the person had left for the day. "I went around and roused the tenants and had the first person I reached call 911," Boreen said. The fire department responded to put out the small fire, and discovered that someone had apparently thrown a cigarette butt that caught fire. "Everyone got out just fine," the carrier said. The residents expressed their gratitude, saying that they were sure that if Boreen hadn't alerted them all, the fire would have taken over the building and a more tragic ending would have occurred. Boreen said he didn't do much,

though. This is the second time he's been recognized for heroic actions. A few years ago, he found a customer who was injured and in distress, and he called for help. "I think I didn't do anything anyone else wouldn't have done," the 19-year postal veteran said.

Arthur Denton Jr. had started walking to the next lap of his route on March 4 when he smelled fire, but he assumed it was blocks away. "I kept walking and I saw smoke," he said. A fire was burning at the corner of the house right ahead of him. The San Jose, CA Branch 193 member rang the door bell and knocked loudly. While waiting to see if residents were inside, Denton connected the water hose to the water faucet and put out the fire, which was about 4 feet high at that point. The customer heard the com-

motion and came out of the house to watch Denton put out the fire, and thanked him. "It was fast; it was only a five-minute thing," Denton said. "I then continued on my route." The six-year postal veteran brushed off "hero" accolades for his actions, though. "It's no big deal," he said.

On Saturday, Feb. 9, **Adam Levenson** was delivering his route when he noticed that the grass was on fire at a customer's house. The Greenville, SC Branch 439 member immediately called 911 and went to the adjacent houses to alert the people inside of the situation. The fire was burning in the front yard and the sides of the two houses, and it also had reached the back yard. Levenson is credited with saving at least two customers' lives if he had not alerted 911. **PR**

'You gotta do what you gotta do'

A loud noise interrupted a routine morning at the Morris, MN, post office on Oct. 23, 2012. "I heard a boom," Morris Branch 1927 member **Brett Beyer** said. Fellow Branch 1927 member **Patrick Schneider** heard a crash as well, but said, "The way my case was situated, I couldn't see anything."

Employees assumed that a tray of letters or other equipment had been dropped on the floor, but that wasn't the case. Postmaster Dan Kerkvliet had collapsed flat on his back. He was not breathing and had no pulse. Beyer could see what was happening from his case. "I saw Brett whiz by," Schneider said.

Clerk Bradley Hill and rural carrier Randall Baker called police and EMTs. Schneider, Beyer and rural carrier Richard Olsen ran over and attempted to resuscitate Kerkvliet for

about 10 minutes. "We thought he was choking," Schneider said, and so they decided to give him the Heimlich maneuver, which kept the man's heart going until he went into full arrest.

The group continued to assist after help arrived. Eventually, EMTs used a defibrillator to shock Kerkvliet twice. He regained his heartbeat, began to breathe on his own, and requested to return to work.

"He's a lucky man," Beyer said, since the postmaster went a full two minutes without breathing. The police officer who responded along with the EMTs commented that he had seen a lot of situations such as this one, and he had never seen someone wake up.

"It was a life-changing experience," Beyer, a seven-year postal veteran, said. "It seems like forever when you're

in a situation like that."

The carriers denied any heroics, though. "It was just me and the other two guys working on him," Beyer said. "We'd just hope others would do the same for us." Schneider concurred. "I was at the place, at the time, and you just react," the 15-year postal veteran said. "You do what you gotta do." **PR**



Morris, MN Branch 1927 members Patrick Schneider and Brett Beyer are credited with helping to save the life of their postmaster after he stopped breathing.



Eye on the elderly

Pittsburgh Branch 84 member **Bob Bordick** was making a rear delivery to a house on Feb. 28, when he found his 90-year-old customer who had fallen on the ice and could not get up. “She told me she had gone to feed the birds,” he said. “It was a struggle because the stairs were so slippery.” The carrier got the woman inside and put his jacket around her to keep her warm. He noticed that she was injured and bleeding from her elbow. “She was cut down to the bone and the bleeding was rather profuse,” Bordick said. He saw that the woman was wearing a life alert button around her neck, so the carrier told her he was going to press it. Bordick was soon connected to police and EMTs, and he waited until they arrived to tend to his customer’s injuries. Because of where the woman was found, no one else would have seen

her for quite some time, and she could have potentially suffered from hypothermia as well. Bordick said his actions were nothing exceptional, though. “Like everyone says in *The Postal Record*, I only did what anyone else would have done,” the 12-year postal veteran said. “It’s what we carriers do; we take care of our people.”

Aurora, IL Branch 219 member **Frank Appello** was delivering mail on his T-6 route on Feb. 26 when he noticed mail from the previous day in the mailbox of an elderly resident. “It was still there, and the papers had started to pile up,” he said. “When I got to the door, the dog started barking a lot. That triggered the thought, ‘Something’s not right here.’” The carrier went to a neighbor’s house and asked them to call the man, but there

was no answer. So, he called police and asked them if they could do a wellness check, and when officers responded a short while later, they found the elderly man on the floor and unable to move, after he had fallen out of his wheelchair two days earlier and was unable to move. Aurora Police Lt. Nicholas Coronada said that the carrier’s actions “brought aid to one of the residents on his route and perhaps may have save that resident’s life.” But Appello said his actions were something anyone would have done. “We’re out there, keeping our eyes and ears open,” the 35-year postal veteran said of letter carriers.

On Saturday, June 8, **Bob Eaton** was making his rounds when he happened upon an elderly customer who had fallen in his yard. The man has mobility is-

ues and a family member checks on him daily, but had already stopped in and left for the day. The customer knew Eaton would be coming along and when he spotted the carrier, he called out to the Springdale, AR Branch 3671 member for help. Eaton helped the customer to a chair and called the man’s son, who came shortly to help his father. “His reliability and good customer relations helped avert a possible tragedy in the humid Arkansas June weather,” Branch President Scott Hedegard said. “If the USPS didn’t carry mail on Saturday, this customer could have been in much more serious trouble.... [Carriers] are a constant reliable fixture in thousands of neighborhoods and countless customers have been helped by good-hearted letter carriers like Mr. Eaton. Branch 3671 commends him.” **PR**



Neighborhood watch

Dave Carpenter was delivering mail on Jan. 7 to a house that had its mailbox next to the side door, which was next to a window, and he saw a dog inside. “The dog came running toward the window and shattered the glass,” the Traverse City, MI Branch 618 member said. But, after this happened, the dog stayed in the house. No one was home, so Carpenter contacted a neighbor who knew how to contact the owner. The owner came home to take the dog to get stitch-

es, and she wrote a note to Carpenter to thank him for aiding the animal. “It’s pretty much our nature to run into incidents with dogs,” the 15-year postal veteran said. “I don’t consider myself a hero; I’m just an animal lover.”

On May 20, Orangeburg, SC Branch 1782 member **Norman Brown** was delivering mail to the office of attorney Zipporah Sumpter, who is the only tenant in an office building across from the courthouse. As he en-

tered, he saw her car in the parking lot. He climbed the stairs and noticed that her door had a notice that she would return at noon. But it looked as if it had been forcibly opened. “I saw that the door was ajar,” the carrier said, which was unusual when Sumpter leaves a sign. Brown left the building without delivering the mail and called his supervisor, who notified authorities. Officers responded, and after calling out Sumpter’s name and, not getting a response, they

entered the office. Brown answered any questions he could and gave his contact information to police. An investigation revealed that \$80 had been removed from Sumpter’s purse inside the office. When the woman saw Brown a few days later, “She said she was glad I called and that I was concerned about her safety,” he said. But the eight-year postal veteran doesn’t think he’s a hero. “It was just something I hope someone would do for me,” he said. **PR**

WHEN AN ACTIVE LETTER CARRIER DIES . . .

- ✓ Notify employee's immediate supervisor, postmaster and personnel section (if any). Give supervisor locker keys and badge as well as information on time and place of memorial services. Check with USPS personnel or postmaster for benefits for spouse and any dependent children.
- ✓ Fill out forms (obtain from USPS personnel section or postmaster): application for death benefits under the retirement system; claim for unpaid compensation; claim for FEGLI death benefits.
- ✓ If the carrier had a TSP account, notify the TSP Death Benefits Processing Unit, Fairfax Post Office, DEDIS—P.O. Box 4450, Fairfax, VA 22038-9998, or call 877-968-3778.
- ✓ Notify the carrier's NALC branch.
- ✓ If veteran, notify the Veterans' Administration local office.
- ✓ Notify banks and other financial institutions.
- ✓ Call the local office of the Social Security Administration or toll-free 800-772-1213.
- ✓ Notify insurance companies (life, health, home, automobile, etc.). If the carrier had a policy with NALC's Mutual Benefit Association, write to 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Room 510, Washington, DC 20001-2144 or call 202-638-4318. If the carrier belonged to the NALC Health Benefit Plan, write to 20547 Waverly Court, Ashburn, VA 20149 or call 703-729-4677. **Note:** Health benefit coverage for a surviving spouse and dependent children continues automatically if carrier had family coverage at time of death *and* if a monthly survivor annuity is payable.
- ✓ Have mortuary officials obtain enough certified death certificates for your needs (they can suggest how many).

WHEN A RETIRED LETTER CARRIER DIES . . .

- ✓ Notify U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Retirement Operations Center, Boyers, PA 16017, or call toll-free 888-767-6738 and provide: full name of deceased; date of birth; date of death; Social Security number; CSA claim number; and survivor's name, address and relationship to the deceased.
- ✓ For quicker action, provide the above information to NALC's Director of Retired Members, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144, 202-393-4695, or call toll-free 800-424-5186 only on Monday, Wednesday or Thursday, 10 a.m.-noon and 2-4 p.m. (Eastern). NALC will alert OPM so that survivor benefits will commence as quickly as possible, and will send you the application for death benefits under the retirement system, and the claim for death benefits under FEGLI.
- ✓ Return any uncashed annuity checks to the address on the accompanying Treasury Department envelope. If payments are being deposited directly to a bank or other financial institution, contact them with the retiree's date of death and advise them to return any future payments to the Treasury Department.
- ✓ Call the local office of the Social Security Administration or toll-free 800-772-1213.
- ✓ If the retired carrier had a TSP account, notify the TSP Death Benefits Processing Unit, Fairfax Post Office, DEDIS—P.O. Box 4450, Fairfax, VA 22038-9998, or call 877-968-3778.
- ✓ Notify the retired carrier's NALC branch.
- ✓ If veteran, notify the Veterans' Administration local office.
- ✓ Notify banks and other financial institutions.
- ✓ Notify insurance companies (life, health, home, automobile, etc.). If the carrier had a policy with NALC's Mutual Benefit Association, write to 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Room 510, Washington, DC 20001-2144 or call 202-638-4318. If the carrier belonged to the NALC Health Benefit Plan, write to 20547 Waverly Court, Ashburn, VA 20149 or call 703-729-4677. **Note:** Health benefit coverage for a surviving spouse and dependent children continues automatically if retiree had family coverage at time of death *and* if a monthly survivor annuity is payable.
- ✓ To request a duplicate 1099R, Statement of Annuity Paid, call 888-767-6738. Callers will need the former carrier's CSA number and the last four digits of their Social Security number.
- ✓ Have mortuary officials obtain enough certified death certificates for your needs (they can suggest how many).

If the spouse of a retired letter carrier dies, call the NALC retirement office for instructions on how to restore annuity to full amount, switch health coverage from family to self (unless dependent children), and change beneficiaries.