

Proud to Serve

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.

Quick-thinking carrier saves choking baby

On Aug. 15, 2014, Greer, SC Branch 2553 member **Chris Brown** had left the mail in the mailbox of the Cooper family. "I was driving away and realized I had a package," he said. As he went to deliver the parcel, Stephanie Cooper ran out of her house in a panic

because her 11-month-old son, Eli, had put a piece of plastic wrapper in his mouth, and it had lodged in his throat.

She thought that it was her husband outside, but it was Chris Brown. "My baby's not breathing!" Brown said Cooper told him. "She was kind of hysterical.

"The next thing I know, the baby's in my arms," Brown said. He performed the Heimlich maneuver a few times, which caused Eli to cough out the plastic, enabling him to breathe again.

"I didn't realize at the time it was a life and death situation," Brown

told *Greer Today*. "I was shocked when Mrs. Cooper ran out of the house with her son in her arms. I just knew the child wasn't breathing and I had to get oxygen to his lungs."

The carrier knew that permanent brain damage can occur in as little as four minutes when a person is suffocating, so time was of the essence. "A calm just came over me and I just wanted to get this child breathing again," Brown told *Greer Today*. "The child was so little, I worried about squeezing him too hard."

The 25-year postal and Marine Corps veteran had learned the Heimlich maneuver as part of emergency training with the Postal Service.

"When I heard the baby crying, I knew he was going to be all right," Brown told *Greer Today*.

Brown wasn't even supposed to be at the Coopers' house at that time—Brown had been given an assistant that day, which changed up the timeline of his route. "There was nobody outside. I looked in all directions and didn't see anybody," he told *Greer Today*. "If I didn't have a package to deliver, I would have put their mail in the box and left."

The Coopers call Brown their hero. "I really wanted to get his name out there and just thank him for what he did," Stephanie Cooper told SCNow. "Because I, ultimately, will never be able to repay him for what he did."

But Brown disapproves of the "hero" appellation. "I look at other occupations like firemen, policemen, nurses, as heroes," he said. "I'm just glad everything worked out good for the family."

The carrier appeared on "The Ellen Show" in September 2014, where he was recognized for his actions.



Greer, SC Branch 2553 member Chris Brown reunited with the parents of Eli Cooper, who he had saved from choking.

Heroic carrier makes Saturday save

As he was going about his rounds on Saturday, June 28, 2014, Toledo, OH Branch 100 member **Chad Kleman** heard noise coming from his customer, Bud Dauterman, who was underneath his car working.

"I saw his feet hanging out from under there," Kleman said. "Hey, what're you singing under there?" he asked the man.

It was no song—it was muffled cries for help.

Dauterman later explained to Kleman that he had been doing some work on his 1988 Chevrolet pickup truck with the vehicle up on a scissors jack. Lying on his side while holding a grease gun, he suddenly heard a crunching noise. The top kickplate of the jack broke off and the truck went down before he could move. The vehicle, which had one of its tires off, came down on Dauterman, and the axle pinned his left arm.

"I couldn't hardly breathe, so I was taking minute breaths," Dauterman told *The Sentinel*.

Dauterman was able to move himself into a slightly better position to breathe, but it didn't help much. He attempted to cry for help, but the massive weight of the truck made calling out loudly almost impossible.

The man told the newspaper that he thought, "If it's time to take me, it's time to take me. Otherwise, you're going to have to send help."

It was then that Kleman arrived. Once the carrier knew what was going on, he threw his mail satchel down and went into action.

"All I did was I attempted to utilize the jack as much as I could," the carrier told *The Sentinel*, "because the top kickplate of the jack was broken." Bracing the vehicle on a tire rim, Kleman maneuvered the jack and eventually was able to lift the car about four inches off of Dauterman.

"It was enough," Kleman told the newspaper. When Dauterman indicated that he was free, the carrier grabbed him by his ankles, pulled him out and remained with him until paramedics arrived, trying to keep him conscious.

An Army veteran who saw combat during the conflict in Bosnia, Kleman

said, "In the Service, I've seen too many people die. I didn't want to see him die."

Dauterman was taken to the hospital and treated for a fractured shoulder blade, cracked spine and a lacerated kidney and eventually returned home to recover. "It's kind of amazing he's still alive," Kleman said.

"He saved my dad's life," Dauterman's son, Mike, told *The Sentinel*. "Even the head surgeon told me ... 'it's a miracle.'"

Kleman knew Dauterman from his mail route. "He's always giving me peaches and water throughout the day, on hot days," Kleman told the newspaper.

The carrier didn't make his rounds to the Dauterman home at the normal time that day—he arrived a half-hour earlier than he usually did. "Now he calls me his angel," Kleman said.

"(The Lord) sent him by at the right time," the customer told the newspaper. "Because if he hadn't come by, and no one else had come by, I'd expire under there."

But Kleman, a nine-year postal veteran, brushed off any talk of heroics. "There's a point where you're just doing your humanly duty," he said. **PR**

Eye on the elderly

Mahanoy City, PA Branch 177 member **Brian Reed** was delivering his route on May 7, 2014, and went to the mailbox near the screened porch of an elderly customer's house. "I just happened to look in," he said. He noticed that the woman was lying half inside the house, half inside the enclosed porch. He yelled in and got a response asking for help. He entered the home, called 911, and was able to calm the woman by letting her know that help was on the way.

Once the ambulance arrived, paramedics took over to help the woman with her broken hip. Reed didn't think his actions were exceptional. "It was something anyone else would have done," he said.

Toledo, OH Branch 100 member **Taylor Yates** knew that a specific resident preferred to have her mail left inside her screen door because she had trouble getting to her mailbox. But when the carrier reached the woman's screen door one

day in early July 2014 and saw that the interior door was wide open, he thought something was off. Yates then heard a soft voice call for help, though it was so muffled that it sounded like a cat meowing. He called out to see if anyone was there. "I could barely hear her," Yates told the *Port Clinton News Herald*. "She said: 'I'm in the kitchen.'" Yates went inside and found the woman lying on the kitchen floor, her walker on the other side of the room. Yates told the

woman that he would call an ambulance, but she said no and asked him to call her neighbors instead. Neighbors came over, and they and Yates helped the woman to her feet and brought her the walker. The woman never told him how long she had been on the floor, but said she was not hurt. The neighbors thanked Yates profusely, but the carrier said he was just doing his duty. "I think anybody who had been there would have done the same thing," he said. **PR**

Neighborhood watch



Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 member **Judy Kahl** was recently recognized for her heroic actions. Pictured (l to r) are Region 6 National Business Agent **Pat Carroll**, Kahl and Branch 2184 President **Mark Judd**.

Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 member **Judy Kahl** started her route on Saturday, Nov. 23, 2013, on what she described as a “normal day.” She started toward the first house. “I had just stepped on the walkway to the house when I smelled nothing but gas,” the carrier said. The carrier immediately knocked on the door and told the cus-



Charlie Grayson

tomer, Marsha Lane, about the odor. The woman said she didn’t smell it, but Kahl pointed out that the woman’s dog had gasped, so Kahl told the customer to get out of the house and call the gas company. After some urging, Lane did so. The two women noticed that a gas company truck already was down the street; they then saw it hightail over to the house. “The pipes to the meter had ruptured,” Kahl said, and Lane’s stove and furnace had been leaking gas. Lane came into the post office a few days later to personally thank Kahl, telling her that she had saved her life and she couldn’t thank her enough. But the 27-year postal veteran said she’s nobody special; she was just doing her job. “My customers are what make my job,” she said. “I’ve always watched out for customers—always. That’s just who I am.”

Having had the same route for 18 years, Louisville, KY Branch 14 member **Charlie Grayson** knows who belongs in the neighborhood and who doesn’t. On Sept. 18, 2013, the carrier was delivering mail when he saw an unfamiliar car had backed into and was idling in the driveway of customer Emily Branes’ home,

so he kept an eye on it. He watched as a stranger came from around the back of the house. “He wasn’t carrying anything,” Grayson said. Still, the carrier made note of the make and model of the car, the license number, and got a good look so he could give a description of the individual. When it was safe to do so, the carrier called police. When officers arrived, they found that Branes’ back door had been kicked open and that the home had been burglarized. Her house was left open and her dog was alone. Grayson gave officers his statement, and the police followed up by asking Grayson to look at a lineup of six suspects. He confirmed the police’s suspect, and they were able to arrest the alleged thief within 48 hours. The police also were able to pin about 15 to 20 other break-ins on the suspect, who they said had made off with some of Branes’ jewelry. “He probably would have had a field day if I hadn’t seen him,” Grayson said. Branes thanked Grayson for his actions. But the 28-year postal veteran laughed at being called a hero. After having his own home broken into years ago, “I don’t have much sympathy for a thief,” he said. “I would just want someone to do the same for me.”

When North Little Rock, AR Branch 3745 member **Phillip Mariner** returned to his vehicle after a park-and-loop on March 26, 2014,

he found a 5-year-old boy sitting on the sidewalk. “He was crying incessantly,” the carrier said. “He had a backpack as big as he was.” Mariner talked to the youngster and found out that the boy’s mother and grandmother normally met him at a meeting point after school, but he had wandered off and gotten disoriented. He said that his family had recently moved, and he did not know where he lived. Mariner called 911 and was told by the dispatcher that a patrol



Phillip Mariner

unit was close by. Officers arrived a few minutes later and, seeing that the child was in good hands, Mariner returned to his route. Police later told Mariner that the child’s new house was four miles away from where the carrier had found him on his route and they had reunited him with his family. The 27-year letter carrier said that being called a hero is humbling, but that “it wasn’t that big of a deal. I would want someone to do that for my child.” **PR**