

## 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](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, 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.

## Marine carrier takes control of bloody situation

San Bernardino, CA Branch 411 member **Peter Villalon** had just pulled up outside of a customer's house to deliver the mail on July 17, 2013, when he noticed that the customer was inside the garage and bleeding profusely.

The carrier rushed over to check on the man. "He lost control of the electric saw, and it was still spinning and it hit his left leg, cutting all the way to the bone," Villalon said. In addition, the customer said he had taken a prescription blood thinner, so he was even more in danger of fainting.

A neighbor was at the scene trying to help the man, using a towel to try to stanch the man's blood flow, but it was not working. He asked Villalon if he knew how to apply a tourniquet.

The carrier, a Marine Corps veteran, quickly fashioned a tourniquet out of a piece of fishing string. Villalon stayed with the customer until an ambulance arrived 15 to 20 minutes later.

The next day, the customer's son told Villalon that the doctor had said that the tourniquet had saved his father's life and that the injury required 197 stitches.

But the carrier doesn't think of himself as a hero. "Anyone who could see it would do the same thing," the 21-year postal veteran said. "I just applied what I learned at Marine Corps boot camp."

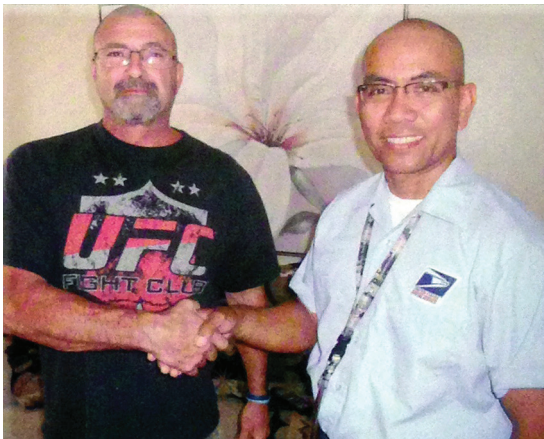
## Carrier saves customer from bad situation

As Akron, OH Branch 148 member **Kizzy Spaulding** was going about her route on Oct. 7, 2014, "I smelled some funny odor," she said. As she approached the slot at a customer's door, she said, "It smelled like a burned egg."

Spaulding knocked on the door, but the elderly woman who lived there did not respond. The door was open a little bit, and she saw smoke starting to come out. The carrier entered the house and saw her customer lying on the couch, unresponsive.

Checking the kitchen, Spaulding saw a fire and knew that time was of the essence, so she pulled the woman outside to safety. She then got a neighbor to call 911 and used the woman's phone to call people in its directory. Firefighters soon arrived to help put out the fire.

Spaulding later learned that the woman had been going into a diabetic coma, and her nurse wasn't scheduled to arrive until later that day. When Spaulding saw her customer the next day, "she gave me a big ol' hug," she said. But the 18-year postal veteran brushed off any major accolades. "I paid attention," she said. "I don't think I'm a hero." **PR**



San Bernardino, CA Branch 411 member **Peter Villalon** recently reunited with the customer he helped to save after an accident with an electric saw.

## Eye on the elderly

On Oct. 10, 2014, Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Mike Masters** was delivering mail to his elderly customer, Connie. The woman has a mail slot on her front door, but when he has a package for her, he takes it around the back door and knocks. When he noticed that a package and the mail from the previous day had not been taken in, he grew concerned and knocked but received no response. “It looked like nothing had changed,” he said. “I just knew something didn’t seem right.” Masters then went to the garage, and he noticed that the garage door was open and Connie’s car was there. Aware that the woman lived there alone, the carrier alerted a neighbor, who in turn contacted the police. When officers arrived, they

discovered that the customer had fallen and injured her hip. The neighbor left a note for the carrier to let him know that the woman was OK. Masters doesn’t think he’s a hero, though. “It’s just stuff letter carriers do every day,” the 12-year postal veteran said.

On Nov. 21, 2014, Salem, OR Branch 347 member **Rose Boen** was on the route she’s had all 26 years as a letter carrier when she noticed one of her elderly customers had not picked up his mail in a few days. “He had a bout in the hospital,” the carrier said. She knew that the man was frail, but that he also picks up his mail regularly, so she became concerned. She then saw that a police officer was down the street. “I nabbed

him and asked him to check on him,” Boen said. The officer went to the man’s home to do a welfare check. After breaking down the door, the officer found the customer lying on the floor after falling two days earlier. Caretakers check on the man regularly, but apparently hadn’t that week. The man was taken to the local hospital for medical attention before being moved to assisted living. The officer called Boen to thank her for her actions. “He’s a dear man,” the carrier said. “I’m just glad I said something early enough.”

When Havre de Grace, MD Branch 1749 member **Gardner McCullough** was on his route on a rainy Oct. 29, 2014, “I heard these faint calls for help,” he said. “I stopped, looked around, and

didn’t see anything.” As he took a few more steps, he eventually heard the source of the calls: his 85-year-old customer, Mrs. Esparraguera, who had fallen outside her home while walking her dog and had injured her arm. McCullough got a neighbor to help by covering the woman with plastic to shield her from the rain as he called 911. He then called Esparraguera’s daughter to fill her in and waited with the woman until emergency personnel arrived. The carrier stopped by the hospital on his way home to check on Esparraguera. “She’s back out walking the dog now,” McCullough said. But the 31-year postal veteran said his actions weren’t a big deal: “I’m not a hero—it’s just helping out a fellow American.” **PR**

## Help on the way



While on her route on Oct. 31, 2014, Aurora, IL Branch 219 member **Namette Vaughn** delivered her customer Sunita Thaker a registered letter. “She started signing, then she passed out,” the carrier

said. Vaughn called out to Thaker and asked if she could hear her and if she was hurt. Still lying down, the woman slowly raised her head and waved her hands to show she was conscious. Vaughn asked the woman if

there was anyone she could call. “She was so weak, she could hardly speak, but she was able to give me her son’s number,” Vaughn said. The carrier called him to fill him in about Thaker, followed by a call to 911. While waiting for an ambulance, the carrier saw a neighbor and waved her over to wait with them both. Once EMS units arrived to check on Thaker, Vaughn continued on her route. Thaker had apparently been suffering from the flu and had been dehydrated. The carrier later spoke with the woman’s neighbor, who reported that Thaker was

doing well. Though she’s being called a hero, Vaughn said helping someone in need is something anyone would do. “I would do it again,” the 15-year postal veteran said.

On Sept. 2, 2014, New Jersey Merged Branch 38 member **James Rice** was delivering his route when he saw a child who he sees almost every day on a bike pass by him and wave hello. As the carrier continued walking, he heard a crash. When he turned around, he saw that the boy had fallen from his bike, hitting his head. He then complained

about a headache. “I looked at his head, and he had a lump,” Rice said. He asked a neighbor to call 911 and stayed with the child until help arrived to take him to the hospital. The child suffered a fractured skull and a brain bleed and had to be taken by helicopter to another hospital, where he was in the intensive care unit for five days. Doctors said if the carrier hadn’t taken action when he did, the child would have died. Rice, a 21-year postal veteran, doesn’t think he’s a hero, though. “I was glad I was in the right spot at the right time,” he said.

## Neighborhood watch



Stacy Klenk

When New Smyrna Beach, FL Branch 3129 member **Stacy Klenk** was on her route on Saturday, June 21, 2014, she saw a toddler with a dog stand-

ing by the side of the road. After Klenk finished delivering to the trailer park close by, she saw that the girl had crossed the intersection. "It's an extremely busy intersection," Klenk said. "I wouldn't even let my teenage daughter cross it." Klenk asked a woman walking by, "Do you recognize her?" She didn't. Klenk caught up to the youngster and asked her name and age, but she wouldn't say anything. The carrier got the girl a drink and called 911. Klenk said police told her, "Ask her if

her name is Gianna." It was. Officers were familiar with her because she had wandered away before. Klenk stayed with Gianna until police arrived 30 minutes later, followed by the girl's father. The child had unlatched a gate and had wandered with her dog about a quarter-mile from home while her parents were sleeping. "It was an interesting experience, to say the least," Klenk said. But she doesn't think she's a hero. "I would have wanted someone to do the same for my child," the eight-year postal veteran said.

While delivering mail one day in January, Buffalo-Western NY Branch 3 member **Tina Mederski** heard a beeping noise coming from a home where the customer is a "snowbird" and lives somewhere warmer during the winter. "I heard a smoke detector going off," the carrier said. She didn't see any

smoke or a fire, but being a former volunteer firefighter, Mederski went to the home to be sure. Looking through the window, the carrier noticed water dripping from the ceiling and called the postmaster. The postmaster in turn called the police department, which dispatched police and fire responders to the house. Mederski also called the snowbird customer's son who lived nearby to inform him of the situation. Responding officers and firefighters forced their way inside and, finding five inches of water in the house, shut off the water supply. They said that without Mederski's actions, there could have been far more water damage to the home or worse. The 13-year letter carrier said, "I'm glad I was aware of my surroundings."

While on his route on Jan. 8, 2015, East Lansing, MI Branch 2555

member **James Murray** got in his vehicle to go to his next relay when he smelled the unmistakable odor of natural gas. "In all my years, I haven't smelled something like that," the 37-year letter carrier said. He traced the scent and knew it belonged to a house where an elderly woman lives alone. He went to the door to notify the patron about the smell he detected at her house. "I don't want to panic you, but I smell gas pretty bad," Murray told her. She immediately called the local utility company, which sent workers to check her house. They informed her that a gas pipe in her home was cracked. The customer called the post office later that day to commend Murray for his actions. Murray doesn't think he's a hero, though. "I think anybody would have done it," he said. "I just did what I thought was right." **PR**

## Fire and rescue

On the morning of Saturday, April 12, 2014, Pine Bluff, AR Branch 240 member **Wayne LaFrance** was delivering his route. He had just looped back around one street when he noticed smoke coming from a house that had looked unremarkable just a little while earlier. "There's normally a car in the driveway," he said, though there wasn't this time, so LaFrance called 911. The carrier rushed up

to the door and knocked, but getting no answer, he knocked on the windows as he went around the house. "I pushed on the kitchen door and it opened," he said. Yelling inside, he heard no response. Firefighters arrived shortly after to put out the blaze. The fire had burned only one section of the house, so there was luckily not a lot of damage. Investigators determined the fire's cause

as arson and asked LaFrance if he had seen anyone running away, but he had not. When the carrier saw that the situation was in good hands, he continued with his route. LaFrance was praised for his actions, though he said he was just in the right place at the right time to help. "Anyone would have done it," the 10-year postal veteran said. "You don't want to see anyone caught in a fire." **PR**



Wayne LaFrance

## Help on the way

Fairmont, WV Branch 910 member **Walter Brummage** was carrying a pivot on a freezing-cold and dark Feb. 5 afternoon when he saw customer Gloria Nowlin outside of her home screaming for help. When the carrier approached, Nowlin seemed confused and wasn't dressed for the weather. "She was all disoriented," Brummage said. "I asked, 'Are you all right?'" She asked the carrier to walk her to the corner to catch a ride. As the carrier walked with the woman, she started mumbling. Brummage knew something was wrong, and when they arrived at the cor-



Fairmont, WV Branch 910 member **Walter Brummage** (second from r) recently received recognition at his post office for his heroic actions.

ner, Nowlin asked the carrier to call 911. The carrier called for help, gave the woman his gloves, and wrapped his arms around her to keep her warm until an ambulance arrived. After paramedics evaluated Nowlin, they told Brummage that the woman was going into diabetic shock. Brummage said that he's just glad that his customer is OK. "Any other mailman would have done the same thing. We're out there every day," the 15-year postal veteran said. "A hero I am not. I'm just an average person doing what I do every day."

One day in November 2014, Peoria, IL Branch 31 member **Mike White** was going about his route when he heard a commotion. "This lady was yelling and screaming and I didn't know what was going on," he said. When he arrived at the house, he saw the woman, who was on her front porch bent over the railing while holding her infant and having what she said was a serious asthma attack. She wanted White to knock on the door of a neighbor who she knew would have an inhaler. He got it from the neighbor, but it was apparently not the right type of inhaler for her. "It just seemed like so much stuff was happening," he said. The carrier called 911 and took the child inside before trying to calm the woman as they waited for rescue crews to arrive to take

over. The woman went home after a week in the hospital. The next time White delivered, "I looked in and she ran out, gave me a big hug and thanked me," the 21-year postal veteran said. "It brought tears to my eyes. It made me feel good to help."

On a very cold Nov. 21, 2014, Willingboro, NJ Branch 5801 member **Jared Dilello** was delivering his route when he saw something unusual. "As I was crossing the street, I saw someone lying next to a car," he said. As Dilello got closer,

he recognized the person as his customer, Mr. Putnam. "He didn't look right," he said. The carrier called to him, but Putnam was unresponsive, so he called 911. The dispatcher informed Dilello how to perform CPR, and talked him through the process until an ambulance arrived. "It was a little nerve-racking," he said. "This is not part of my usual day." He was able to get a pulse prior to EMTs taking over. Though Putnam died the following day, Dilello was credited with reviving his customer and giving medical professionals a chance to help him further. "I would have felt better if he had survived," the second-year letter carrier said, but he was glad he could help extend the man's life.

While on his route on March 13, 2014, Cleveland Branch 40 member **Mark McDonald** saw his customer, Charlie Wise, lying outside on snowy grass. "Help me," he said to the carrier. Wise had fallen while trimming his rosebushes, and had injured his hip and could not get up. He told McDonald he had been there for about 30 minutes. McDonald helped Wise up and "I got him up on a bucket," he said. He then went to the door and talked to Wise's wife, Elaine, who brought out crutches. The carrier called 911 and stayed with Wise until an ambulance arrived. Elaine wrote a letter to the post office to thank McDonald. "My husband fell and dislocated his newly revised hip. Our mailman saw him, stopped, checked, informed me, helped him up and held



Jared Dilello

him until the squad came," she wrote. "He was our hero." But McDonald doesn't think he's a hero. "I was just there at the right time," the 21-year postal veteran said. "It's nothing anyone else wouldn't have done."

As Minneapolis Branch 9 member **Ken Wehr** was pulling up to a clusterbox on Jan. 5, "I saw a customer was walking her garbage bins to the street," he said. When he turned back around, he saw that the woman had fallen and smacked her head on the pavement. "I went back to my truck and got some napkins," he said. He applied pressure with them against the injury and asked the woman if she needed an ambulance. The woman refused, but the carrier told her that she looked as though she needed stitches. Wehr waited with the woman until she was able to get up, then helped her back into her home. Wehr insisted that she needed more help, so the woman called her daughter. Wehr returned an hour later to check up on her and again the next day, and found that the woman's daughter had taken her to the doctor, where she received several stitches. The woman contacted the local postmaster to express her gratitude for Wehr's care and assistance. The 30-plus-year carrier just said that he hoped someone would do the same for him. "It's just part of being a human being, helping each other," he said. **PR**