

## 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 202-662-2489 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.

## Carrier helps his 'family'

Oak Brook, IL Branch 825 member **Torre Gardner** was delivering mail on Oct. 17, 2018, and had put his 86-year-old customer Joan's mail in her mailbox when he noticed that the woman's front door was closed and the screen door was locked. The carrier found that to be strange because, for the past six years, the customer had normally met him at the door. "Where's Joan today?" he said he wondered.

At the front door, "I could hear the TV really loud," he said, adding, "I could hear a noise, but I couldn't tell what it was."

The noise stopped, so the carrier decided to continue to the next delivery address. As the carrier walked past the house, he looked through Joan's picture window. "I see her walker on the floor," Gardner said.

He went back to the home and then could hear a faint sound saying, "Help! Help!" and the noise he had heard at the door became louder. It was coming from the woman rolling on the floor, hitting the door with her cane.

"Joan, I'm here! I'm here!" he told her. The carrier tried to enter the home, but all the doors were locked. The carrier yelled to her that he was going to the neighbor's house across the street for help. While there, he also

called 911.

As Gardner waited for emergency help to arrive, he remembered that the customer's daughter lived across the street from his post office's vehicle maintenance specialist.

The carrier called the man, who was able to reach the customer's daughter through his wife. The carrier told Joan through the window that help was on the way. The carrier could see the customer's legs as she rolled on the floor, and she could see the carrier's hands waving at her through the window.

When responders arrived, the carrier was able to give them the customer's name, age and also tell them that her daughter had been notified. The daughter soon came and used a key to open her mother's back door.

Joan told the carrier that, after having falling near the kitchen, she was able to roll over and pull herself to the front door. She said she knew that if she got to the door, she could bang on it to get his attention. She added, "Once I saw your hands in the window, I knew you would not leave me."

The daughter and firefighters thanked the carrier for his kind actions. "She was OK," Gardner said. "I gave her a big hug."

The woman has since gone to reside in a nursing home, where the carrier has visited her. Gardner said he also keeps an eye on her house, which she still owns.

But the 13-year postal veteran shrugged off any accolades for his actions. "That's what we do as mail carriers," Gardner said. "It's just my job. We see people every day and they're like family to us."

## Right place, right time to save a life

Raleigh, NC Branch 459 member **Chris Petersen** was on his last loop on Dec. 24, 2018, and had just deliv-



Oak Brook, IL Branch 825 member **Torre Gardner** (r) helped his customer **Joan**, who was injured inside of her home, after he noticed that she had not met him at the door as she normally did.

ered to Mike and Pam Hodgin's house.

"I was walking away from their house when [Pam] opened the door, called out, 'Somebody please help me. I believe my husband is having a heart attack!' " Petersen told the *Wake County News*.

The carrier, along with two neighbors, Joanie and Jason Peterson, ran inside the home to help. The three found Mike Hodgin collapsed on his back on the kitchen floor. Jason said to the carrier, "Chris, he's not breathing."

The carrier checked for a pulse on Hodgin's wrists and neck. "He had no pulse," Petersen told the *Wake County News*, "so at that time I instantly began chest compressions."

Petersen had undergone CPR training a few times over the past 30 years ago, though he had never had to use it before. "Luckily for me—and for him—it came flooding back to me when I needed it," he said. "I didn't think; I just did. I saw a person who

was in need."

As Petersen performed chest compressions, Joanie tried to keep Pam calm while Jason attempted to get Mike's attention by calling for him to wake up.

A few moments later, Mike took a large breath and opened his eyes. "That's probably the most glorious thing I have ever seen," the carrier said.

One of the neighbors had already called 911 and, once emergency responders arrived, Petersen returned to his route.

"My mother-in-law always says that everything happens for a reason," Petersen told Fox News. "I was running late that day because I was meant to be there to help Mike. I couldn't have imagined a better outcome."

Joanie Peterson told WTVD-TV, the local ABC news affiliate, that Mike Hodgin had suffered an "electrical event," a medical emergency that the



**Raleigh, NC Branch 459 member Chris Petersen recently received media attention for helping to save his customer by performing CPR.**

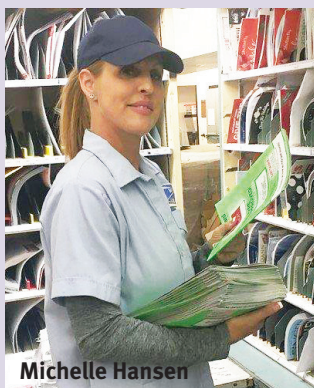
news outlet reported leaves victims with a 5 percent survival rate.

Jason Peterson told the *Wake County News*, "You know if we hadn't been there, if Chris hadn't taken the quick action that he did, Mike wouldn't be here today."

Hodgin, who returned home after a stay in the hospital, told Fox News, "Chris is my hero and it is because of him I'm alive today to watch my grandsons grow and enjoy each new day."

Petersen said he's not comfortable with the title of hero. "I was in the right place at the right time and I knew what to do and it worked," the 31-year postal veteran said, adding, "My wish is to have everyone take a CPR class. It's a skill that's handy."

## Eye on the elderly



**Michelle Hansen**

On Nov. 2, 2018, South Jersey, NJ Branch 908 member **Michelle Hansen** had returned to her route

after a day off and was delivering mail to a 94-year-old customer's house when she noticed two newspapers outside. She thought that this was unusual for the woman, whose schedule she knew well. "I looked in the mailbox and saw yesterday's mail," the carrier said. Hansen went to a neighbor's house, but didn't receive a response, so she returned to the customer's house. "I started looking through the window," she said. "I noticed the lamp had been knocked over." The carrier looked toward the street

and saw a police officer patrolling. Hansen flagged him down and requested a wellness check on the resident. When officers responded to the house, they found the woman unresponsive and trapped under a large piece of furniture. It was determined that the customer had suffered a stroke and was in need of medical attention. "She had been lying on the floor for a day, the poor little thing," Hansen said. Paramedics were dispatched to the scene to provide further assistance. The woman

died of complications from her condition a few months later. Hansen was later approached by the woman's grateful son. "It gave them more time with her," she said. Though the family has called Hansen their "angel," the carrier said she simply makes an effort to look out for her elderly customers and to notice things that are out of the ordinary. "You know when something's wrong," the 19-year postal veteran said. "Anything I can do to help out, I appreciate." **PR**

### Little things can make a big difference

Denver, CO Branch 47 member **Amy Bezerra** became concerned on Nov. 21, 2018, when a customer, John, hadn't picked up his mail in several days. It was the day before Thanksgiving, but the man usually put in a mail-hold request when he went out of town.

"I knew something was wrong," the carrier said.

She knocked on the front door of the home, but got no response from John. She then went to try the neighbors' door to see if they would try to call the man. They were unsure if they had seen the man lately, but Bezerra left her contact information with them.

When the carrier finished her route, she went back to the man's home and knocked on the door. When she got no response, she called police for a welfare check. The operator told the carrier to stay at the man's house until they got there.

As it turned out, John was upstairs in his bedroom. He had seen from his

window that Bezerra was there, and he knew that she never came to his house on her route that late.

"It took him almost 25 minutes to get to the front door," she said. "He scooted on his butt because he was so weak."

When John answered the door, "he was completely covered in blood," the carrier said. The man apparently had repeatedly fallen in his bedroom, hitting furniture, and decided to not drink anything so he did not have to move, which caused him to become dehydrated. He also had two black eyes.

Bezerra helped him get into a chair. "I've called the police, but I'm going to call for an ambulance," she told her customer, and he agreed.

The carrier assisted him to the ambulance, where paramedics told Bezerra that they did not think the man would have lasted much longer without assistance. He spent a few days in the hospital, before going to a rehabilitation facility.

Bezerra has become closer to her customer. "[He] and I have created this bond," she said. The carrier and her



When Denver, CO Branch 47 member **Amy Bezerra** (r) saw that her customer **John** had not picked up his mail in a few days, she knew something was wrong.

family would often visit John while he was in rehab, helping him with laundry, bills and playing card games with him. The man returned home in February with new medical equipment.

The 23-year letter carrier received an award from the Red Cross in March for her efforts.

This is not the first time the carrier has been recognized for her actions. Bezerra was featured in the December 2017 *Postal Record* for helping to reunite a family with a relative who suffered from dementia.

The carrier said that she just tried to be observant. "We're out there every day and we know people's habits and routines," Bezerra said. "The littlest things, like ringing a door bell, can make a difference." **PR**

### Help on the way



**Richard Sucik**

On Dec. 31, 2018, Madison, WI Branch 507 member **Richard Sucik** was delivering packages on a snowy afternoon to an apartment building on his route. When he got to the door of a ground-floor unit, "I heard this faint call for help," he said, "and it kept repeating." The carrier wondered if it was a recording. "It was kind of surreal," Sucik said. He continued delivering and decided that, "If I keep hearing it, I gotta do something." The carrier returned to the door after a few

more deliveries and heard the faint call again, so he knocked. The woman, Jean, called out and said, "Help!" "Are you OK?" Sucik asked. The woman responded that she had fallen and couldn't get up. The carrier asked if it was all right to call 911; with Jean's permission, he did so. He then waited outside the patron's locked front door to comfort her. "I assured her that help was on the way," he said. When responders arrived and gained access through a screened window, they discovered that the

woman had fallen in the kitchen and had been struggling on the floor for some time. It was later learned that Jean had suffered a heart attack and also had injured her hip. After undergoing an operation, Jean went to rehabilitation. She later called the post office to commend her "brave and alert" letter carrier. "I'm not a hero," the 13-year letter carrier and 26-year Air Force veteran said. "I was just in the right place at the right time and I think I did the right thing." **PR**