



OF THE YEAR AWARDS

The Heroes honored at the event (from l): Mark Simone, Casey Ritchie, Meagan Sperling, Eric Smith, Michael Ciccone, Jerry Giesting, Eric Beu, Jeremiah Grant, Sherri Baker, Kyle West, Gerald Soileau, Christine Cambizaca, Christopher Lippy, Chyanne Thomas, Anthony Picariello, Dixie Manns, Matthew King and Pedro Mendoza



“**E**very day, somewhere, letter carriers are doing something to assist folks on their route.

It may be as simple as noticing that a resident’s mail has gone uncollected from the porch and alerting authorities—or as courageous as trying to help a victim in real time amid gunfire from multiple assailants,” NALC Executive Vice President Paul Barner said as he welcomed a large audience to the NALC Heroes of the Year Awards luncheon.

He noted that letter carriers do not do those things because they are superheroes. “Rather,” he said, “it reflects the nature and the ethos of the letter carrier craft. Because they are out delivering the mail daily, in every community across this vast country, they’re often first on the scene when action is needed.”

“Equally important,” Barner added, “it indicates how letter carriers view their work. It is more than a job—it’s a career in public service.”

The Heroes event was held on May 11 in Washington, DC. The annual ceremony, which had been put on pause starting in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted the special acts of courage and compassion performed by NALC members to improve—or save—lives along their routes. Attendees included the union’s resident national officers, NALC staffers, U.S. Postal Service executives, members of the Postal Regulatory Commission, representatives from the USPS Board of Governors, journalists, and many others from the labor and postal community, including leaders from the

American Postal Workers Union, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO, the United Steel Workers, and the National Association of Postal Supervisors.

The event recognized not only the 2022 Heroes of the Year, but also the 2020 and 2021 Heroes of the Year. The full list of recipients is below. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it only recently became safe to hold an in-person award event for those two slates of recipients. This was reflected in the unfortunate death of 2020 Unit Citation winner **Jody Kotowski** from COVID-19 just months after she performed her heroic actions. A moment of silence was held in honor of the carrier.

Barner invited Postmaster General Louis DeJoy to the podium, where he lauded letter carriers for their service and positive impact in their communities. “Heroes are special people,” he said. “You find them in all walks of life. They are among many of the people we associate with and encounter every day. But not everyone is a hero. Not everyone does the heroic thing when the moment calls for a hero. That’s why it’s so important to celebrate and recognize those people who act selflessly and put themselves at risk and act with heroism when a hero is needed.”

DeJoy noted that letter carriers are uniquely part of the lives of the customers they serve and he praised them for rising to the occasion when help is needed in a crisis that can be averted or a dangerous situation that can be



Executive Vice
President Paul
Barner



Recipients

Special Carrier Alert Award:

2020: Matthew King
of Champaign, IL Branch 671
2021: Michelle DeCosta
of New York, NY Branch 36
2022: Christopher Lippy
of Harrisburg, PA Branch 500

Unit Citation Award:

2020: Eric Beu and Mark Simone
of Oklahoma City, OK Branch 458
2021: Kevin Bystrak and Jody
Kotowski of Buffalo-Western New
York Branch 3
2022: Eric Beu, Casey Ritchie,
Meagan Sperling and Jeremiah
Grant of Oklahoma City, OK
Branch 458

Humanitarian of the Year:

2020: Jerry Giesting
of Cincinnati, OH Branch 43
2021: Kyle West
of Cincinnati, OH Branch 43
2022: Anthony Picariello
of Philadelphia, PA Branch 157

Western Region Hero:

2020: Chyanne Thomas
of Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100
2021: Ray Hacker
of North Bend, OR Branch 2342
2022: Darin Chew
of Sun City, AZ Branch 6156

Central Region Hero:

2020: Gerald Soileau
of Lafayette, LA Branch 1760
2021: Dixie Manns
of Michigan City, IN Branch 455
2022: Sherri Baker
of Little Rock, AR Branch 35

Eastern Region Hero:

2020: Sydney Rodgers
of Buffalo-Western New York Br. 3*
2021: Erin Pennington
of Pittsburgh, PA Branch 84
2022: Eric Smith
of Charleston, WV Branch 531

National Hero of the Year:

2020: Pedro Mendoza
of Grand Junction, CO Branch 913
2021: Ramique Hill
of Rochester, NY Branch 210
2022: Christine Cambizaca
of Connecticut Merged Branch 20

*Due to the impact of the pandemic as well as the passage of time, some of the 2020 and 2021 Heroes were unable to attend the awards ceremony or no longer are postal employees or NALC members. For 2020 Eastern Region Hero of the Year, Michael Ciccone of Worcester, MA Branch 12, who rescued a family from a house fire, represented the category at the ceremony.

diffused. “You epitomize the ideal of a public servant, and your actions reflect the very best expectations of the Postal Service and of the country,” the postmaster general said.

“I would like to recognize and congratulate the NALC Heroes of 2020, 2021 and 2022,” he added. “I am proud to be your colleague. May we all live up to the example you set.”

Returning to the podium, Executive Vice President Barner explained why the Postal Service, and especially the nation’s 200,000-plus active city letter carriers who are the face of the agency, are so trusted by the public. He said that they, along with the union’s 90,000 retired carriers, go beyond the call of duty every year. And he addressed the traits that spurred the honorees’ wide array of feats.

“Today’s Heroes represent letter carriers throughout the country who not only deliver the nation’s mail six, or even seven, days a week, but who often help—or save—people in emergencies involving accidents, fires, crimes or health crises, or who engage in efforts to improve the communities in which they work,” Barner said. “Letter carriers often deliver on the same routes for years or even decades. They know the neighborhoods and they form bonds with residents as they watch the families grow and the children grow up. They develop a sense of when something is amiss.”

Barner told the crowd that if the past were any indication, the heroes would rebuff the notion that they did anything out of the ordinary while asserting that anyone would have done

the same thing under similar circumstances.

“That’s reflected in how we generally learn about these events in the first place,” he said. “A fire chief mentions the critical intervention of a letter carrier. A grateful family writes a letter to the local newspaper. A neighbor tells the local postmaster what happened. The one place where we rarely find out about the event is from the letter carrier themselves. Rather than seeking attention after saving someone, they simply get back on the route and deliver the mail, perhaps checking up on the resident later on to see how things are going.”

Barner also mentioned that it doesn’t hurt that nearly a quarter of all letter carriers are military veterans, wearing their second uniform in service to our nation, and that “they possess the training and situational awareness to quickly size things up and act decisively when called for.”

He added that individual letter carriers—like the Heroes gathered at the ceremony—are the ones who put principle into practice by performing acts of heroism or kindness on their routes.

He then briefly recounted each hero’s story to the audience, before giving each his or her award. The stories of the 2022 Heroes are found in the following pages of this issue of *The Postal Record*. To read the stories of the 2020 and 2021 Heroes, see the December 2020 and December 2021 issues of *The Postal Record* respectively or visit nalc.org/news/the-postal-record/archives.

Before presenting the awards by category for the three years, Barner



Postmaster General Louis DeJoy

thanked the independent judges who selected the Heroes from more than 100 nominees, whose stories of heroism and community service were published over the course of a year in this magazine, as has been done since 1974.

For the 2022 Heroes, a one-time change was made to extend the selection period to 18 months, with the judges reviewing *The Postal Record* issues from July 2021 through December 2022. The 2022 judges were Christopher Godfrey, director of the Office of

Workers' Compensation Programs at the U.S. Department of Labor; Erkeisha Terry, director of labor engagement at United Way Worldwide; and Warren Broughton, lieutenant/assistant fire marshal in the Prince William County, VA, Fire Department.

Barner presented each honoree with an award certificate and a special lapel pin that the carrier can wear to highlight the distinction. Each recipi-

ent was asked to speak about why they acted in the way that they did.

2020 Special Carrier Alert award winner **Matthew King** summed it up aptly when he said he was serving as a representative for all the carriers out there who do their duty. "We all take an oath as federal employees to the Constitution of the United States," he said in accepting his award. "The Constitution is there to provide domestic tranquility, whether you're putting letters in a box, or doing something else as fate and the situation might call for. On behalf of all the representatives who do their duty, thank you for this."

While in the nation's capital, many of the honorees met with congressional representatives, who were eager to thank them for looking out for their customers and their communities.

Barner concluded the event by saying how proud the union is of the Heroes. "They truly represent our country's best in public service," he said to a standing ovation. "They are, indeed, our heroes."

Video of the Heroes of the Year event is available on NALC's YouTube channel at youtube.com/ThePostalRecord. **PR**



Above left: The 2021 Heroes of the Year who attended the ceremony were (from l) Dixie Manns of Michigan City, IN Branch 455; Kyle West of Cincinnati, OH Branch 43; and Erin Pennington of Pittsburgh, PA Branch 84.

Left: The 2020 Heroes of the Year who attended the ceremony were (from l): Jerry Giesting of Cincinnati, OH Branch 43; Mark Simone of Oklahoma City, OK Branch 458; Pedro Mendoza of Grand Junction, CO Branch 913; Gerald Soileau of Lafayette, LA Branch 1760; Chyanne Thomas of Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100; Eric Beu of Oklahoma City, OK Branch 458; Michael Ciccone of Worcester, MA Branch 12; and Matthew King of Champaign, IL Branch 671.



Christopher Lippy

Harrisburg, PA Branch 500



2022 SPECIAL CARRIER ALERT
AWARD HERO OF THE YEAR

Almost all heroic letter carriers will tell you that the key to what they accomplished was being alert. Sometimes that means smelling smoke at a house fire or noticing that yesterday's mail hasn't been collected from an elderly resident's mailbox. For Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 member **Christopher Lippy**, it was getting a second change of address (COA) form.

"It was early December," he said, when he received the COA for the wife of a married couple on his route. "[I got one] for her first, and I thought maybe [it was for] Christmas," the 33-

year carrier said. "Maybe she did it so Christmas presents would go somewhere else."

When Lippy got a second COA, this time for the husband, he took action.

Lippy went up to the door and "tipped them off" about the temporary requests. Both customers said they hadn't placed the requests. The carrier explained that he also had noticed a significant drop-off in the amount of mail he was delivering to them and suggested that they may have been the victims of mail fraud.

"We figured out [that the COAs] were phony," he said.

After an investigation, Lippy's hunch was proven correct—someone had placed the requests through an online form and had been collecting their forwarded mail.

The customers reached out to the post office, thanking the carrier for his attentiveness, saying, "We are grateful Chris picked up on it early, or even more damage would have been done."

For that attentiveness and compassion, the judges declared Lippy NALC's 2022 Special Carrier Alert Hero of the Year.

"He put two and two together," the judges said. "He was very close to what was going on with the married couple and laser-focused on his customers."

"I'm happy about it," Lippy said about being named the winner. "It's nice to be recognized." **PR**



Darin Chew

Sun City, AZ Branch 6156



2022 WESTERN REGION
HERO OF THE YEAR

“I was coming up the other side of the street for curbside delivery, when I heard someone talking on the other side of the street,” Sun City, AZ Branch 6156 member **Darin Chew** recalled about his route on Dec. 26, 2020, when “I heard [Patti Clark] say, ‘He fell and hit his head, and he’s not getting up.’”

The 25-year carrier continued on his route, listening intently, until he heard her say, “He’s not breathing.” At those chilling words, the Marine Corps veteran leaped into action.

Clark’s husband, Lee, had been pumping air into his tires when his wife went inside to get something. When Patti came back outside, her husband was lying on the pavement underneath the car, unconscious. Patti quickly called 911, which was the phone call that Chew had overheard.

“I heard her say, ‘The mailman’s running over,’” the carrier recounted. Lee’s body was partially under the car—Chew figured that he must have rolled after falling to the ground, but Lee’s position made it difficult to determine the extent of his injuries. “I reached under [the car] and felt for a pulse, but I got nothing,” Chew said. He managed to pull the man out from under the car. “Then I tipped his head back and started doing chest compressions,” the carrier said.

Chew hadn’t performed CPR since his military training, but he was determined to keep Lee alive until paramedics arrived.

“I felt like I could just give him a fighting chance until someone with medical training could come save his life,” he said.

He continued doing chest compressions until EMTs reached the scene and took over. Lee was defibrillated three times before his pulse was restored. Paramedics credited Chew’s medical attention with saving Lee

from possible brain damage, due to the length of time he was without a pulse. Lee was placed in a medically induced coma at the hospital and later underwent heart surgery, but has since completely recovered.

Chew didn’t tell anyone and didn’t want anyone to know about his heroism until Lee came out of the coma and could talk to his wife. That was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as Patti was not able to go to the hospital and instead spoke with Lee over the computer and phone.

Lee was extremely grateful to Chew for helping save his life. “He put [the story] in the newspaper here,” Chew said. “He wants everyone to know.” Patti also called the post office to thank Chew for his actions, calling him “a miracle from God.”

For going above and beyond, the judges named Chew NALC’s 2022 Western Region Hero of the Year.

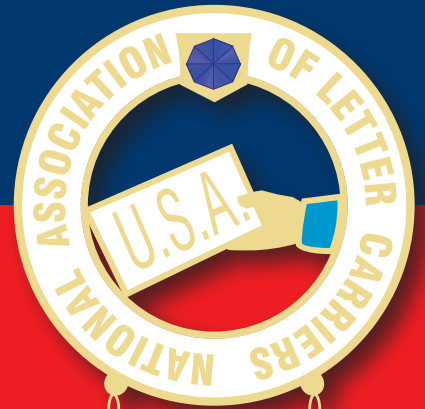
“His action had a very clear impact on the person that had become injured,” the judges said. “In a situation like that, he could have said, ‘I don’t want to pull this person because I could inflict further damage to an arm or leg.’ But he just immediately jumped into action and pulled the person out, saving their life. He didn’t think twice about that.”

The carrier, however, was modest about his recognition, saying that he was more grateful that Lee ended up being OK than about receiving an award. He said that he still sees the couple often and that every year on Dec. 26 since then they have dinner together to commemorate the day.

“I don’t feel like I saved him. I feel like I just kept him alive long enough for the paramedics to do it,” he said. Chew hoped that if anything good comes from this recognition it’s that when people see someone in need, they’ll respond. “Don’t do nothing,” he added. **PR**

Sherri Baker

Little Rock, AR Branch 35



2022 CENTRAL REGION
HERO OF THE YEAR

“I heard someone yelling, ‘Look out!’” Little Rock, AR Branch 35 member **Sherri Baker** said.

On April 8, 2021, the 24-year carrier had been helping deliver mail to an apartment complex on another route after finishing her own in the late afternoon. She was walking across the crowded courtyard outside the apartment building.

“There were about 30 people out there, including kids [at a playground],” Baker said—when she noticed a young man walking slightly ahead of her. “I could see the guy walking about 15 to 20 feet away from me,” she recalled.

A man jumped out of the passenger side of a vehicle that had pulled up in front of the building and began yelling at the man. As Baker watched, “they shot him twice in the back,” she said.

The victim, 24-year-old Deshon Stokes, fell to the ground and rolled over.

Despite the chaos that immediately broke out, Baker rushed to help. “I started yelling and running after the man shooting, telling him to stop,” the carrier said. “He turned and looked at me but continued to shoot the young man.”

Stokes was shot several times again, this time in the legs, arm and chest. The shooter ran back to the car and jumped in, and the vehicle took off as Baker called 911.

It was a frightening situation, Baker notes. “They shot him eight times in front of me,” she said.

Then two men ran up to Stokes, pulling at his pants and robbing him. “I was physically fighting with them to stop,” the carrier said.

The carrier followed the 911 operator’s instructions, who advised her to let the robbers have what they wanted and focus on her victim.

“I did CPR and everything I could,” which she said she was trained to do through her previous restaurant career. “It’s something everyone should learn.”

Police arrived shortly afterward and told her to stop CPR, as the young man was gone. Paramedics soon pronounced Stokes dead at the scene, with the fatal shot being to his lung.

“I knew he was gone because I couldn’t get any breath. I was doing my best to get breaths in him, but his eyes had already locked on mine,” she said. “When you’re doing CPR and somebody has blood coming up, you know.” But the training is, she added, that you keep going until someone relieves you. “I can say with all my heart I tried my best that day. I wish it was a good story; I wish it would have been a good outcome,” she continued. “I am thankful I was there for him, and that he didn’t die alone. I’ll never forget him, I know that. He will always be with me.”

Baker has a son who’s just slightly younger than Stokes. “I would hope and pray that if something happened to him, that somebody would be there for him,” she said.

The carrier, along with other witnesses, was later interviewed by police—but even two years later, the killer had yet to be apprehended.

The story, including Baker’s actions, was covered by many media outlets, such as the local Fox and ABC TV af-

filates, and Stokes’s brother thanked Baker for her help. The carrier, however, rebuffed any praise for her role.

“I’m not a hero, I’ll tell you that,” she said. “I just feel like God put me where he wanted me to be for this young man. I did something that I felt, in my heart, that anybody with compassion would do for somebody.”

In naming Baker NALC’s 2022 Central Region Hero, the judges cited the carrier’s bravery. “She put herself not only in harm’s way physically, but also emotionally and mentally,” they said. “To see something that traumatic and to still have the fortitude and the heroism to put herself in harm’s way—[when the shooter] coming back was a distinct possibility, and dealing with someone else who’s bleeding and still doing CPR—all of that is just very, very dangerous.”

Baker concluded simply: “We have to look out for everyone on our route,” she said. “We’re not just carrying mail; we’re looking out for everyone.” **PR**





Eric Smith

Charleston, WV Branch 531



2022 EASTERN REGION
HERO OF THE YEAR

A vehicle sitting idle in the road with flashers on caught the attention of Charleston, WV Branch 531 member **Eric Smith** as he was driving to work on March 20, 2021.

“I drove past it at first, and then I saw the flames” and he felt the heat through his car, Smith recalled. “I turned around after realizing no rescue vehicles were on the scene.”

The flames were coming from the house nearest to the parked vehicle, and when the 10-year carrier investigated further, he saw that the driver of the idled car was approaching the residence.

Smith recognized him as a customer from his route, and he recognized the house, too—he knew that three people lived there. The man yelled, “There [are] people in the house!” so they both ran up.

While another passerby called 911, Smith, the first passerby and a neighbor were able to gain entry to the house and decided to brave the smoke and flames to try to rescue the residents: Linda Harris and her two uncles.

“I got the front door open,” Smith said, “and there were two people lying [unconscious] behind the door.”

Harris and one uncle, Richard, had made it to the front hallway before collapsing from the thick smoke.

“I pulled the lady out, and she was unconscious,” the carrier recalled. “You could only go in as long as you could hold your breath. We could only

stay in for 30 seconds to a minute at a time. Visibility was extremely low also.”

While Smith carried Harris a safe distance from the fire, another person went into the house to pull out Richard, who also was unconscious. “By that time, the whole house was engulfed,” Smith said.

The neighbor was unable to pull out the man by himself, due to the heat and thick smoke, so Smith went back into the house. “I went in and managed to get hold of him, and I pulled him closer to the door until I had to catch a breath,” he said. “By this time, the house was coming down around us.”

Eventually, through a group effort, the four men were able to drag Richard out of the house to a safe distance and begin administering CPR on him until EMTs arrived.

Emergency services airlifted Harris to the hospital. She was the only survivor of the fire and spent 13 days on a ventilator. Richard did not survive, and Harris’s other uncle, who had been trapped upstairs, also died.

Harris later spoke to local media about the role of Smith and the three other men. “[They were] complete strangers, except for my neighbor,” she told local WSAZ-TV. “I thank them every day; I’m grateful every day for my heroes—my angels.”

“Everything happened so fast,” Smith said, reflecting on his role in saving his customer. “I just did whatever it took to try and get everyone out.

It was instincts—just try to save them,” he added.

In naming Smith NALC’s 2022 Eastern Region Hero, judges said that “the ability to experience the extreme temperatures and the extreme dangers that you do when you run into a burning building—and to go in a second time to pull someone out when you see that the environment has deteriorated even more—is a true act of heroism and so selfless of him to risk his life to do that.”

Though Smith called the award an honor he appreciates, he insisted, “I don’t necessarily think that I deserve it over anybody else. I just did what anybody else would do.” **PR**

Eric Smith’s son, Deklan, joins his father on stage.



Casey Ritchie, Meagan Sperling, Eric Beu and Jeremiah Grant

Oklahoma City, OK Branch 458

Returning to Chicago's McCormick Place Convention Center following lunch on Aug. 10, four Oklahoma City Branch 458 delegates to the 2022 NALC national convention saw two cars driving erratically in front of the convention center.

"We heard a commotion between two vehicles," carrier **Eric Beu** said. The cars were honking at each other and driving recklessly.

"It looked like road rage," added Branch 458 member **Casey Ritchie**.

They watched as the driver of one car abandoned it, still running, in the middle of the street and hopped into the other car, which made a U-turn and sped away. The carriers surmised that it was a stolen car that had been ditched.

Another Branch 458 member, **Meagan Sperling**, approached the remaining car to investigate—and spotted something shocking.

"There's a baby inside!" she yelled. A 1-year-old boy was strapped into a car seat in the back of the vehicle.

The fourth member in the group, **Jeremiah Grant**, already had begun to call 911, but the finding of the child made the call more urgent. With Ritchie relaying their location to Grant to tell the police dispatcher, Sperling looked after the child. Beu reached in and turned on the car's hazard lights, while Sperling, concerned about the child's safety, took the toddler out of the car and held him.

Chicago police already had been searching for the car with the child inside, and officers arrived quickly with the boy's father. Sperling handed the boy over to the father and, after the four carriers gave their statements to police, they went back to the convention center floor.

Beu previously had been recognized as a 2020 NALC Hero in the same

From l: Beu, Sperling, Ritchie and Grant



category after he and another carrier from the same branch had helped a lost, hungry man who was blind find his way home.

The judges were impressed by how the four carriers quickly jumped into action and did all the right things to respond to the situation, each taking a different role.

"Not only did they identify the situation, but they sprang into action to call dispatch, to stay on the line, and also triage to make sure one person was with the child and the others helped with the situation itself," the judges said in bestowing NALC's 2022 Unit Citation Award on the group. "It was just really good teamwork."

"I don't think any of us would consider ourselves heroes," Beu said of the award. "Just a couple of good Samaritans striving to put right what once went wrong." **PR**



2022 UNIT CITATION
AWARD HERO OF THE YEAR



Eric Beu tells the story of the group's actions in Chicago, while (from l) Casey Ritchie, Jeremiah Grant and Meagan Sperling look on.

Anthony Picariello

Philadelphia, PA Branch 157



2022 HUMANITARIAN
OF THE YEAR



Anthony Picariello does his part to ensure that children enjoy what are probably the two favorite holidays among young folks: Halloween and Christmas.

Branch 157 carriers in Philadelphia, PA, where he has delivered the mail for 26 years, know Picariello as “Stitch.” He got the nickname as a young child when he had open-heart surgery, and then earned a reputation as an accident-prone boy. Years later, his own newborn daughter had surgery at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), followed by 24 days of recovery time in the neonatal intensive-care unit.

After that experience, he teamed up with another carrier to collect Halloween costumes for children in the oncology unit of the hospital. The daughter of the other carrier, who has since left the Postal Service, had died of cancer at CHOP on Halloween, her favorite holiday, a few years ago. Since that carrier left the job, Picariello has carried on the work of bringing Halloween to the kids at CHOP.

“At the hospital, they set up a makeshift store,” he said. “A lot of the cancer patients, the kids can’t leave and their families pretty much live there.”

The in-house costume store allows the children to choose their costumes without parents having to worry about logistics. “The kids get to pick out their costume and trick-or-treat at the hospital,” Picariello said.

Picariello set up a box in the Bustleton Post Office, where he works, to collect donated costumes from postal employees and the community, and he also gathered cash donations to buy more. For Halloween 2022, the effort yielded 337 costumes of all kinds and sizes; many more were bought with the cash donations.

Once Halloween is over, many children’s thoughts soon turn to Christmas. For the past two years, Picariello, who has two young children of his own, set up a special mailbox in the post office lobby for letters to Santa, and answered each one.

At a table next to the box, he offered children little gifts such as stickers and candy, and included templates and pens to make writing to Santa easy. He personalized each response from Santa to match the child’s wishes—though he was careful never to promise that a child would get the gifts requested. He fancied up the letters from Santa with a special North Pole wax seal and sent them by mail.

When word got out about the mailbox, he was swamped with letters—151 last Christmas, for example. But that didn’t slow Picariello down. “I was up until 2 or 3 in the morning

almost every night writing back to them,” he said.

The judges were impressed by Picariello’s efforts, naming him NALC’s 2022 Humanitarian of the Year.

“To continuously give to our youth is a special action and it takes a special heart to do that. To continuously give speaks volumes for a person’s character. Not only did he go out of his way to have 337 Halloween costumes for the children at the hospital when they can’t go out and get costumes themselves or trick-or-treat, he had the time and the heart to think about the same kids during Christmastime. He took time to respond to each one of those letters,” the judges said.

“Just the act of continuously giving and continuously thinking of others and our youth is a very special thing,” they added.

Picariello said he was “honored to be recognized,” but he doesn’t feel like a hero. He just likes helping youngsters. In addition to his holiday volunteer activities, he coaches softball, a sport his children enjoy. “All my free time is helping my kids and other kids,” he said. “It’s one of my passions.” **PR**



Christine Cambizaca

Connecticut Merged Branch 20



2022 NATIONAL
HERO OF THE YEAR

A barefoot woman—crying, afraid and struggling to speak—approached city carrier assistant **Christine Cambizaca** while she was delivering the mail in her truck in Torrington, CT, in August of 2022.

“She had blood on her nose and bruises on her face,” Cambizaca said. “Are you OK?” Cambizaca asked her. “Are you being followed?”

The woman nodded.

Cambizaca, a member of Connecticut Merged Branch 20 who had started on the job only a month earlier, called her supervisor, who told her to call 911, which she did.

The carrier then spotted a man who seemed to be looking for the woman, so she let the victim wait inside her mail truck while she stood outside. The man approached the truck and yelled at her and the woman inside, demanding to be let in, but Cambizaca refused, despite the danger.

“I got scared because I saw a knife in his pocket,” she said.

Cambizaca tried to get into the truck through the back door, but the man noticed and also tried to enter the truck that way, so she shut the door again to protect the woman inside. A neighbor heard the commotion and came outside, distracting the man and allowing Cambizaca to get in the vehicle.

From the truck, she saw the man throw the knife at the neighbor, who was not injured. The neighbor picked up the knife and continued to distract the man until police arrived. They ar-

rested the man, and an ambulance took the woman to the hospital. After telling officers what happened, Cambizaca continued on her route.

“I was calm,” she said of the incident, “but I was scared.”

The suspect is facing six charges, including assault, strangulation and threatening.

For her courage and cleverness in the face of great personal danger, the judges declared Cambizaca the NALC’s 2022 National Hero of the Year.

“The young lady risked her life by locking a woman in her truck to protect her from someone who had proven he would assault someone,” the judges

said. “She put her own life in danger—she didn’t know what the situation could have developed into. But she thought quickly, on her feet.”

“I am excited that I was chosen Hero of the Year,” Cambizaca said, but she added that she simply did what needed to be done. The victim, she said, “could have been anybody’s daughter or sister. No matter who it was, we should always look after each other.” **PR**



Cambizaca receives her certificate from Executive Vice President Barner.