

2018



OF THE
YEAR
AWARDS

National Association of Letter Carriers
Washington, DC

Wednesday, September 26, 2018

Honoring

Unit Citation Award:

**Dennis Denham of Mt. Clemens, MI Branch 654;
Steve Futach of South Macomb, MI Branch 4374
Joseph Pomante of Detroit Branch 1**

Special Carrier Alert Award:

Naseem Elias of South Macomb, MI Branch 4374

Western Region Hero:

Antonio Colon of Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100

Central Region Hero:

Brandon Franklin of North Oakland County, MI Branch 320

Eastern Region Hero:

Peter Monteleone of Westchester Merged, NY Branch 693

Humanitarian of the Year:

Ebony Nobles of Houston, TX Branch 283

National Hero of the Year:

Jason Moss of Tampa, FL Branch 599

National Hero of the Year:

John Sylvain of South Florida Branch 1071

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Prayer

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Greetings from distinguished guests

Importance of Heroes of the Year Awards

Presentations

Unit Citation Award

Special Carrier Alert Award

Regional Heroes

National Humanitarian of the Year

National Hero of the Year

Closing Remarks

This year's judges

Richard Bowers

Retired Fire Chief

Department of Fire and Rescue

Fairfax County, VA

Christopher Godfrey

Chief Judge and Chairman

Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

U.S. Department of Labor

Kelly Temple

Director, Labor Engagement

United Way Worldwide

Dennis Denham—Mt. Clemens, MI Branch 654 Steve Futach—South Macomb, MI Branch 4374 Joseph Pomante—Detroit Branch 1



In a moment of serendipity, the paths of three active and retired members converged on a Mt. Clemens, MI, cul-de-sac on May 23, 2017.

Retired South Macomb, MI Branch 4374 member **Steve Futach** had just returned home from volunteering at the branch. As he pulled into his driveway, he stopped to pick up his mail.

Futach's neighbors, retired Detroit Branch 1 member **Joseph Pomante** and his wife, Michele, out enjoying a bike ride, paused to chat with him.

Dennis Denham, a Mt. Clemens, MI Branch 654 city carrier assistant (CCA), passed the retirees as he worked his route. Denham noticed customer Fred Baker lying on his

driveway; he assumed that Baker was working on his car. As he got closer, however, he could hear the 81-year-old calling for help.

The CCA immediately alerted Futach and the Pomantes and the group sprang into action. While Denham called 911, Joseph Pomante ran up to provide first aid to Baker, who was bleeding from a gash on his head, and Futach went home to get towels to help stanch the flow. Denham put the 911 operator on speakerphone so Pomante could follow directions on administering aid.

"I asked [Baker] a number of questions just hoping he wouldn't go unconscious. He barely remained awake until the ambulance arrived" about 10 to 15 minutes later, Pomante said.

After EMTs arrived, stabilized Baker and took him to the hospital, Futach noticed that Baker's keys and wallet were still in the driveway. By this time, Futach's wife, Linda, a retired postal custodian, had arrived on the scene. Linda Futach called the injured man's daughter, whose number was found on an emergency contact list in Baker's wallet. The daughter gave the group permission to get Baker's dog from the house.

"We then cleaned the blood from the driveway, secured his belongings and retrieved the dog," Steve Futach said.

Baker apparently had fallen on his driveway a half-hour earlier and had hit his head on the concrete. He received stitches and, after leaving the hospital, went to a rehab facility.

"This is a very unique situation where two different generations of letter carriers worked together," Branch 654 President **Clarence Blaze** said. "In this case, they worked together to save a human life."

In bestowing NALC's 2018 Unit Citation Award on Denham, Futach and Pomante, the Heroes of the Year judges cited the carriers' teamwork and eagerness to extend themselves. "What an outstanding team effort demonstrated by active and retired letter carriers," they said. "Their act demonstrates the character of letter carriers and their willingness to help."



Naseem Elias

South Macomb, MI Branch 4374



Naseem Elias recognized the distraught woman clutching her infant.

They had met a few weeks before. The resident was from Egypt and didn't speak much English. "If you need any help, let me know; I will be on this route once a week," the South Macomb, MI Branch 4374 member had told her.



On Aug. 14, 2017, she very much needed help. Her baby had stopped breathing and she had run into the street to try to get a passerby to call the police. The man ignored her, and she ran back to her house, screaming.

By kismet, Elias was on the route that day. He heard the screams and, as he followed the sound, the woman cried out to him, "Please call the police! The baby is not breathing!"

Elias called 911 and stayed on the phone with them until police arrived. He remained at the scene to translate to officers and the medical team what the frantic mother was saying.

He checked on the mother and child after they returned home from the hospital two weeks later. The mother, crying and profoundly grateful, said "God sent you to me from nowhere," Elias said she told him.

The carrier was just happy that he could spare the woman and her family the pain of losing a young loved one. He knows it all too well, having lost his 13-year-old brother to a car bomb in his native Iraq in 2006. "I still remember that day like it was yesterday," he said.

"The Postal Service has a lot of employees and each one has different skills and experience, and this is one of them," he said. "When a mailman speaks more than one language, it can help people like this mom."

The Heroes of the Year judges were impressed by both the "unique" quality of the incident and the way it underlines the importance of diversity. "Diversity is a gift that we should embrace and be grateful for," they said. "No one else in that situation could have helped."

Because of this, it seems particularly appropriate that Elias should be the recipient of NALC's 2018 Special Carrier Alert award.

"Delivering the mail is not only putting letters in the mailbox, it is about delivering to people news and needs, love and care," Elias said. "I am proud to be an employee for the United States Postal Service."



2018 WESTERN REGION
HERO OF THE YEAR

Antonio Colon

Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100

Calls of “Help!” in both English and Spanish alerted Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member **Antonio Colon** as he delivered packages to his customers at a senior apartment complex on Saturday, Sept. 16, 2017.

“I was close by, so I rushed over,” the carrier said. The screen door of the apartment was closed, but the door was open.

“When I got to the apartment door, I saw the back of a man kneeling on the ground,” Colon said. “When I asked what was going on, he got up quickly and started to button up his shorts. He told me that the lady had fallen and he was trying to help her up.”

As they spoke, he heard the 90-year-old woman who lived there continuing to cry out for help in both languages. “The lady [had been] lying on her back underneath him. She said, ‘No, *mijo*, he’s trying to rape me. Call the police.’”

Colon took his cell phone out, but as he did so, the man started to walk to the door of the apartment. “I told him to wait,” he said. “He couldn’t leave; he had to wait for the police.”

The man reiterated that he had been trying to help the woman and that he needed to go.

“I said that was fine, but he had to wait for the police to tell them,” Colon said. He asked him to wait in the corner.

The man asked if the carrier really wanted to get involved in the situation. “I said I was already involved,” Colon said.

The suspect again tried to escape, so the carrier grabbed his pepper spray and warned him that he would spray him if he did not comply. The man moved to the corner, and the carrier did his best to keep the two separated.

Colon waited at the apartment until police officers arrived to help the woman and question the suspect. “I didn’t want to touch anything in case it was evidence,” the carrier said. When it appeared that the situation was in safe hands, he returned to delivering his route. Police officers arrested the man for disorderly conduct.

The woman’s son later contacted the post office to thank Colon. Despite receiving praise and hugs for his actions from the woman’s son and his wife, as well as from many of his customers, the 14-year postal veteran insists he is not a hero.

The Heroes of the Year judges disagreed. “His call to act was awesome,” they said. “It was incredible for him to intercede—what a stand-up action. He was trying to keep him from doing this to someone else.” That’s why they named him NALC’s 2018 Western Region Hero.

While Colon said it feels great to be recognized with this honor, he added, “I think it’s normal that if anyone needs help, you help them.”



Brandon Franklin

North Oakland County, MI Branch 320



2018 CENTRAL REGION
HERO OF THE YEAR

The morning of Sept. 21, 2017, was like any other for North Oakland County, MI Branch 320 member **Brandon Franklin** as he left the post office to begin his route. Then, he said, “I was coming over the crest of the hill and I saw this car with its hazards on.”

Franklin wasn’t sure what was going on with the vehicle, which was swerving between lanes and appeared to have no driver. “I drove past and I didn’t see anyone in it,” he said. “Something just didn’t feel right about the whole situation.”

He turned his vehicle around and caught up with the Jeep. Passing it, he saw a woman inside—the Jeep’s driver was unconscious and slumped over the center console into the passenger’s seat. “She was starting to get into the oncoming traffic,” Franklin said.

The carrier got as close to the Jeep as he could and parked his LLV. He then got out and ran. “I was like Usain Bolt,” he told local news station WDIV-TV, referring to the Olympic sprinter from Jamaica. “I just sprinted a 100-meter dash and I’m able to catch up to her.”

“I tried yelling at her to wake her up,” Franklin said, but the woman did not respond. The door was locked. In desperation, he dove through the open driver’s-side window of the moving Jeep, with his feet in the air, as the vehicle was getting closer to a busy intersection and school zone. “I was able to get it into park and turned off,” he said. “We ended up stopping right in the middle of the intersection, right before the school.”

EMTs soon arrived and were able to resuscitate the woman and take her to the hospital. “Of all the things you’ve seen on your routes, that takes the cake,” Franklin told WDIV-TV. “The driverless Jeep takes the cake.”

The three-year letter carrier said he had acted because he was concerned that the car could hit a child. “It was a fight-or-flight moment,” he said. “If I didn’t, no one else was.”

Despite overwhelming local media attention for his actions, Franklin insists he’s not a hero. “I’m not—I’m just a mail carrier,” he said. “It was just the right thing to do.”

“I feel pretty honored,” Franklin said of being named NALC’s 2018 Central Region Hero. “But a lot of people probably would have done the same thing.”

The judges believed, though, that his actions deserved special recognition as a hero. “His act was very courageous, spontaneous and athletic,” they said. “He had only one shot, and he did it.”





2018 EASTERN REGION
HERO OF THE YEAR

Peter Monteleone

Westchester Merged, NY Branch 693

“I heard two women scream,” Westchester Merged, NY Branch 693 member **Peter Monteleone** said of delivering his route one day last October. “I haven’t heard a scream like that. It was total fear. It caught me off guard.”

A woman and her 12-year-old daughter had just run from their house and were standing in their driveway. The two had returned

home to find a burglar inside. “The intruder happened to be in the daughter’s bedroom and it scared the living daylights out of her,” Monteleone said.

Seeing the two residents distraught, the carrier attempted to calm them. The carrier then confronted the burglar as he tried to leave the scene through a side door. Monteleone would not let him leave. “There were a few choice words and an ultimatum,” the Navy veteran said. “I just reacted, and it worked out.”

Noticing kitchen knives protruding from the burglar’s pants pockets, Monteleone quietly urged the woman to call police and assured her that he was not going to leave them until law enforcement got there. Police officers soon arrived and arrested the intruder, who was carrying knives, blank checks and jewelry that he had stolen.

Monteleone, who has worked for USPS for 26 years, said, “I’m sure any letter carrier would have done the same thing.”

The Heroes of the Year judges disagreed—they said he demonstrated uncommon courage and determination and named him NALC’s 2018 Eastern Region Hero.

“He placed himself between a clear and present danger and risked his life,” the judges said during deliberation. “It was a stand-up action.”

The carrier’s actions also earned him praise from his customers. “Undoubtedly, Peter’s poise, courage and steadfast clear judgment helped to keep a very tense and dangerous situation from escalating into catastrophic violence, and resulted in a quick and efficient apprehension of an armed criminal,” the woman’s husband, John Piazza, wrote to the local post office. “My entire family owes Peter a huge debt of gratitude for his brave and conscientious actions that day.”

“It shows that we do more than deliver the mail,” Monteleone said of the honor. “We look out for the community.”



Ebony Nobles

Houston, TX Branch 283



“In the Army, we’re taught to anticipate and act,” said **Ebony Nobles**, a member of Houston, TX Branch 283 and an Army veteran who served in Afghanistan. Working as a new city carrier assistant (CCA) in August of 2017, Nobles noticed the water rising rapidly due to unrelenting rain brought by Hurricane Harvey. When she stopped on her route next to a canal and water poured into her truck, she knew that things would get serious soon.

“I watched the weather and I saw how bad it was getting,” she said.

The rain came down for three days, ultimately dumping 61 inches in parts of South Texas—a record for a tropical storm in the United States. As she watched the water rise, Nobles began reaching out to friends and volunteers who owned boats to prepare to stage rescues. She also checked on her co-workers’ situations, using social media to get contact information for those she didn’t know. “It started expanding from there, because there was such a need,” the carrier said.

She didn’t wait for deployment as part of the Army Reserves—instead, Nobles began rescues and assistance to the community when the Postal Service suspended mail delivery due to the flooding. On her own time and initiative, Nobles coordinated dozens of rescues in the area.

Her advance thinking allowed her to send help to several people, including a fellow letter carrier trapped in her home by rising water. After checking on the safety of the co-worker and learning that her home was surrounded by water, Nobles arranged for her and her family to escape their home by boat and then drove them to a shelter in her personal vehicle.

She helped with rescues for three straight days while mail deliveries were stopped. Once the Army Reserves were activated, she rescued more residents from homes and rooftops in an official capacity.

The Postal Service resumed deliveries once the water began to recede, but Nobles continued to help. Some nights, she had Reserve duty after finishing her route, returning to her post office the next morning. Nobles managed to deliver the mail, serve in the Reserves and step in to help people in need through her own efforts by working a few 24-hour, back-to-back-to-back days, countering fatigue by drinking lots of water—a tactic she learned while deployed in Afghanistan.

After the rescues ended, Nobles led a clothing drive and brought food to shelters.

But she brushed aside praise for her actions. “I’m just doing what any human being would do in this situation,” Nobles said.

Her efforts, which clearly went beyond what most people would be able to do, led the judges to choose Nobles as NALC’s 2018 Humanitarian of the Year.

“She used many pathways, including the use of her contacts, to coordinate rescues,” the Heroes of the Year judges noted. “She did everything she could think of to help.”

“I feel like I was put on this Earth to serve and help people,” Nobles said. “This award is humbling and I’m very grateful.”





Jason Moss

Tampa, FL Branch 599

“I noticed smoke and something smelled like burnt tires,” Tampa, FL Branch 599 member **Jason Moss** recalled of delivering his route on June 9, 2017.

Looking closer, he saw smoke billowing out of a nearby home and the homeowner standing outside, talking on the phone. Moss asked him, “Is someone in there?” The man responded, “Yeah, my dad is.” Two dogs also were in the home.

The carrier said he felt the urge to take action. “The son was in shock,” he said. “He was stunned at the moment and didn’t know what to do. I pulled over to the side of the road and jumped out.” Moss told the son to call 911 and then tried to find a way inside.

He opened some window screens and entered the house. The elderly father, Terry Sims, responded to Moss’s calls from the back of the house and said that he was bedridden. “I was overtaken by the smoke,” the carrier said. “I dropped to my knees and crawled back out of the window.”

Unwilling to give up, Moss tried a second time, but again was overcome by smoke. Then a responding police officer assisted Moss in reaching Sims. “We were at the edge of the window and helped him out,” the carrier said.

Once Sims was safely outside, Moss said, “We realized the dogs were inside.” The carrier and the officers went to the other side of the house. Moss

put a wet cloth over his face and prepared to go inside again, but then firefighters showed up to the scene and saved the two pit bulls inside.

Sims was treated for smoke inhalation at the hospital but suffered no life-threatening injuries. As for Moss, he was checked out by EMTs. “I had the man’s blood all over me,” Moss said.

A fire investigator determined that the fire had been caused by an electrical malfunction. The home was considered a total loss.

Sims is now in a nursing home. Moss said that he recently had run into the son. “He shook my hand and told me how much he appreciated me,” he said.

Despite praise from the family, firefighters and local media, the carrier brushed off any accolades. “I thought I was just doing what everyone else would do, but everyone thinks I’m nuts,” the 13-year postal veteran said.

The Heroes of the Year judges thought that Moss acted selflessly and courageously. “He made repeated attempts during this significant fire,” they said. “The situation was hugely dangerous and he was putting his life on the line for another life.”

Because of that, the trio of judges named Moss one of NALC’s two 2018 National Heroes of the Year, which the carrier called an honor.

“It’s crazy that a group of people thought what I did was pretty cool,” he said. “I didn’t really want the attention, but I’m going with it. It’s another person’s life. I’m not going to let someone die.”



John Sylvain

South Florida Branch 1071



Driving up to a curbside box on his route on April 12 as he typically did, South Florida Branch 1071 member **John Sylvain** noticed that things were amiss at his customers' house.

"I knew both gentlemen and talked to them every day," he said. "I was looking for Mr. Hicks to yell, 'Good morning!' as always. But that was not to be.

"Someone yelled, 'Help! The old man!'" Sylvain said, and he then began to see and smell dark, ominous-looking smoke coming from their home.

"I then placed my LLV in park in the middle of the street, locked up my truck, and ran toward the side door and went in to look for Mr. Hicks," he said.

A neighbor called out to tell him that the homeowner, Lou Didomenicis, was asleep inside the burning house. It was unclear whether the man's octogenarian tenant, Donald Hicks, was there.

The carrier said he knew he had to go in.

He made his way into the house, and found the kitchen engulfed in smoke. He quickly located Hicks by the side door. "He was trying to find his way out," Sylvain said. "I grabbed the guy and brought him outside."

Then he returned to the house. "[Someone] gave me an extinguisher, I believe it was the next-door neighbor," the carrier told WSVN-TV. "I got the extinguisher, trying to

extinguish the fire. I couldn't do it from the inside, so I asked [Didomenicis], '...could I break the window and try to get the fire from this angle?' He told me, 'OK,' so I broke the window and started spraying the fire."

Didomenicis later told WSVN-TV that, when he woke up, he witnessed Sylvain trying to put out the flames with a fire extinguisher. The homeowner was able to get out of the house on his own.

"Then someone said, 'The dogs!'" Sylvain said. "I ran to get the dogs, but the smoke was too thick to breathe and see, so I couldn't. Then I went back out for air."

Four fire crews soon responded to the scene. The two residents survived and were taken to the hospital. Sylvain was treated for smoke inhalation and was hospitalized for four days. The house was damaged, and the two dogs inside were lost in the fire.

Firefighters said the cause of the fire was unknown, but the two occupants said they thought that it may have started with the water heater. Didomenicis now is trying to repair the house and get it back to livable condition.

Neighborhood residents praised the carrier in local news media, but Sylvain, a fourth-year letter carrier and five-year Army veteran, insists he's not a hero. "I was just trying to help," he said.

In naming Sylvain one of NALC's two 2018 National Heroes of the Year, the judges commended the carrier's selfless and brave actions during the fire's "huge, dangerous exposure" and said, "He was going above and beyond his duties—incredible."

Sylvain said he didn't expect this type of honor, but added, "I just hope someone will see something good being done and pay it forward."





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