



Syracuse, NY

Branch 134

Mathew Watkins, age 17, always greeted the letter carriers from Syracuse, NY Branch 134 who came to his house. He even liked to go to his local post office and watch LLVs arrive at the end of the day, counting them to assure himself that all carriers arrived safely back from their routes. Carriers nicknamed him “Mathew the Mailman” because he told them he wanted to be a postal employee someday.

Then one day, Watkins stopped appearing at his door, and a postal employee who knew his family got wind that he was in the hospital, being treated for acute lymphomatic leukemia, or cancer of the blood—the most common childhood cancer.

The treatment lasted several months, and eventually Watkins came home, in a wheelchair, to continue his recovery. To give him a special welcome home, postal employees from the Bayberry office in nearby Liverpool, NY—including carriers from Branch 134—joined with local firefighters and police officers in February to launch a parade of various vehicles past Watkins’ house. But it was the LLVs that really thrilled him. “Everyone got together,” said Thomas Dlugolenski, executive vice president of Branch 134 and steward at the Bayberry station. “The entire office drove by his house.”

The local postmaster gave Watkins his own letter carrier uniform, and Branch President Jim Lostumbo declared Watkins an honorary Branch 134 member. The young man and his family were elated by the show of support.

The parade brought out the whole neighborhood, including other children, to watch and show their support for Watkins, bringing joy not only to the boy, but to the entire community.

“Matthew is a special-needs guy who has a love for people, which is what I think attracts him most to mail carriers,” Mathew’s mother, Jennifer Watkins, wrote in a letter to the branch. “He loves to meet the mail carrier at the door, obtain and distribute the family mail, point out mail trucks in the neighborhood and visit the branch in Bayberry to count the mail trucks.”

On the day of the parade, she said, “each postal worker that passed by in their vehicle did so with a smile and a wave. It was truly an unforgettable homecoming.”

“This act extended beyond one morning,” she added. “Matthew proceeded to receive letters, cards and packages. Many of those items were received from NALC members countrywide.”

In selecting Branch 134 for the Branch Service Award, “this speaks so well of the branch to have concern for the young man, and also pride in their work,” the Heroes of the Year judges said. “They have a great sense of community engagement. This epitomizes what a postal worker is and what they do.”

