his holiday season, letter carriers will deliver millions of messages and packages conveying love and friendship. But sometimes letter carriers see a need among their fellow postal workers or in their communities and bring their own gestures of love.

They don't wait for someone else to act—they step up.

Whether they pass the hat around to buy a wheelchair for child on their route, or arrange for a portable mammogram truck to come to the post office to check women for breast cancer, or wrap toys and school supplies for children in need as Christmas gifts, letter carriers across the country find many ways to give back. But they don't wait for December to show they care—throughout the year, carriers support charities and respond to individuals in need.

The following stories provide a few examples of how letter carriers nationwide cared for the people in their workplace and their communities over the past year.

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A new set of wheels

ome people would walk past the home of a boy with a disability who had outgrown his wheelchair but couldn't afford a new one and think nothing of it. Gerry Waksmundski walked past many times, but he did something about it.

Waksmundski, a carrier with New Jersey Merged Branch 38, met the 10-year-old boy, Marko, on his route. He delivers the mail to Marko's street about the same time the boy gets home from school on the bus. When he learned that Marko needed an expensive new wheelchair, he passed the hat around at his branch, and his fellow union mem-

bers responded.
"These good
people weren't
looking for a
handout,"
Waksmundski
said, "but I felt
they could use a
hand up."

With the help of his fellow carriers and several businesses on his route, Waksmundski collected more than enough money for a new wheelchair. In fact, he had enough money to give Marko an extra surprise.

"We raised money for a wheelchair," said Waksmundski. "We had some money left over, so we bought him a three-wheeled cycle."

Marko came to the Garfield, NJ, post office to get his new wheelchair. Waksmundski unloaded Marko's wheelchair from his truck. Then he thrilled Marko by unloading a brand new Triton Ultimate three-wheeled cruiser.

"He told me he wanted to come to the office to meet and thank us personally for what we did," Waksmundski said. "He's a good kid; he deserves it."

Marko, who has cerebral palsy, can't balance on a two-wheel bicycle, but the special adult-style trike allows him to cruise around like any other kid. (Marko's parents asked that only his first name be used in media reports).

Waksmundski's efforts did not go unnoticed. In October, the Bergen County, NJ Division on Disability Services recognized Waksmundski's efforts in its annual "Salute to Champions" breakfast. "Gerry Waksmundski is a very special person," said Jim Theberry, director of the division. "A pediatric wheelchair can cost well over \$2,000. Local folks, led by one man, made a difference."

New Jersey Merged Branch 38 member Gerry Waksmundski is all smiles as Marko shows his excitement over his new wheelchair.



'Just doing my part'

ecause letter carriers are out in their communities each day, they have a unique perspective on the lives of people on their routes. They know when someone has died, when someone has gotten married and, sometimes, when people are in need.

Some special carriers take it upon themselves to help out. When Columbia, SC Branch 233 member Herb Garvin saw a woman on her route who lived by herself and didn't have much family around, it dawned on him: "Why don't I do something for her?"



Completely out of pocket, he provided an entire Thanksgiving meal for her, from turkey down to the sides, though that endeavor proved costly.

But Garvin still wanted to do more. Ever since the 14-year postal veteran started this holiday tradition about a decade ago, his generosity has kept on growing. The following year he gave out a few more turkeys for Thanksgiving and Christmas, Last year he gave out 35 turkeys, and this year, with continued logistical help and a discount from a local Piggly Wiggly grocery store, he gave out 100 turkeys and bunches of collard greens to patrons. Those chosen "encompass some of the seniors, those between jobs and the ones who have lost family," Garvin said.

Just before the holidays, Garvin was presented with a check for more than \$1,700 raised by staff at the NALC Health Benefit Plan to help buy this year's haul.

"Overall, if you just hang in there, something good is going to come out in the end, and that's what this check represents," Garvin told a local NBC news affiliate. "A lot of my co-workers and persons in the union have stepped up, so that enables me to provide more for those persons out on my route."

During his day off a few days before Thanksgiving, Garvin put on his uniform and delivered the turkeys the same way he does his normal route.

"I'm just doing my part," he said.
"I'm sure if they were able, they'd do
the same."

Marrow registry grows by 46

ometimes the devotion letter carriers
have for their co-workers goes
down to the bone.

of postal workers have participated through the Postal Service's Deliver the Gift of Life program, which make

At the Okeechobee, FL, post office, letter carriers, fellow postal employees and their family members pitched in to help rural carrier Linda Ledford in her five-year struggle with leukemia. With a simple, painless swab of the cheek, 46 of



them added their names to the national bone marrow registry last June. An experimental drug she was trying

An experimental drug she was trying had stopped working, and chemotherapy did not help, so Ledford's last hope was a transplant.

The collected genetic data was added to a database of 7 million volunteers who might offer bone marrow or other tissue for people like Ledford who need transplants or similar treatment. Thousands

of postal workers have participated through the Postal Service's Delivering the Giff of Life program, which makes it easy for postal employees to join the registry. The program focuses on boosting the number of minorities in the registry to increase the chances that minority patients can find good genetic matches. The program has added more than 26,000 minority donor candidates to the registry.

Heartwarming Treats

"This program really took the fear out of myself to get on the registry," said Okeechobee Post Office letter carrier Melanie Jasa of West Palm Beach Branch 1690. "It only took a few minutes of paperwork and an easy Q-Tip swab."

A week later, a match in cord blood taken from umbilical cords after a baby is born and sometimes used to treat leukemia and other diseases—was found for Ledford. But miraculously, her health improved before she tried the cord blood treatment, and she is doing well.

Letter carriers in her branch also donated annual leave to Ledford after she used up all of her sick time. The workers in the Okeechobee Post Office even sponsored a yard sale and barbecue fundraiser to raise more than \$3,500 for Ledford and other fellow employees who need help with medical bills.

"My co-workers have been unbelievable" in their support, Ledford said. "I can't say enough about everybody." Delivering for the community

Left: A little paperwork and a cotton swab is all it takes to register to become a bone marrow donor.

Below: Cathy Hiers shows off one of the many little boxes that can help make a child's Christmas special.

Operation Christmas Child

nother carrier, Cathy Hiers of Walterboro, SC Branch 6123, was inspired to help out needy children after she found out about fellow churchgoers who had lost their son, Noah, to the rare Severe Combined Immune Deficiency.

Hiers suggested packing gift boxes for Operation Christmas Child in Noah's honor. "He touched a lot of lives, and through the love of his parents, he's still touching a lot of lives," the carrier told *The Press and Standard.* "I think we can all use his life as an example."

You can put so much into these boxes and they change lives. Hiers said.

With help from her church, her co-workers and the community, Hiers received donations such as toys, clothes, shoes, candy, toothbrushes

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and school supplies and packed them all in boxes designated for specific age ranges. Some included personal notes and pictures for the recipients.

In the couple of years Hiers has coordinated the effort, she has received a good response—and its influence has grown. The program garnered about 174 boxes from her community the first year and more than 250 last Christmas. "I did it because it helps reach underprivileged children," she said, "who would never get anything for Christmas."

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During the holiday season.

and in his community

Herb Gavin delivers turkeys to

those in need along his route

Two strikes against breast cancer

imberly Arnhold doesn't give up easily.

After surviving breast cancer in 1999, the Pasadena, TX Branch 3867 letter carrier put her heart and soul into supporting breast cancer research and early detection. She raised thousands of dollars by participating in and volunteering for breast cancer walks with the help of her fellow carriers and her two boys, Austin and Sam. She has sold ribbons, bracelets and pink baked



goods, and also sponsored car washes. She brought a mobile mammogram van to her post office so postal employees could get exams. She counseled fellow union members who were diagnosed with the disease.

Arnhold's efforts were profiled in the December 2006 issue of The Postal Record The next month, cancer was detected again during her routine mammogram. But even that couldn't stop her.

"The hardest thing for me. worse than hearing I had cancer, was having to tell my boys, not once but twice." Kimberly said.

Her first cancer had been defeated with a combination of removal of the tumor, radiation and chemotherapy, but this time Arnhold chose to have a double mastectomy with immediate reconstructive surgery. Eight weeks later, she was back on the job—and resuming her tireless fundraising and advocacy efforts.

"I continue to have regular checkups every six months," she said. "The key to survival is early detection. Being vigilant on my checkups caught the second diagnosis early. Cancer is small and devious, and usually by the time it can be seen, it has been around for a good while."

Arnhold's personal race for the cure has become an unofficial charity drive for Branch 3867, where she also finds time to serve as branch secretary. Arnhold, a thirdgeneration postal worker, never stops thinking of creative new ways to bring in funds, especially using things that are pink, the color of the breast cancer awareness movement. If you wake up one morning and see that pink flamingos have mysteriously appeared in your front lawn, it may be the work of Arnhold, who "flocks" people with flamingos to ask for small donations. Between the walks and the other fundraising efforts, Arnhold estimates she has raised \$50,000 so far.

Arnhold doesn't just raise money—she brings health care to the post office. With the assistance of her branch and post office supervisors, Arnhold arranges for a mobile mammogram unit to visit her post office in Pasadena for postal workers, retirees and wives to get exams, "Early detection saves lives. I don't want anyone to hear those words, but the earlier it is caught, the better the chances of survival. As long as these ladies will come, I will schedule the unit every year."



Books for the troops

he letter carriers of Aurora, IL Branch 219 are always looking for new ways to help the community. In May, they decided to extend their community service by providing American soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines with books to read during the long hours away from home.

Along with the Illinois State Association and a local community group, Branch 219 set up collection centers at bookstores for donations of books to Operation Paperback, a charity that sends paperbacks to fighting men and women serving overseas. Their efforts filled a flatbed truck with about 1,200 books, said Ken Christy, president of the branch and the state association, "We had books overflowing to the ground," he said.

The collection also netted many hardback books, but shipping them overseas is quite expensive, so they were provided instead to local independent bookstores and schools.

"We've done so much locally that we decided to broaden our horizons," Christy said. The branch was inspired to support the program by a letter carrier whose son had served in Irag.

Operation Paperback has sent more than a million used books to troops around the world since 1999, helping them fill the long hours away from their families.



Delivering Santa's message

ucson Branch 704 members get in the holiday spirit by answering kids' letters to Santa. The letters are usually shipped off to a non-profit organization, but last year, the local postmaster contacted the carriers and asked them if they wanted to get involved.

So, six carriers met at the union office with newly purchased holiday stationary and stamps. They read all 200 letters and sent a letter back to each child

The children's letters didn't just request the latest toys and gadgets. though.

"Some really wanted to vank your heart out," former Branch 704 president. Dan Versluis said. One child's letter asked for Santa Claus to pray that their family doesn't lose their home. Another message said the best present they could imagine would be for their mom to get better.

Current branch president Stuart Love said they were fortunate to be able to offer help, such as providing food, for some of the affected families. "It was very gratifying," he said. "Stewards went back to their stations and were able to go through other avenues to get help for people."

As this issue was going to press. Branch 704 members were gearing up for a second year of letter writing, with a few more recruits to respond to the holiday missives. The event has "quite a nice impact," Love said, "It makes you stop to think and be grateful."

Delivering for the community



Heartwarming

Treats

All in the family

ear Santa" letters also fell into the hands of Reading, PA Branch 258, For the past 10 years, the branch has been adopting a family (or a few) undergoing a hardship found through these letters, solicited through churches or homeless shelters, or discovered when they are out at people's homes.

"I had read somewhere that another branch somewhere had done it," Branch President George Cook said. He talked to the branch's executive board to set up a plan, and it "went so well the first year, it's snowballed."

The inaugural year of the event, the branch helped a single family. The program has since expanded to provide for three to four each year, and "just about all our offices contribute and help out," Cook said. This includes about 260 active carriers in the branch, as well as help from some clerks and managers donating money and volunteering their time.

The branch then sends the volunteers out to see what the families need and a list of what they want, and goes shopping for the items, big and small.

Larger items get delivered to the families' residences. One year, a girl had written to Santa asking for a bed. Shoppers went to work finding the family furniture and had it delivered to the house.

An article in the Arizona Daily

Star about the carriers' efforts.

Around the holidays, Branch 258 holds a party at its union hall and invites all of the carriers and their families as well as the adopted families. It's at this event that the families are given their presents to open, are provided with food and entertainment, and usually enjoy an appearance by Santa Claus himself.

"It's a high point of the holidays," Cook said. 🖂

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