

Proud TO SERVE

When most people hear the word **hero**, images of fire fighters, police officers or soldiers come to mind. But some think of another person, also in uniform: their letter carrier.

Across this nation, letter carriers are often the first to discover medical emergencies, accidents and fires, and provide timely assistance. The following reports are offered to honor the actions of those carriers whose quick thinking and speedy reactions have saved lives.

Alert carrier gives aid in horrific mower accident

While working his route, **Derek Daponte** noticed a customer cutting the lawn as his wife walked around with a young child. As he continued delivering, he suddenly heard the young child screaming. Daponte was directly across the street and saw the man who had been

mowing the lawn earlier standing beside the lawn mower with the child bleeding in his arms and the mother crying.

Thinking that something terrible must have happened, the carrier reached for his cell phone to call the police and told them to send an ambulance right away. Daponte then went to the family and tried to calm them down. He tried to control the young girl's bleeding as much as possible—her foot had been mangled—so she wouldn't go into shock. The



Derek Daponte of Fall River, Massachusetts Branch 51

Fall River, Massachusetts Branch 51 member instructed the mother to get a towel to place around the foot and told the father to put pressure on the wound to stop the bleeding.

When police arrived, they took over the emergency first aid until the ambulance arrived. Daponte comforted the family as best he could. Then, knowing they were in good hands, he continued on his route.

The young girl lost her foot, but the carrier was commended for his cool-headed help in what could have been a much more serious situation. The girl's baby-sitter came to the post office soon after to thank Daponte for his actions.

Carrier pulls man from tracks in daring commuter rescue

John Zabatta was waiting for a train on his regular commute to work one day when he noticed a young man near him on the platform who didn't look well. The letter carrier didn't think much of it and turned to look down the tracks to see if his train was approaching. As he did so, he heard a thump. When he looked back, he didn't see the man who had been there moments before—his fellow commuter was now face-down on the tracks below them.

Knowing the train's arrival was imminent, the New York, New York Branch 36 member reached out to another passenger on the platform for help before jumping into harm's way. Zabatta quickly lifted the injured man off the tracks and carried him to safety on the platform just seconds before his train arrived—and then he went on his way to work. ☒

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

On her rounds, Yolanda Banuelos noticed that a couple of young men were running out of a house on her route. Suspicious, she investigated further and saw that police were in the back of the house. She honked her horn to get their attention and noted the route of the suspects and a description of their vehicle. Because of the Sacramento, California Branch 133 member's actions, the officers apprehended the suspects and Banuelos later provided positive identification of the pair.

As Ronald Peterson was delivering his rounds, he noticed the distinctive odor of natural gas at a vacant home. He immediately told a neighbor, who called authorities. Investigation revealed there had indeed been a gas leak at a vacant residence and the home had filled with gas. Responders said the potential explosion could have been substantial had Peterson

not noticed and taken action. Several neighborhood residents contacted the post office to offer the Minneapolis, Minnesota Branch 9 member their thanks.

Carrier Stephen Volz noticed that a couple of young men were hanging around the house of an elderly gentleman. He saw them knock on the door, then go around to the back of the house to crawl in a window. The police were notified as four young men escaped with loot from the home. The Sacramento, California Branch 133 member's information given to the police about the suspects, their escape route and vehicle's description allowed the authorities to apprehend the suspects and recover the stolen items.

Smelling what seemed to be natural gas coming from a home on her route put carrier **Kelly Lofino** on alert. Unable to contact anyone in the home, she immedi-

ately called utility officials and then continued on her route. When the utility crew arrived, they also pounded on the door to no avail. As they prepared to break in, the homeowner, Norma Godbey, came the door after finally being roused by the commotion. Godbey, who was recuperating from recent surgery, had been asleep and completely unaware of the dangerous situation. In fact, a smoke and gas detection alarm was sounding, but not loud enough to wake her. Officials immediately removed her from the home, which was filled with near-lethal levels of carbon dioxide. Further investigation found a gas leak in the furnace and officials said that within 10 to 15 minutes, the entire structure would have ignited, destroying the home and possibly the neighbors' as well. Godbey's husband later told the Dayton, Ohio Branch 182 member, "You saved my wife's life. Words alone cannot express our gratitude." ✉

FIRE & RESCUE

As he was approaching a house for delivery, **Pete Dygert** heard a smoke detector alarm and could smell smoke. The door was open, with only a screen door blocking entry into the house. The owner's small dog was restless, running back and forth from the screen door to the cellar door. Dygert rang the bell and banged on the door. He saw a smoky haze in the kitchen and guessed that the smoke was originating from the stove. He opened the door a crack and yelled inside. The owner finally came up from the cellar, saying she had been trying to find the source of the smoke. The Utica, New York Branch 375 member ushered the reluctant customer out of the house and helped get the pet to safety as well. Dygert called 911 and found a neigh-

bor to help calm the woman and stop her from re-entering the house. When the fire department arrived and got the smoke under control, the carrier continued on his way.

Jim Hudson was delivering his route when he saw a man come out of his house, gesturing frantically. The carrier looked in the direction the man was pointing and saw a nearby home on fire and an elderly woman trying to put out the blaze with a garden hose. Hudson ran to the house, made sure everyone was outside and instructed the neighbor to call 911. The Sacramento, California Branch 133 member took the hose from the woman and battled the fire himself until he heard popping noises. Fearing an explosion, he

moved the elderly woman and the neighbors out of the way. The fire eventually spread to two neighboring homes, but Hudson was commended for making sure everyone was safe.

When she saw lightning strike and split a tree, carrier **Heather Green** immediately called 911 as the tree fell into electric wires, causing them to snap and explode, and setting the tree afire near homes on her route. With the live wires sparking, the flames were creeping closer to one house when emergency crews arrived to forestall further damage. The Evansville, Indiana Branch 377 member was commended for her quick actions. ✉



ANIMAL ACTION

ONE MORNING ON HIS ROUTE, KEVIN Smith noticed a bad odor coming from a residence. He went to the house to alert the homeowner and saw a light cloud of smoke starting to seep from an open window. Smith called the postmaster to explain the situation, and reported it smelled like burnt popcorn. The fire fighters soon arrived and entered the home. Incredibly, an investigation concluded that the owner's dogs had repeatedly started the microwave in an effort to get at food left inside. The mutts clawed the quick-cook controls enough times to catch both the food and the microwave on fire. No one was home at the time, and both the dogs and the residence were saved by the Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member's actions.

A CUSTOMER ALERTED DAVID MAENZA that an aggressive raccoon had been spotted in the immediate vicinity and to be careful. As he continued his deliveries, he noticed that a hearing-impaired customer had opened all her doors to do some spring cleaning. When he looked inside, he saw the raccoon in the family room. The woman hadn't noticed the animal and, since he was concerned he would not be able to communicate with her to explain the situation, he quickly grabbed a broom and tried to keep the beast away from her. The raccoon was becoming increasingly bellicose, but the Rochester, New York Branch 210 member finally was able to trap the varmint in the bathroom and call Animal Control. When he figured the situation was under control, he left



to continue his route. Maenza later found out it took Animal Control 45 minutes to contain the animal. The carrier was credited with defusing a dangerous situation for a customer who did not realize her safety was in jeopardy. ☒

HELP on the Way

As he went about his route, Michael Tibbs took a moment to speak briefly with a customer carrying groceries. After climbing back into his LLV, Tibbs heard a sudden noise and, looking back, he saw the customer had collapsed to the ground. Tibbs called 911, and when he discovered the patron was not breathing, he initiated CPR. A passerby stopped to help the carrier with the CPR until the ambulance arrived five minutes later. Thanks to the Beckley, West Virginia Branch 2420 member's actions, the

customer survived the incident, but unfortunately succumbed to another heart attack the next day.

While delivering her route, Susan Richter thought she heard cries for help. But, because it was a windy day, she wasn't entirely sure. After delivering to a few more homes, the Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member decided to double-check the noise and backtracked to the house. As she looked through the front window, she saw her customer, Herb Homer, on the floor, appearing very groggy. She quickly called 911 and coaxed Homer into opening the door. The customer was taken to the hospital, having suffered an aortic aneurysm. Richter returned to her route without ever telling her supervisors. The carrier's actions only became known when Homer's girlfriend notified a local TV station, which was running a series about local heroes.

When Vince Stunja was approached by a fellow letter carrier who was worried about a third carrier in their section who was not feeling well, he also became concerned. The co-worker in question appeared very pale and when asked how he was feeling, he said he was experiencing pain radiating down his arm. The carrier had been given permission to drive himself to the doctor, but Stunja quickly concluded he was in no condition to drive himself. Since it was possible the man was experiencing a heart attack or stroke, the Boise, Idaho Branch 331 member immediately called 911 and the afflicted carrier was taken to the hospital by ambulance. Stunja is credited with helping his co-worker obtain life-saving medical attention. The carrier is no stranger to good deeds. Two years before while on his route, he rescued a dog that nearly drowned in a drainage culvert. ☒

AS HE WAS APPROACHING A HOUSE FOR delivery, carrier **Ted Engh** heard moaning coming from the back of the home. Upon investigation, he discovered his 80-year-old customer, Mr. Haeffner, lying on the ground, waving to him for help. Engh saw blood everywhere and that the man was bleeding profusely from both his head and arm. He called 911 and got a neighbor to rouse Haeffner's wife. The Denver, Colorado Branch 47 member stayed with the man until EMTs arrived. Haeffner said he had come out to water his plants without his cane and had fallen, so he been lying on the ground for about a half-hour. The customer had cancer and had received a blood transfusion the day before. Because of that, combined with the fact that he was also taking prescription blood thinners, it was possible Haeffner could have bled to death if Engh had not discovered him. After the incident, Engh returned to the office without telling anyone. His heroic actions were discovered only when the neighbor went to the post office to praise the carrier.

SEEING ACCUMULATED MAIL IN THE BOX of an elderly patron, carrier **Jeremy Farmer** became worried, since it was unusual for the woman not to collect her mail. He called the police department to report his concern and continued on his route. The next day, he saw an ambulance at the home and thought the worst. Two days later, a neighbor approached Farmer and asked if he had been the one to call the authorities about the elderly woman. She had apparently suffered a stroke and been lying on her concrete floor for three days and was suffering from hypothermia when she was taken to the hospital. Farmer, a Lorain, Ohio Branch 583 member, was lauded for going above and beyond the call of duty for his customers.

DON SINGLETON WAS ON HIS ROUTE, with a customer service manager conducting a 3999, when they witnessed an elderly customer fall and quickly rushed to her aid. Although she was coherent after her fall, she sustained injuries to

her face and was bleeding substantially. The two assisted her back on her feet and helped her back into her home. They contacted the customer's friend and stayed with her to provide comfort until the woman arrived. The Mid-Michigan Branch 256 member was commended for his care and assistance.

SEEING A BUILDUP OF MAIL IN THE BOX of a customer in her 90s, carrier **Thomas Steinke** became concerned. He notified local authorities, who came to investigate. The woman was found on the floor in an upstairs bedroom, where she had fainted three days earlier. She was taken to the hospital for treatment of dehydration and possible broken bones. Steinke, a Hudson Valley Merged, New York Branch 137 member, was applauded for his quick and caring reaction to the situa-



“Ms. Lepe’s keen observations and compassion for her fellow human being are the only reasons that Mr. Brady is alive today.”

—**Sheriff’s Captain David E. Halm, hailing Branch 24 member Maria Lepe after she found a customer who had collapsed days before**

tion, which may have saved his customer’s life.

AN 81-YEAR-OLD PATRON’S CAR WAS SITTING in the driveway as usual, but Mr. Brady’s mailbox had accumulated several days’ worth of mail. Los Angeles Branch 24 member **Maria Lepe**, fearing Brady might be sick or injured and unable to call for help, contacted the sheriff’s station. When deputies and the fire department arrived, they discovered Brady lying on his kitchen floor, unable to get up, and learned he had been there for two days. Captain David E. Halm of the Walnut-Diamond Bar Sheriff Station said, “Ms. Lepe’s keen observations and compassion for her fellow human being are the only reasons that Mr. Brady is alive today. She is a hero in every sense of the word.”

ON AN AFTERNOON WHEN THE TEMPERATURE reached a sweltering 100 degrees, carrier **Frank Li** spotted a wheelchair-bound elderly man lying on the ground near the mailbox. Initially, the man was unresponsive when Li called out to him, but a few seconds later the carrier saw the man feebly raise his hand and gesture for help. With assistance from a neighbor, Li was able to get the man back in his chair and into a cool spot. The 81-year-old patron, who suffers from Parkinson’s disease, said he had lost his balance reaching for the mailbox and toppled out of his chair about an hour earlier. The neighbor called the man’s family, who credited the Hayward, California Branch 1707 member for coming to the rescue of his patron.

WHEN CARRIER **NICHOLAS TSARNAS** SAW 83-year-old Margaret Reinman fall while exiting her car in the parking lot at her doctor’s office, the Youngstown, Ohio Branch 385 member jumped into action—literally. Tsarnas clambered over a 10-foot-high fence to reach Reinman, who had suffered a gash on her head and was bleeding profusely, and he helped her into the doctor’s office for medical attention. The carrier was commended for the care he shows toward the members of his community. ✉