

Proud TO SERVE

Heroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or fire fighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the form of concerned letter carriers.

Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they are often the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

Fire fighting skills help carrier save boy

"Help! My baby's pinned under my car!" The scream cut through a typical cold winter day in Michigan as **Christopher Leipter** set out to deliver his route. Hearing the shouts from a frantic customer about four houses down, the carrier quickly locked his mail bag in his LLV and ran to the woman's aid. Leipter entered the garage and saw where the car's front axle had plowed through the back of the garage, creating an opening to the snow-covered back yard. Blood stained the snow where the boy was trapped, stomach down, partly in the garage with his face pressed to the ground. "I can't breathe," he gasped.

Leipter thought quickly, asked for a car jack and began talking to the boy, 10-year-old Christopher Craig-

head, to try to calm him down. The Saginaw, Michigan Branch 74 member, who is also a 17-year fire fighter, used his training to assess the boy's possible injuries. He worried if he relieved too much pressure too quickly, blood might pool, which could prove to be fatal. Leipter placed the jack under the front passenger side of the vehicle and used it to lift the car up about 4 inches. Craighead was able to breathe a little more freely and ease his face out of the snow. "His hips were still kind of stuck, and each time he was moving the car would rock," the carrier told *The Saginaw News*, so he didn't want to attempt to pull the boy completely out until emergency responders arrived.

During the wait, Leipter laid down on the floor next to the boy to try to calm him. Shortly thereafter, police and fire fighters arrived to use the "jaws of life" on the vehicle to raise the car high enough to pull the boy out. Craighead was rushed to the hospital, and once Leipter saw the boy was in good hands, he returned to his route.

The woman told police that earlier in the day, as she and her son returned home, she asked him to get out of the car to open the garage door, Saginaw Police Detective Joseph Dutoi said. As the woman accelerated the car toward the garage, it hit a patch of ice. She yelled to warn her son, and pressed her brake pedal all the way to the floor, but the vehicle didn't stop. "I'm a parent, too," Leipter told *The News*. "Things like this can happen when you least expect it.

"His hips were still kind of stuck, and each time he was moving the car would rock."

—Branch 74 member Christopher Leipter recalled helping a young boy stuck under a car in a garage

WHILE DELIVERING MAIL, BEVERLY Edwards witnessed her elderly customer, Rose Eichenbaum, take a bad fall as she was leaving her house. The Maine Merged Branch 92 member responded quickly to help the woman and called 911 and the customer's husband. "Rose was examined, treated and released from the hospital without any complications, thanks to Beverly's help," Mr. Eichenbaum wrote in a letter to the post office commending the carrier. "She does a great job."

DURING ONE OF THE WORST SNOW days of the year, nine-year postal veteran **Charra Turner** was walking along her route when she came upon someone with a familiar face lying in the alley. The elderly customer had fallen down on the ice and could not pick himself back up. Turner helped the man to his feet and led him along the path back to his home. The Columbus, Ohio Branch 78 member was praised for the concern she shows to the members in her community.

NOTICING THAT AN ELDERLY CUSTOMER on his route had not picked up his mail in several days, **Russ Brennen** grew deeply concerned, especially since he knew the man was in failing health and that his wife had recently passed away. The carrier knocked on the customer's door, but received no response. Brennen checked with neighbors, but they all said they hadn't seen the man in a while, so he decided to call his supervisor, who in turn called city police. Officers arrived a short time later and were able to gain access to the house via the back door. The customer was found in an incoherent state and had apparently not eaten for several days. Police credited the Seattle, Washington Branch 79 member with saving his customer's life, saying if he hadn't intervened when he did, the man may have died.

SEEING MAIL PILING UP IN A PATRON'S mailbox, carrier **Penny Bell** became very concerned about her elderly customer, Mildred Hasenbank. Bell looked into the matter further and noticed that Hasenbank, who has hearing difficulties, no longer had her TV on at high volume, as she normally did. Bell thought Hasenbank might be away for the weekend with one of her kids, so she moved on with her route, but asked her sub, fellow Muskegon, Michigan Branch 13 member **Debbie Czarny**, if she would check on the situation the next day. Czarny noted the accumulated mail and quiet house again, so she went to a neighbor's house for help. The neighbors kept pounding on the door until they finally heard a small, faint voice in reply. Since the neighbors had a key, they opened the door and found Hasenbank on the floor, where she had

been lying for four days. Medical responders found her responsive but disoriented. Hasenbank had a medical alert device, but it wasn't functioning. Norton Shores Fire Capt. Andy Casperson praised the carriers. "If help had arrived only 12 hours later, it might be a different story," he told *The Muskegon Chronicle*. "It was nice to see someone like the Postal Service or anyone in our society take an extra step."

HEARING CALLS FOR HELP WHILE delivering mail, carrier **Jennifer Lopez** became worried. Following the direction of the voice, she found an elderly and disabled customer who had fallen out of his wheelchair at his home. The Western Wayne County, Michigan Branch 2184 member called EMS and waited with the customer until help arrived before continuing on her route.



photo by Ken Stevens, *The Muskegon Chronicle*

Muskegon, Michigan Branch 13 members Debbie Czarny (l) and Penny Bell checked on an elderly customer when they saw mail piling up. The woman had been lying on the floor for a few days and was in failing health before she was discovered.

LYNNETTE THONNE USUALLY SAW ONE of her elderly customers every day when the woman came to collect her mail, and she had gotten to know her. So when the carrier came across about two days' worth of accumulated mail, a red flag went up. She went to the building manager to ask about the customer, and it seemed that no one had seen her recently. The manager went to the apartment to check on the woman and heard her calling for help. She had been unable to get out of bed for days and had been trying to summon attention. She suffered from dehydration and a swollen leg but responded well to treatment. Thonne, a Green Bay, Wisconsin Branch 619 member, was commended for the care and concern she showed to her customer.

WHILE DELIVERING A CERTIFIED LETTER to the home of an elderly customer, **Dick Lauer** noticed the door was open. Concerned, he investigated further and when he looked inside, he discovered the woman lying on her floor and seeming very disoriented. The St. Paul, Minnesota Branch 28 member called paramedics, covered the woman up, and stayed with her until help arrived.

AS MICHAEL ESTES APPROACHED THE mailbox of one of his elderly patrons, he saw that the previous day's mail was still there. He knew immediately something must be wrong, since Alpha Ross always picked up her mail—sometimes before Estes even left her front porch—and would often tell her carrier when she would be out of town. Investigating further, he realized her car hadn't moved in days. So, Estes called Ross' daughter, Denise Cox, who also happened to be a former classmate of his. Cox told him to try opening the front door, but it was locked. Estes phoned the local police department, and officers showed up within minutes to break down the back door. They found Ross in her bathtub, where she had been for five days after she had fallen while cleaning the tub. She was clinging to life and had been surviving on drops of water from the

“She’s probably alive today because of Mrs. Green.”

—Fire chief Keith Brown commended Branch 1374 member Sherri Green for looking after her patron after she fell and injured herself

bathtub faucet. “I really appreciate the concern Michael Estes showed in figuring out something wasn't right,” Ross told *The Montgomery County Chronicle*. “I look so forward to thanking him personally when I see him.” But the Independence, Kansas Branch 1035 member brushed off praise for his actions. “I didn't save Alpha's life,” he said. “The police and EMTs did. I just made the telephone call.”

ONE RAINY DAY, ALTA MARSHALL FELL while she was in her front yard, breaking her hip. She lay on the ground, unable to move and unable to get anyone's attention. Since she knew the mail would be coming soon, Marshall decided to stay put. When Pasadena, Texas Branch 3867 member **Joe Villalovos** came along, he immediately spotted her and rushed to her aid. He quickly called 911 and stayed with his patron until help arrived. “He was an answer to my prayers,” Marshall wrote to the postmaster.

WHILE DRIVING ALONG HER ROUTE, **Sherri Green** noticed an elderly customer sitting in her driveway. Waving to her and wishing her a nice day, she continued on. As she drove away and put mail in a couple of boxes, though,

she felt there was something not right about the situation. Green turned her vehicle around and went back to the woman's home, finding her still in her driveway. She had apparently fallen and injured herself. After calling for help, the Gulfport, Mississippi Branch 1374 member stayed with the woman until medical personnel arrived. “She's probably alive today because of Mrs. Green,” Fire Chief Keith Brown told the Picayune City Council.

AS HE WAS DELIVERING HIS ROUTE, **Eric Legner** heard pleas for help from an elderly customer inside a home. He made his way inside the home and found 93-year-old Elsa Schmidt in the bathtub. Legner covered her, called emergency services for assistance and stayed with her until she was safely inside the ambulance. Schmidt had slipped outside her bedroom the day before and broken her arm. She was able to pull herself into the bathroom, but was unable to pull herself all the way up. In an attempt to stand, she swung her feet over the tub, but lost her balance and fell in. She spent the night there, cold and with no water. Schmidt thanked the Bloomington, Illinois Branch 522 member, saying that without his help, she would have waited there for five days for her living assistant to come to the home.

SEEING AN ELDERLY CUSTOMER'S screen door and front door slightly open, **Scott Rector** grew concerned. He knocked on the door, but got no answer. He then looked through a window and saw what looked like someone lying on a bathroom floor, so he called out for her a few times. The woman finally made a mumbling noise in response, and Rector immediately contacted police. The responding officer found the customer inside and called paramedics, who arrived to take her to the hospital. The officer told the Spokane, Washington Branch 442 member that the woman had been on the floor for a few days and might not have survived if he hadn't found her. ☒

Good Samaritan saves three in fiery car crash

While driving home after a day of work, **Jim DuPont** saw something horrific: a head-on collision involving a truck and a car. He parked his own car nearby, turned on its blinkers and tried to call 911 as he got out of his vehicle. He was going over to check on the driver of the car to evaluate his situation when he heard screams coming from the truck, so he rushed over to the second vehicle instead. The truck doors were jammed shut, but DuPont noticed that the driver inside, covered in blood, seemed to be in a lot of pain. The Rogers, Arkansas Branch 1514 member entered the truck through the back window, carefully grabbed the 21-year-

old man, pulled him out of the cab the same way he had entered and took him to the side of the road.

As he turned back to assist the other passenger, the truck erupted into a blaze. A 17-year-old passenger, stuck in the middle of the fire, watched in horror as her clothes became engulfed in flames from the neck down. DuPont went back for her, and as he carried her, her skin peeled off, sticking to his uniform. Finally, DuPont was able to get her out of the vehicle and bring her to a safe place to lie down.

With those two passengers safely out of the fire's way, DuPont set his sights on the car in the crash, now also on fire. The motor had slammed back into the front seats, jamming the door, so he pulled with all his strength, bending the door open enough to remove the driver

and get him to safety. Emergency paramedics arrived to take over and air-lifted the victims to trauma centers while fire fighters worked to put out the blazes.

Due to his heroic actions, the 13-year postal veteran dislocated both shoulders, had burns on his arms, and suffered smoke inhalation. The three passengers suffered from a variety of ailments, ranging from multiple broken bones, a leg amputation and skin grafts, but all came out of the ordeal alive. When asked if he felt like a hero, DuPont responded, "No, I am not a hero. The fire department that responded were the heroes—they are volunteers who don't get paid, they just do what needs to be done. If you want to call me something, just call me a Samaritan."

Thomas Pierson was on his route when he heard patron Rita Schiavo calling for help. She saw what she thought was heavy yarn on her dining room floor, but discovered instead that it was a 3-foot-long snake when it uncoiled and slithered across the floor. The Fort Myers, Florida Branch 2072 member came quickly with a shovel at Schiavo's plea, but the snake had disappeared out of sight. They looked for it for a while and found it curled up by the front window, sunning itself. Pierson cornered the reptile and killed it before carrying it away to the back yard. Schiavo wrote a letter to *The Postal Record* praising Pierson. "I want to thank my letter carrier Thomas Pierson for not only delivering my mail to my door six days a week," she wrote, "but also for coming to my aid and bringing me peace of mind."

While on his route, Clyde Pence began to smell natural gas at the home of an elderly customer. Since he knew the woman's son was working at a church about 50 yards away, he rushed over and yelled to him that he smelled strong gas fumes at the house and he should go check on his mom. The man

immediately ran to the house and helped his mother outside while a neighbor called 911. Fire department officials said there was a gas buildup that, left unattended, could have led to an explosion with the lighting of a cigarette or the furnace kicking on.

"Postman Mr. Clyde Pence may have saved 'Momma Dees' life," the customer's son, Charles Dees, wrote to the postmaster and a local newspaper about the Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member. "I would like it known at the highest level the value I put on the Postal Service employees who take the time to just say 'hi' or check in on our elderly. What dollar sign can be put on that kind of service they perform?"

Nancy Klein was delivering her daily rounds when she came upon the unmistakable odor of natural gas coming from a garage on her route. She called 911 and waited for the gas company to arrive. Officials found a serious problem

with the customer's furnace and were able to fix it right away, preventing any further danger. The Rochester, New York Branch 210 member was commended for her quick thinking.

Mon-Yough, Pennsylvania Branch 332 member **Todd Cipolla** was delivering his mail one morning when he saw 19-month-old Isabelle Edder walking down the middle of the street. She had apparently opened the screen door and started walking away while her father was in a different room. Cipolla picked the small girl up and took her back to her house, where he knocked on the door to reunite Edder with her very appreciative father. ☒

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

HELP on the Way

Delivering his route one day, **Jericho Tabor** noticed an 85-year-old customer in her front yard with a large, unfamiliar dog, which belonged to her granddaughter visiting from Nebraska. When the woman opened her fence gate, the unrestrained dog fled the yard. The woman tried to capture the dog, but the animal turned on her and started attacking, biting her several times on both forearms. Tabor rushed to the woman, and the dog moved on to another yard. He moved the customer a safe distance away from the animal and calmed her down as he called 911, staying with her until emergency medical responders and animal control arrived to take care of the situation. The customer later called the post office to thank the Minneapolis, Minnesota Branch 9 member, saying she didn't know what would have happened had he not been there and willing to help.

As **Anthony Hussey** was driving along his route one winter day, he heard a customer, Raivo Luik, calling his name from somewhere outside. The carrier stepped out of his truck and kept calling out, "Where are you?" until he found his patron. Luik had slipped on ice on his way to the mailbox, had fallen in between some bushes, and had been lying there for more than an hour until Hussey helped him. The New Jersey Merged Branch 38 member tried to make Luik comfortable, giving the man a pair of gloves to wear since his hands had gotten very cold. He then rushed across the street to ask a neighbor for help, and the two of them were able to get Luik back inside his warm home.

South Suburban Merged, Illinois Branch 4016 member **Kristine Smart** noticed that mail had started accumulating in a customer's box. She decided to check on the situation and knocked on the man's door. She heard a cry for help in response and grabbed a phone right away to call 911 before attempting to recruit assistance from anyone nearby. When emergency personnel arrived, she told them she heard a faint voice coming from inside. They entered and found the man on the floor, where he had been for four days. "Knowing Kristine is part of the Postal Service is a good feeling," the man's niece and nephews wrote to the local post-

master. "She is one who will go above and beyond her normal task of delivering the mail. To us, Kristine will never be 'just the mail carrier.'"

Jackie Torain had just returned to work following time off to recover from surgery on her thumb when she saw a regular customer on the ground after a fall. The woman had lost her balance near her mailbox and had taken a spill. The woman's husband was blind and disabled and couldn't provide help. Torain helped the customer to her feet and guided her up several steps to her porch and into her house. The customer had suffered several lacerations to her arms, so the Raleigh, North Carolina Branch 459 member provided first aid until further help arrived. The woman expressed immense gratitude for Torain's help. "I just did what I thought anyone else would do, and that's help someone in need," Torain told USPS officials. "It's a part of the job I take seriously, to look after our customers."

Early one morning, **Ralph Dubossi** was walking up the steps to the first stop on his second relay when his attention was drawn to the customer's storm door because her small dog was frantically barking. Though the dog would normally bark when it was in the back yard, this time it seemed different. Dubossi looked over and saw the customer lying on her back just outside the door. From her appearance, the carrier was afraid she was dead, and he immediately called 911, then waited outside the door for rescue services to arrive. Paramedics complimented the Norfolk, Virginia Branch 456 member's actions, saying the woman would likely have died if they had arrived just five to 10 minutes later.

Robert Mack thought he heard a faint cry for help while delivering to the residences on his route, so he decided to look into it further. Searching for the origin of the sound, he soon came upon its source: a customer inside a garage who had broken her knee. She was unable to walk but managed to crawl into her garage. Mack called 911 and began to administer assistance before summoning one of the woman's neighbors for help. The Chicago, Illinois Branch 11 member stayed with the injured woman until responders arrived. ✉

Carrier delivers a special birthday present

Frank Whall was on his postal route one Saturday when he pulled over at his last stop to drop off a package at a church. Something shiny on the ground reflected the light from his mail truck's headlamps. Getting out and looking closer, he discovered a platinum ring with several diamonds on it. He picked it up, and on Monday morning, delivered a letter to the church asking anyone who may have lost a valuable piece of jewelry to call him.

Mary Dolabany, the owner of the ring, had been out running errands with her husband that day. When they stopped at the church, she took off the ring to apply lotion to her hands and dropped it on the ground as she was exiting the car. The couple called all the places they could think of where they had run errands, including the church, but had no luck.

Then Dolabany's phone rang—a priest from the church called to wish her a happy birthday and told her about Whall's letter. She called the Boston, Massachusetts Branch 34 member later to ask about the ring. Whall asked her to describe it, and her description perfectly matched the ring he had found. He told her she could meet up with him at the post office, and it was there that she reclaimed her precious possession.

"I would like to thank the postal office for hiring Frank Whall and making our community a place we can truly say honest, moral individuals exist," Dolabany wrote in a letter. "He walks our streets, delivers our mail and is an awesome example and role model for our kids." Whall said he just did what he thought was right. "If my wife lost her wedding ring, I would hope someone would do the same thing," he told *The Boston Globe*.

Carrier first on scene

A loud bang caught the attention of **Ed Walsh** while he was out delivering his route one early spring day. Turning around, he was horrified to discover that two women had just been the victims of a hit-and-run car crash and were lying injured on the ground.

Walsh immediately ran over to the pair and identified himself. Noticing that the older of the two, Phyllis, was bleeding profusely from a gash in her temple and was not fully conscious, he quickly took off his jacket and used it to apply pressure to her wound to help stop the bleeding. He then turned his attention to the other woman, Buffy, and tried his best to make her feel comfortable, since she said she believed her leg was broken.

The Northeastern New York Branch 358 member then grabbed his phone to call 911 and stayed with the women until help came. Once EMTs arrived on the scene, Walsh did his best to fill them in on the situation. The responding police officer commended Walsh for his role in helping mitigate an otherwise disastrous situation.

Fire meets its match

While a shout brought **Jeffrey Vollmar** running from his route, it was what he heard next that stopped him in his tracks. A young woman told the Freehold, New Jersey Branch 924 member that her house was on fire and her mother was still inside.

Not stopping to consider the danger to himself, Vollmar told the woman to call 911 and then, without hesitation, he ran into the smoke-filled home and began searching for the girl's mother. He finally found her on the second floor, where she was disoriented and having trouble breathing. He grabbed her and was able to assist her down the stairs and outside the house.

But he wasn't done yet. Once he saw that she was safely out of harm's way, he ran back into the house to look for any other residents, but he found none. While

inside, he tried to tackle the fire that had by then engulfed most of the kitchen area. He was successful at quelling a majority of the flames before the fire department arrived to put out the rest.

Vollmar was treated for smoke inhalation and was later commended by the local borough council for setting aside concern for his own safety to help others.

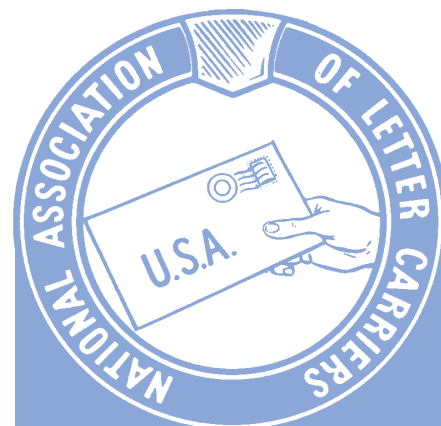
"When someone is in need of help, you can either let someone else respond, or do the right thing," he told *The News Transcript*. "I know that no matter what the cost to me, I will always do the right thing."

Attentive carrier saves patron from apartment fire

Hearing a cry for help and the smell of smoke while delivering his route, **Thomas Matuszek** was jolted into action. He ran to the house and, when he saw it was on fire, he quickly dropped his mail satchel and entered the smoke-filled kitchen without a second thought.

He saw that the fire had started from something burning on the stove, so the Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member called 911 immediately. He then searched the apartment, found elderly patron Adele Stokes, and carried her outside of the smoky residence as he shouted for other occupants of the building to escape. He then ran back inside the apartment to make sure all of the burners on the stove were turned off to avert a possible explosion. "It happened so fast that there was no time to really think," the carrier told *The Buffalo News*.

Fire department officials commended the carrier, saying how wonderful it was for Matuszek to go out of his way to save the woman. "It certainly doesn't make me a hero," Matuszek said. "It makes me attentive, and I enjoy helping people." But Adele Stokes was certainly glad he was there. "Without him, I wouldn't be here," she said. "He was the perfect person to have at my side. He did all the right things." ✉



Leadership Academy applicants sought

Applicants for the 2011 Leadership Academy are now being accepted. The form is posted on the NALC's website at nalc.org and is also available from national business agents. In order for candidates to be eligible for 2011 training, forms must be received at National Headquarters by September 30.

Please note: Previous applicants must reapply and include updated information, along with a renewed commitment from their mentors.