

Proud TO SERVE

Proud to Serve is a semi-regular compilation of heroic stories about letter carriers in their communities. If you know about a hero in your branch, submit any news clippings, photos or other information to: Postal Record, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001 or e-mail us at postalrecord@nalc.org.

In this modern age, with greed and violence staples in the news, examples of courage and compassion are more important than ever. Across this nation, letter carriers are often the first to discover people in need due to accidents, attacks or fires. The following reports are offered to honor the actions of all NALC members whose quick thinking and sharp reactions have saved lives.

Carrier a 'superhero' after multiple saves



photo by Karen Schieli/Akron Beacon Journal

In his postal career, Akron Branch 148 member Keith McVey has been recognized three times for helping to save customers' lives. His latest feat included performing CPR on a man who wasn't breathing.

Akron Branch 148 member Keith McVey was on his usual rounds to an apartment complex on the route he's had for 29 years when he heard shouts coming from the parking lot of a laundromat across the street. He decided he needed to investigate and, upon moving closer, saw an unconscious man lying in the back of a pickup truck, with another man yelling at him and shaking

and hitting him in an attempt to wake him. McVey, a former firefighter and emergency medical technician, rushed to the scene to take over. He and another man carefully pulled the unconscious man out of the truck and placed him on the ground.

"I could see he wasn't breathing," the carrier told *The Akron Beacon Journal*. "His skin was ashen and his lips were turning blue." McVey started chest compressions and forced air into the man's lungs. A woman joined the group and held the victim's wrist while searching for a pulse, which returned after McVey had performed CPR. Paramedics soon arrived to take the man to the hospital.

This isn't the first time McVey has been recognized for saving the life while on the job—or even the second. Almost 20 years ago, when a teenager tried to take his life by jumping off a bridge on a snowy day, McVey, unable to stop him, covered the teen with blankets and helped keep him alive until an ambulance arrived. And two years before his latest feat—almost to the day—he pulled a drowning girl from a nearby lake. (See the January 2009 *Postal Record* for more details.)

McVey said it's intriguing how many times he's been in the right place at the right time. "After three times, I'm beginning to think there might be a little divine intervention of some sort," he told the Associated Press. "It is kind of eerie."

Tina Starosto, a receptionist at a local apartment complex, said, "He's a hero in our eyes. I think they should have him wear a cape when he walks around here so they'll know to holler for him when they need help." ☒

Driving from a relay to his next park point, **Perry Fontenot** noticed a middle-aged woman slumped over the steering wheel of a vehicle as he passed a church parking lot. He pulled his LLV next to the car and honked his horn, but there was no response. He then knocked on the window and shook the car, but still got no reply. Fontenot called 911, explained the situation and waited by the vehicle for emergency responders to arrive. Paramedics arrived a few minutes later and took the woman to the hospital. After he saw that she was safe, the Newport News, VA Branch 609 member continued on his route.

When **Reggie Boelman** was out on his route, he saw a young woman who appeared to be heading to soccer practice collapse from a seizure. The Willows, CA Branch 2472 member ran to her side and held her head to keep her from hurting herself. He made sure 911 was called and stayed by the girl's side until help arrived. Boelman found out later that it was Postmaster Theresa Chacon's child. "Reggie is my hero," she later wrote.

Elmira, NY Branch 21 member **James Mosher** was training a TE from his office when they came upon a customer down on his hands and knees, having difficulty breathing. The man had been siphoning gas, had accidentally swallowed some and was now in obvious distress. The two carriers called emergency services and stayed with the customer until they were sure the man would be OK.

Two young boys were playing under a tree inside a motorized toy police car when a large branch from the 75-foot tree above snapped and began falling. Carrier **Timothy Wert** was walking across the lawn at the time. "I heard a crack and I looked up and saw it coming down," the Omaha Branch 5 member told KETV. It all happened so fast that Wert didn't have time to alert the boys. One boy was able to escape the toy car just in time, but the other 7-year-old boy still inside was struck by the tree limb, resulting in critical injuries. Wert immediately called 911 on his cell phone as

"Your faith in humankind came shining through."

—A customer praised Branch 2 member **Brett Bezjak**, who summoned help and rendered aid to her as she was having a stroke

he banged his fist on the door of the injured boy's house. The mother rushed outside to pick up the boy to take him to a nearby hospital. Though the boy did not survive his injuries, Wert was commended for his selfless display of civic duty.

Brett Bezjak was on his route when he came upon a customer, Judy, who didn't look well. The Milwaukee Branch 2 member called 911 and rendered aid to her until an ambulance arrived. Responding medical personnel said the woman was suffering a stroke. "Your faith in humankind came shining through," she wrote Bezjak in a thank-you letter. "I am forever in your debt and will never forget you."

Newport News, VA Branch 609 member **James Craddock** was nearing the end of his route when he saw a regular customer whom he always exchanged greetings with sitting on the passenger side of her car. As he looped back on her side of the street and approached her residence, he noticed she was still in her pajamas and leaning slightly forward in the vehicle. He got out and knocked on her window, calling out, "Young lady, are you all right?" He then noticed that she appeared to be foaming at the mouth. Craddock shook the vehicle and, receiving

no response, pulled out a phone to call 911. He stayed with his customer until an ambulance arrived a few minutes later. Once he knew that she was well taken care of, Craddock returned to finish his route.

Mark Duncan was on his route and had just dropped off the mail at a local bar when he turned to leave. On his way out, he heard thumping, and turned to see owner Denise Cook pounding her fist on the bar and indicating she couldn't breathe. He dropped the mail and, remembering lifesaving lessons he had learned as a football coach, the Galesburg, IL Branch 88 member performed the Heimlich maneuver on Cook, which opened her air passage and allowed her to breathe again. The bar owner was alone at the time, and she thanked Duncan profusely for being there to save her. "He saved my life," she told the local CBS affiliate. "I'm very, very lucky." Duncan brushed off any praise. "I was the only one in there," he said. "I had to do something."

At the office around 9 a.m., rural carrier **Pat Duggan** collapsed while casing mail and began having seizures. Buffalo-Western NY Branch 3 member **Keith Sowa**, a former EMT, rushed to Duggan's side, checked his pulse, and noted he was having difficulty breathing. Seeing that he was turning blue, Sowa quickly began CPR on his co-worker. Fellow Branch 3 member **Michael Freeman** saw what was happening and put a wallet in Duggan's mouth because he had started to swallow his tongue. Minutes later, Duggan started to regain consciousness as the paramedics arrived to take over.

Charlottesville, VA Branch 518 member **Mary Good** was making her deliveries when she came across a man lying in the center of the street, bleeding profusely from his head. Good quickly grabbed a phone to call 911 and protected the injured man from being struck by oncoming traffic. She remained with him until the rescue squad arrived. The man had been crossing the street when he apparently blacked out and suffered a concussion. Good then ran to the realty office the man owned to tell his son what had transpired. ✉



Eye on the ELDERLY

AS **JERRY JACKSON** APPROACHED THE apartment of an elderly customer, he could hear the woman inside calling for help. When he rattled the mailbox, the calls became louder, so the carrier rang the doorbell and the woman inside called out that the door was open. Jackson entered and found the customer on the floor. She had fallen and wasn't able to get back on her feet. Since she thought her arm was broken, the Magnolia, AR Branch 3719 member called 911 and asked the woman for contact information for a family member so he could notify them. Jackson stayed with the woman until responders arrived and once he saw that she was in good hands, he returned to his route.

NOTICING ACCUMULATING MAIL IN THE mailbox of an elderly customer, **Audel Garcia** grew concerned. Since the 89-year-old Mrs. Ho picked up her mail regularly and because there was no vacation hold order, Garcia went to knock on the door to check on the woman. When he heard her feeble call for help in response, he summoned police and emergency crews. Ho's son wrote to the post office to commend the Santa Clara, CA Branch 1427 member for not only saving his mother's life, but also for his professional and friendly service on a daily basis. This was not Garcia's first heroic act. He was also spotlighted in the March 2009 *Postal Record* for performing CPR on a customer who had collapsed in his driveway.

SEEING THAT AN ELDERLY CUSTOMER ON her route had not picked up her mail for a few days, **Mary Ike** called the woman's daughter to alert her. The daughter found that her mother had fallen and wasn't able to get up. The woman sent a card to the Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126 member to thank Ike.

SAN FRANCISCO BRANCH 214 MEMBER **Alfred Jew** was bringing the day's mail to an elderly, disabled customer, Stephanie Shaw. The woman opened the

door to receive the mail, and he placed it on her walker. The customer then closed the door and Jew was about to head down the stairs when he heard a loud crashing sound. He went back up the stairs and knocked on the door, and Jew heard Shaw say that her head hurt after she had fallen and hit her head on a table. He tried the door knob and made his way inside, where he saw the woman on the floor. She asked him to call 911 immediately, and as he did, he advised the woman to lie still and not move. Jew, a 31-year postal veteran, stayed and comforted the customer until the ambulance arrived. Shaw later thanked Jew profusely, but the carrier brushed off any praise, saying, "Anyone would have done it."

SINCE **VICKIE CHAMBERS** HAD BEEN ON the same route for more than 20 years, she knew her customers. When she saw an elderly customer's door open and didn't see the woman, Dorothy, waiting for her (as she had done for 10 to 15 years), Chambers grew concerned. She rang the bell, but received no response. She called out to Dorothy, but still heard no answer. The carrier opened the storm door and again called out. This



"I am so proud to have Daryl as my mailman and honest people in the post office."

— A customer wrote to commend Branch 1820 member Daryl Hull for his good deed

time, she heard a faint voice calling out for help. The Toledo Branch 100 member rushed to the kitchen, where she found the woman lying on the floor after she had fallen and broken her hip. She had been lying there for more than five hours, was in shock, and had weak vital signs. Chambers quickly called 911 and stayed with Dorothy until responders arrived. Paramedics on the scene said that had the carrier not gotten to Dorothy so quickly, she might not have lasted much longer.

SEVENTY-NINE-YEAR-OLD **AUDREY Resler** went outside to get her mail and fell. Unable to get back up, she was forced to lie there in 24-degree temperatures in her nightgown and coat. Mid-Michigan Branch 56 member **Marie Hutchinson** found the customer and immediately removed her jacket and placed it over Resler. She alerted the woman's daughter, Gayle Ann Kettle, who was inside sleeping. Hutchinson and Kettler helped the elderly woman up and back into the house, careful to do so because Resler had broken several ribs. Kettler wrote a letter later, saying she was very grateful for Hutchinson's actions, as she would not have been able to get her mother back inside without her help.

WHEN FORREST CITY, AL BRANCH 1820 member **Daryl Hull** came across a wallet in the front yard of a patron's house, he recognized the name of the elderly woman who lived there. He went to knock on the door to return it to her. The woman called the post office to inform them that she had misplaced her wallet, purse, money and credit cards, and Hull had come by with perfect timing and returned her misplaced wallet to her. "I could have cried with joy, because people are always walking down the street and they could have picked it up and taken all my money," she told the office. "I am so proud to have Daryl as my mailman and honest people in the post office." ✉

Paul McGlory was home on his non-scheduled day using the laundry facility in his apartment complex when he heard a loud popping noise and noticed a flash. He turned around to see an electrical outlet with flames coming from it. McGlory quickly called 911 then alerted the apartment complex manager. They rushed to the maintenance shed to cut off the electricity, where the Tidewater Virginia Branch 247 member grabbed a fire extinguisher and returned to the laundry room to put out the fire. McGlory was commended for his quick thinking in helping to avert a potentially dangerous situation.

While delivering on his route, Gregg Esselman saw smoke coming from an elevated deck area under a customer's house. Investigating further, he observed flames coming from a wood-pile, which was now burning the overhead deck attached to the house and garage. The Brookfield, WI Branch 4811 member made contact with the homeowner and called 911 to report the fire. The customer inside the home was safely evacuated prior to the arrival of police and firefighters. The fire was determined to have been caused by faulty exterior wiring under the porch. Brookfield Police Chief Christopher Perket wrote to the post office, saying, "Had Mr. Esselman not taken the actions he did, I would hate to speculate on the outcome of this call."

When Jim Russo arrived at a residence on his route, he saw a disturbing sight: smoke emanating from a window and smoke detectors blaring. He ran up to the house and started knocking, but got no response. He called 911 and upon arrival a few minutes later, firefighters investigated and found no one home, but discovered a pot that had been left burning on the stove. Fire officials commended the Worcester, MA Branch 12 member, saying if Russo hadn't gotten there when he did, the situation could have been a lot worse.

A woman carrying her child came rushing toward **Robert Sweeny** as he delivered his route. Panic-stricken, she

pleaded for help because the inside of her garage was on fire. Acting quickly, Sweeny ran to the garage, where he unplugged the clothes dryer and extinguished the fire that was beginning to take over the machine. He called the fire department and stayed with the family until firefighters arrived to take over. The Sacramento Branch 133 member was praised for helping his customers out, and as a result of his quick action, neither the woman nor child was injured and the fire was quickly contained. This is not Sweeny's first time to be recognized as a hero. He was featured in the May 2009 *Postal Record*, and gained national attention on Fox News and "The Oprah Winfrey Show" for administering CPR to an infant.

Out on his rounds, Raymond Franca was approached by a patron who came running out of her house. She hurriedly told him that something was burning inside and asked for his help. Franca locked his LLV and ran into the house and up the stairs. The smoke alarm was sounding and he could smell the pungent odor of smoke. At the top of the stairs, he could see flames coming from the stove. After making sure the woman had left the building, he went to the kitchen and opened the stove. He saw flames climbing the side wall, coming from the bottom tray in the oven. He doused the flames with water and then opened the tray and realized everything was on fire. After putting out the flames with glasses of water from the sink, he removed the items from the stove and placed them in the sink. As he opened all the windows, he heard the sirens and knew the fire department was close. Responding firefighters thanked the Staten Island Branch 99 member and said he had prevented further damage to the house and possibly to neighboring houses.



Staten Island Branch 99 member **Raymond Franca** rushed into a burning home to make sure his patrons were out safely and put out the fire before fire officials arrived.

Burlington, VT Branch 521 member Maureen Johnson was delivering mail along her route when she heard a smoke alarm go off in a home. She looked inside and saw a woodstove emitting a large amount of smoke, and quickly called 911. Firefighters arrived soon to control the situation. "This incident would not have cured itself without the mail carrier noticing the alarm activation and smoke in the window," Burlington Deputy Fire Chief Steve Bourgeois told a local news affiliate. "This would have been a much more serious fire." The house sustained only minor damage, and investigators discovered a blocked pipe inside the stove and debris buildup in the chimney that caused the fire.

Seeing smoke billow from around back of a house on his route, **Pat Tibbetts** grew concerned. He knew the residents were on vacation, so he ran to the back porch to investigate and found a large rug on fire. He ran next door to recruit help from a neighbor, and they pulled the rug away from the house. Tibbetts grabbed a garden hose and sprayed down the rug and porch while the neighbor called the fire department. The Barre, VT Branch 617 member had just finished putting out the fire when firefighters arrived. ☒