

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, contact us as soon as possible at 202-662-2851 or postalrecord@nalc.org. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

Despite the sometimes extraordinary circumstances, most letter carriers take their role as heroes in stride. From being the first on the scene to going above and beyond to make sure all is well in the neighborhoods they serve, these men and women make a difference in the lives of patrons who find themselves in situations where a little extra help is just what is needed. Here are the stories of some of those special letter carriers.

Carrier swiftly saves patron from growing inferno

Noticing dark smoke swirling its way up from a customer's house in December, **Paula Johnson** quickly approached to investigate. Through the window, she saw 95-year-old Virgie Johns, whom Johnson had gotten to know over the eight-plus years she had been on her route. Johns was sitting in her usual living room chair, unaware of the smoke. The Lynchburg, VA Branch 325 member walked around the residence and saw flames curling out of a bedroom window at the back of the house.

Johnson ran to the front porch and knocked on the door—no response. She kept trying, eventually kicking at it and calling 911. Johns finally responded, and invited Johnson in to get out of the cold. The carrier could see smoke drifting into the dining room. “No, Miss Virgie,” Johnson said. “You have to come with me.”

She grabbed Johns' shoes and led her out to her LLV. Firefighters soon arrived on the scene and told Johnson to take her customer to the fire truck so she could keep warm.

Lynchburg Fire Marshal Greg Wormser said the fire was electrical in nature and that the damage was confined mostly to the back bedroom, though smoke damaged another room. Flames also damaged a neighboring house. After she made sure Johns was safe, the carrier continued on her route. “I'm so happy I was there,” she said. “I knew if I weren't, she wouldn't be here today.”

“She's the greatest,” Johns' daughter Dolly Ashley told the Lynchburg *News & Advance*. “She might not be a hero in anyone else's eyes, but she is in mine.”

Johnson said it was something any carrier would do. “I love my route and I love my people,” she told the paper. “I am their family and they are my family.”



photo by Jill Nance/News & Advance

Lynchburg, VA Branch 325 member Paula Johnson got a 95-year-old customer safely out of her home when she noticed the house was on fire.

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Steve Salzman delivers a route in a neighborhood where several apartments and houses have been condemned. One day last September, the Copperas Cove, TX Branch 5734 member noticed a pickup truck backing up between some unoccupied apartments. He watched as a man walked around the building, which Salzman thought was strange. Next he saw the man by the vehicle, loading appliances such as refrigerators and stoves that had been in the building. The carrier called the police, who came to investigate and soon arrested the thief. Salzman doesn't see what the fuss is about. "I just called the police," he said. "It's no big deal."

While talking with co-workers in the parking lot after her shift May 5, Milwaukee Branch 2 member **Chaquitta Wright** noticed a young child walking on the sidewalk next to Bradley Road—a very heavily traveled thoroughfare. The child was crying and appeared lost. "He was just walking back and forth, back and forth," she said. When Wright looked up and down the street for a parent or guardian, she did not see anyone approaching. She walked over to the child

and asked if he was lost, and the boy answered in the affirmative with tears in his eyes. She asked him where he lived, but he didn't know; he just knew it was close by. Recognizing the carrier's USPS uniform and feeling safe, he followed Wright to the station, where she called the police. "He felt comfortable because we had on our uniforms," Wright said. "He trusted me." The police soon came by to pick the child up to find his home.

Doug Crompton was delivering to a house on his route Feb. 14 when he smelled the unmistakable scent of natural gas. The Worcester, MA Branch 12 member went to the door and knocked until the 92-year-old resident, Ralph, responded. Once the door was open, the odor was even more apparent, though the man did not seem to have noticed, since he said he had a cold. Crompton realized the seriousness of the situation and called the gas company, whose number he found on the last bill. They told the man to wait outside until they could get there, so Crompton continued on his route during the wait. The crew responded about a half-hour later to check it out, and Crompton returned a little while after that to see how it was going. "The gas meter was covered in



Doug Crompton (l), a Worcester, MA Br. 12 member, recently received congratulations from Worcester Postmaster Dan O'Neill for his actions in alerting a customer of a dangerous broken gas line.

snow," Crompton said, and the gas leak was beginning to seep through the foundation into the house. The post office was unaware of the situation until the elderly resident called to notify them of Crompton's actions. "I think anyone would have done the same thing," Crompton said. "It was a strong smell—I don't think you could have overlooked it." ✉

Brave carrier breathes life back into smallest customer

As **Gloria Sramek** was delivering mail one morning in late November, she heard shrieks of "She's dead! She's dead!" and immediately went on high alert. A young man was holding what looked like a small doll in his hand as he and a young woman were running to a next-door neighbor's house, frantic with fear.

The Superior, WI Branch 337 member could see from nearby that what looked like a lifeless, limp doll was

eight-month-old Aura, struggling to breathe. "Her lips were totally blue," she said, figuring it was a choking situation. Sramek started heading toward them, her mail still in hand.

The carrier began yelling instructions to call 911 and get blankets. "The man laid the baby in front of me on the grass," she said. "He had no idea what to do." Remembering CPR training from a class she had taken about 20 years ago, she swabbed the baby's mouth with her finger and performed a few chest compressions. The carrier started doing mouth-to-mouth resuscita-

tion as they waited for paramedics to arrive.

"I don't know how long it was; it felt like an eternity," she said. EMTs arrived a few minutes later and told her to "keep doing what you're doing" before they took over. They eventually found a pulse and used a device to pull out the cause of the episode: a popcorn kernel.

The parents expressed their extreme gratitude to Sramek for her actions. "You don't think about it—you just do," the carrier said. "It's a life experience hopefully not a lot of people have to go through." ✉



When Spacecoast FL Branch 2689 member Albert Lang found an elderly customer on the floor in a pool of blood, he helped him up and summoned medical attention for him. He recently was recognized for his efforts. Pictured (from l) are Branch President Mike Monopoli, Postmaster Ken Rushing, Lang, and stewards Frank Dolack and Pete Bruno.

AS ALBERT LANG WAS DELIVERING HIS route Nov. 12, he heard the distant cry of “Mailman, mailman” coming from a customer’s house. The elderly man who lived there greeted him every day, so Lang knew something was wrong. The Spacecoast FL Branch 2689 member looked through a window and saw the man lying on the floor in a pool of blood. Going inside and getting a closer look, Lang could see the man was bleeding profusely from a deep wound on his arm and was unable to move. The man had fallen while using his walker and couldn’t reach the phone that was just a few feet away. “I helped him off the floor,” Lang said. Placing the customer in a chair nearby, Lang helped bandage the wound as he called 911. Responding paramedics arrived soon to take over. Seeing that the man was in good hands, Lang continued on his route but checked back in later in the day. Lang said it was a good feeling that he could help the man out. “That’s the first time I’ve ever had to do something like that,” he said. “I’m glad I was there—he could have died that day.”

CHRIS CINNAMO SAW A VERY FULL mailbox at an elderly customer’s residence on Monday, Nov. 8. “It was odd to me,” he said, since in the entire five years he had been on this route, she had never missed picking up her mail. So he went to the door and loudly knocked. In return, he heard a feeble “Help me, I fell down.” The Westchester Merged, NY Branch

693 member walked quickly to a nearby police station for help and then hurried back to the house to wait for them. When police arrived, they had trouble gaining entry, but eventually discovered a window they could maneuver through. Once inside, they found the woman on the floor, where she had been for the past few days. After Cinnamo gave his information to the police and saw that the customer was safe and was being escorted to the hospital, he continued on his route. “It was a lucky situation,” Cinnamo said. “She might have been there a lot longer.” Branch 693 Recording Secretary Robert Morton commended Cinnamo, writing to *The Postal Record*, “It is through acts such as these that letter carriers often serve America in ways far exceeding their everyday chores. Great job, Chris.”

WHEN MARK CONWAY DELIVERS MAIL to the home of his octogenarian customer Mrs. Green, he always sees her peek through her curtains, then she meets him outside for the mail on the first day of the month. The Charleston, SC Branch 3902 member usually sees her peeking through the window, and when Conway gets out of his truck and walks up to her door, the woman shakes his hand and thanks him very much. But at the beginning of February, the carrier didn’t see her. On Feb. 2, he found the mail still there and became concerned because “that’s not usual at all,” he said. He knocked on the door, then asked neighbors if they had seen her. Having had no luck with either action, he called



When Charleston, SC Branch 3902 member Mark Conway didn’t see his customer and saw mail piling up, he contacted authorities, who found the woman on the floor.

police. Authorities came and gained entrance to the house. They found the customer on the floor, where she had been for a few days. They also noted that the thermostat was set at 90 degrees. Police said if she spent another day the way they found her, she would have died. “I’m just glad I was there,” Conway told WCSC TV in Charleston.

STU SWEENEY WAS DELIVERING TO A home on his route on March 9 when he heard the elderly customer inside banging on the door and asking for help. The woman had fallen during the previous night and was unable to get up. She knew about what time Sweeney arrived each day to deliver the mail, so she pulled herself across the floor and waited near the door. The Minneapolis Branch 9 member called 911 and waited with the woman for help to arrive.

WHEN SHE SAW THE PREVIOUS DAY’S mail still outside of an elderly resident’s home on Jan. 13, Becca Anderson grew very concerned. “All this stuff goes through your head,” the Coos Bay, OR Branch 1450 member said. She had been on the route for only a few months, but she knew customer Dorothy Blair picked up the post regularly and notified her whenever she went out of town. That day, she contacted the carrier who had had the route before her for many years, and they agreed that it was very unusual behavior for Blair not to pick up her mail. Having a bad feeling, Anderson decided to check with neighbors, but no one had seen Blair that day. One even said she had been trying to reach the woman, but hadn’t had any luck. Anderson called her supervisor to ask the police to do a welfare check. Responding officers had to break in, but found Blair in bed, going in and out of consciousness and was unable to move because of a stroke that had paralyzed half of her body. Blair survived, and Anderson went to check on her later that day. Anderson said she was happy she had been able to notify the police when she did. “It was the day before I had a surgery,” she said. “The next day there would have been a sub.” ✉