

Couriers of the Charitable Spirit



Another holiday season has arrived, and the dedicated men and women of the National Association of Letter Carriers, as always, stand ready to serve as the trusted couriers of our customers' special greetings and precious gifts.

But the dedication and generosity of our members often transcends the mailbox. And many of these efforts also transcend the holiday season, with NALC member performing acts of charity not just in December but all year long.

The pages that follow contain just a few examples of letter carriers' selflessness, from active and retired members making sure the neediest in their communities enjoy a hot meal for Christmas and find toys under the tree, to a brave letter carrier literally giving of himself to save the life of a child he'll likely never meet.

At this special time of year, we take a few moments to reflect on these and the many other ways letter carriers prove, day in and day out, just how much we value the friendships we form with the customers we serve.

Carriers helping whole families

Many NALC branches around the country try to give something back during the holiday season. One of the most popular and effective ways letter carriers help out in their communities is through adopt-a-family programs.

For the past several years, Lexington, KY Branch 361 has been hosting a Christmas party for local families in need. Branch President Kevin Napier said the whole endeavor is funded by donations from the letter carriers, and they tag-team to coordinate efforts for the party.

Participants first obtain lists of underprivileged families from a church or another local organization that helps the community in down-town Lexington. They are provided details about the children, such as names, ages, clothing sizes and their holiday wish lists. Branch members then donate money and split up the duties.

"The carriers do all of the preparations for this event," Napier said, "the shopping, wrapping, cooking, serving—and even the vice president dressed up as the jolly one himself, Santa Claus."

Napier said the event has "absolutely grown." The venture has evolved from



a few carriers taking names they find through an “angel tree” in the local mall to last year’s event, which included providing a hot meal for more than 30 children (from babies to teenagers) and their families, totaling more than 70 attendees, not including the carriers.

“You can tell with a lot of them that it’s one of the better meals that they’ve had. And the kids can’t wait to open their gifts,” he said. “It’s a very heart-warming experience for the carriers.”

Last year, the Oak Ridge, TN, post office held an inaugural event to help out families in the local community. The postmaster suggested the idea of adopting families, and the whole office—about 30 employees, including Knoxville Branch 419 members—jumped on it.

“We as carriers see when people are in need,” said Reba Michel, former vice president and currently a steward for Branch 419. “We brought forth these families.”

They did so by forming a committee, and branch members approached the two chosen families to find out what they needed. One family was expecting a new baby and recently had been evicted; the other had a few children and the father had recently been injured in a work-related accident.

The postal employees then pooled their money and resources. Large collection receptacles were set up at the post office, and clothing, firewood, a car seat, diapers, toys for the kids, and various other items were gathered.

When they found out that one entire family was sleeping on a mattress on the floor of their home, the carriers purchased bunk beds. “We loaded it all up in the backs of our LLVs and took them to the families,” Michel said.

The selected families were overwhelmed by the generosity. “Most all of them cried, and neighbors who knew of the families’ need came to thank us for our help,” Michel said. “We’re very glad to do it.”

Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 also tries to adopt two families a year through the Volunteers of America Adopt A Family program.

Keeping their donations anonymous, last year participants purchased gift cards for each family, enabling the parents to Christmas-shop for their own children. “We prefer to keep the belief in Santa Claus alive for the children,” Branch President Mark Judd said.

Cadillac, MI Branch 794 has been taking part in a local “Christmas Angel” program for the better part of the last decade. Branch members usually work with a human services agency to identify families in the community that are less fortunate.

“Every year people are anticipating the program,” said Branch President Ruth Reddy. It started out with just one person whom they helped; they are now up to adopting one to two families per year.

Once wish lists are professed, the participants get to work, appointing a chairman and reaching out to other postal employees—rural carriers, clerks and management—to join in. They go out and purchase whatever items they are told the family needs and then bring the wrapped donated items to the families.

In some instances, the families have preferred to remain anonymous, but in most cases the participants are able to present the gifts directly to the families. The presents are brought over while children are at school so that it remains a surprise for them.

“The family last year could not believe the generosity,” Reddy said. “They said it was ‘the best Christmas ever.’”

And carriers love the experience. “It’s an uplifting thing we do. It’s a way to bring the office together,” she said. “It has been gratifying to give so generously from our surpluses to bring Christmas joy to a family that may not have anything under the tree.”

All the branches interviewed said they hoped to carry on their adopt-a-family tradition for years to come.

“We intend to continue,” Reddy said. “There’s never an end to the need.” ✉



Above and opposite page: Members of Lexington, KY Branch 361 help to make the holidays a special season for needy families in the community.



A life-saving present

Los Angeles Branch 24 member Eddie Guerrero gave an 11-year-old child the best holiday gift she could ask for: life.

It all started in the mid-'90s, when Guerrero was watching the news one day and saw a story featuring a 6-year-old girl who was dying of cancer and pleading with viewers to register with the international bone marrow registry.

The carrier was touched and soon sought information about becoming a potential donor. He sent in the required cheek-swab to enter the registry and waited to hear back. "I thought they'd call me right away," he said.

He finally received a call—13 years later. He was told he was a match for an 11-year-old girl in another country who was suffering from falconis anemia, a blood disease that often leads to leukemia. Though almost all patient information is at first confidential, they were able to tell him the patient's age, sex and disease.

Guerrero's friends and family were proud of him, he said, but they reminded him that bone marrow donation would be painful. But he brushed off their concerns, saying he was

happy to help. So, on Dec. 15, 2010, the carrier and Army veteran showed up at the hospital to do his part.

Guerrero said the process entailed only a few steps. To start, "they put me under anesthesia," he said. Then, doctors made four small incisions and extracted about half a liter of liquid marrow from inside his pelvic bone. After the procedure, he took about

three weeks of work off to recover, though he said, "It didn't hurt; it was just soreness."

Because of certain protocols in place, Guerrero doesn't yet know the name of the girl whose life he saved. "Because the little girl was out of the country, they weren't obligated to tell me," he said. But, he expects to be given that information soon so that the two of them would be

able to keep in touch in the future.

One thing he knows is that, after the girl's transplant operation, the family passed this message on to Guerrero: "We're so glad you did it."

Guerrero said he was just glad he could make a difference. "I'd do it again," he said. "Pain comes and goes, but this little girl has been suffering her whole life." ✉



Eddie Guerrero



Penalty Overtime Exclusion for 2011

During a four-week period (two consecutive pay periods) in December, the application of penalty overtime is suspended (Article 8, Sections 4 and 5). The Postal Service has designated the Penalty Overtime Exclusion period for 2011 to be December 3-30 (Pay Period 26-11, Week 1 through Pay Period 1-12, Week 2).



Santa carrier

Jack Mayberry knows what his job is all about. For the last four Decembers, the Toledo, OH Branch 100 member has donned a full Santa Claus costume—to match his white beard grown over his 32 years as a postal employee—while delivering mail. If Jack takes a few extra minutes on his route during the holiday season, it's because he's busy waving to delighted children from his LLV or posing for pictures with kids, giving them photographic proof that Santa Claus is real.



Delivering meals to be thankful for

Dave Donovan has complete records of the number of meals he has helped serve to the less fortunate at Thanksgiving.

"I'm kind of a numbers-type, organizing-type person," Donovan said. In 1975, his first year of involvement in the free Thanksgiving dinner offering through St. Matthias Episcopal Church in Whittier, CA, the church served 25 meals. Last year, the number had grown to 935.

Donovan, a retired letter carrier and long-time president of Santa Fe Springs, CA Branch 4941, has been in charge of the shopping and coordinating the 150 or so volunteers required to serve the dinners since 1977. His job includes cooking about 50 turkeys, a task that begins early Monday morning the week of Thanksgiving. Some of the turkeys and other food, and the cash to buy more, are donated by employees at the Bailey Station of the Whittier Post Office. Many letter carriers, he noted, see homeless people out on their routes every day and are moved to help them.

Donovan and other volunteers hang posters, in English and Spanish, around town to reach as many hungry or lonely people on Thanksgiving as they can.

"I believe that we are called to help those who are less fortunate," Donovan said. He estimates that those who come for the free meals are evenly divided among the homeless, those who have homes but limited incomes, and senior citizens enjoying the fellowship as well



as the food. The church even provides transportation to those who need it.

Donovan is humble about his service, much as many letter carriers across the country quietly help the less fortunate at this time of year. Word of the efforts of some does reach *The Postal Record*, though, such as the 25 turkeys collected last year and donated to a local food bank as part of the annual holiday food drive by Las Vegas Branch 2502 members at the East Las Vegas station. For letter carriers, the knowledge that they are helping others is enough. ✉