

# 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](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

**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 saves customer —twice—from growing inferno

While delivering mail on the morning of Jan. 14, Boston Branch 34 member **Stephen Nestor** was walking up the driveway of a house on his route. "I heard a little crackling," he said. "I happened to look up and the roof was on fire."

Since he had been on the route for the past 12 years, he knew that an elderly man lives there. Nestor saw the man's vehicle in the driveway, and figured he was probably home. He ran to the house and knocked on the window, but received no response.

The 24-year postal veteran went to his truck and called 911, then ran back to knock on the door this time—again, no response. So, he entered the home to try to find 96-year-old Albert Whitcomb. Nestor called out several times, since there was only about two feet of visibility. His first instinct was to go upstairs to find Whitcomb, but he remembered advice from his firefighter father, who said to

never go up the stairs during a house fire. Nestor eventually found the man in the basement, where he was apparently searching for a fire extinguisher. The carrier escorted him up the stairs and outside to safety.

When Nestor went to move his LLV in anticipation of arriving emergency vehicles, Whitcomb re-entered the home in search of his keys. Once again, Nestor rushed into the burning house, found Whitcomb inside and led him out of the smoke-filled house.

Within minutes, flames could be seen shooting out of the residence. Vehicles from neighboring fire departments arrived on the scene to tackle the three-alarm fire that at this point had engulfed the second and third floors and sent flames through the roof. Because of a recent snowstorm, firefighters had difficulty negotiating the narrowed roads and getting to fire hydrants. Two towns helped provide more than 1,000 feet of hose.

Whitcomb was evaluated at the scene and had no injuries. His son, who lives with him, was not home at the time of the fire. Lexington Fire Chief William Middlemiss said the fire was most likely caused by electrical problems. "The situation could have been much worse had it not been for the actions of Stephen Nestor," Middlemiss told the local postmaster.

Other residents praised him as well. "He ought to be given a Nobel Prize," neighbor Richard Jensen told the *Boston Globe*. "He's everyone's friend. He's a hero."

Nestor said the event is just something that happened. "Everyone says it's an amazing thing, but I just don't know," he said. "It was in front of me. I'm just glad he's alive."

**"I heard a little crackling. I happened to look up and the roof was on fire."**

**—Branch 34 member Stephen Nestor recalled coming across a burning house on his route, where he saved the elderly customer inside**

When Bryan Wilkins delivers to a disabled customer on his route, he buzzes an intercom to signal that he's dropping off the mail. In late December, he saw that the customer had not picked up the previous day's mail, and so he called out to the customer on the intercom. Hearing a faint moaning in response, the Tidewater VA Branch 247 member gained access to the house and found the customer near the back door of his raised den, incoherent and bloody. Wilkins stayed with the customer until emergency services arrived. It was determined that the customer had passed out because of an electrolyte imbalance, causing him to break his knee when he fell. When the customer returned home from the hospital, they called the station manager to express thanks for Wilkins' actions.



Tidewater VA Branch 247 member Bryan Wilkins

As Long Island Merged, New York Branch 6000 member Michael Rizzo was delivering mail on Feb. 14, he came upon a customer, William Coyle, outside of his home. Coyle had just returned from a dialysis center and was bleeding profusely from a fistula on his right arm. Rizzo quickly called 911, then brought Coyle into the house and called the man's son as they waited for

the ambulance to arrive. "I don't know what I would do if Mr. Rizzo wasn't there and helped," Coyle's daughter Josephine Boyle told the USPS. "My father is doing well, thanks to his actions." Rizzo says he was just in the right place at the right time. "I am glad that I was able to help Mr. Coyle on that day," he said, "and I'm proud to be a letter carrier."

On March 21, South Florida Branch 1071 member Thomas Fleming came upon an accident scene. A crowd had gathered after a young man had been struck by a truck. Fleming could see that the man was

having a seizure, so he stabilized him and stayed at the scene until paramedics arrived to take the man to the hospital.

Columbia, SC Branch 233 member Ray Conrad was out delivering mail in his truck on April 12 when he heard a woman "honking, screaming and yelling." He turned his attention to the car. "Do you know CPR?" she asked urgently. Her 1-year-old child had had a seizure and had stopped breathing. Conrad, a former CPR instructor for the county sheriff's department, jumped out of his truck and ran across the street. He took the child, performing the life-saving technique as recommended for infants. The child's heart started beating again and she began to breathe once more after he gave her a few breaths and compressions. "I got her wide awake," Conrad said. EMS arrived quickly to take her to the hospital. The carrier had performed CPR only once before, while he was in the military. "I've been delivering mail for 16 years now and never had an incident like that at all," Conrad told a local NBC affiliate. "I think that little girl had someone looking out for her. Everything worked perfect for that child." ✉

## Speedy carrier provides aid after rollover car crash

Nov. 8 "was just another delivery day," carrier Michael Hart said, until he saw a car jump a curb, crash into a tree and flip upside down. He then heard multiple screams. "I grabbed my cell phone and just started running toward the car," he said. Inside, he saw an infant, a little boy and a mom, upside down. The lady was frantic, yelling, "Please get my babies out!"

Hart replied: "Don't worry. I will get your babies out."

The Santa Ana, CA Branch 737 member first cradled the baby's head, then unbuckled her seatbelt, so she could fall gently into his arms. He handed her off to a woman who had just arrived at the scene. Then Hart ran to the other side of the car to extract the 2-year-old boy, who was also dangling upside down in the backseat and screaming hysterically.

Someone on the scene had pried open the

door next to the mother, Janie, and she was able to climb out. (She thought Hart opened the door, but he doesn't remember doing so.) Once everyone was safely out of the car, the carrier handed the woman his cell phone so she could call her husband. Fire trucks soon arrived. They determined that she had lost control of the car when she briefly turned around to look at her children in the back seat.

Once Hart had given a police report and saw that the family was unhurt and in good hands, he gave Janie a hug and left the scene to return to his route. The woman didn't even find out Hart's name until her husband wrote to the post office to thank whoever it was who saved them that day.

Hart brushes off the attention, though. "I think anyone in my shoes would have done the same thing," he said. "I just reacted."



Santa Ana, CA Branch 737 member Michael Hart recently received recognition for helping to save a woman and her children after the vehicle they were in crashed into a tree and flipped upside down. Pictured (l to r) are shop steward Frank Vasquez, Hart and Branch President Phillip Capuano.



# Eye on the ELDERLY

ON NOV. 29, CUSTOMER HEATHER Davies was exiting her house with her 84-year-old mother in her wheelchair. Davies set the brakes on the chair, then turned to lock the door. Davies' mother must have jostled in the chair, because a few seconds later, the chair rolled off the walkway and tumbled down a small hill next to the house. Davies screamed as she ran over to her mother and assessed her for critical injuries. Northern Virginia Branch 3520 member **Hernilo Parin**, who was across the street delivering mail, came over to help the struggling Davies lift her mother back into her wheelchair, then back up off the grass to the sidewalk and on to their car. Parin assisted in getting the woman into the car, giving Davies additional time to assess her condition. She was especially worried because her mother has dementia. "I was so thankful for [Parin's] help. Most importantly, I appreciated his light-hearted humor that he used to reassure my mother and me," Davies wrote in a letter to the local postmaster. "As she laughed at his jokes, I was able to see that she was responding well, cognitively." After getting checked out, the woman was found to have no broken bones or head injury. "This is certainly not the first time we have noticed Nilo's kindness and sunny personality," Davies wrote. "But he proved to be a true friend and neighbor to us this week."

## AS AURORA, IL BRANCH 219 MEMBER

**Sonny Sipes** was about to enter a retirement home to deliver mail, he heard a weak voice saying, "Sonny." He looked in the voice's direction and saw that an elderly woman had fallen. "I saw she was laying on the sidewalk and I went to her, asked her if she was all right," Sipes told *The Voice*. She had landed on her head and blood



Aurora, IL Branch 219 member **Sonny Sipes**

photo by Jason Crane/The Voice

was dripping from her forehead. She said she was OK, but added, "Go inside and get help." The 30-year postal veteran quickly went inside and asked someone to call 911. He finished delivering the mail to the building, and when he ventured outside afterward, he saw she was on a stretcher and waved to the carrier as she was being put into an ambulance. "I was just in the right place at the right time. Anyone would have done the same thing," Sipes told the newspaper. "But it feels good to help someone, especially someone you have seen while you are out doing your job."

WHEN HE SAW A HUGE PILE OF MAIL outside his 79-year-old customer's house, Urbana, IL Branch 784 member **Darryl Dague** thought something might be wrong. "That's not like her," he told the *News-Gazette*. "She picks it up every day." He went to the door and could hear her TV on, so he knocked on the door. It wasn't completely latched, so he yelled for her, but received no response. The carrier phoned his supervisor and asked him to call 911, then waited for authorities to arrive before continuing his route. Officers entered the house and found it ransacked. They heard the customer's voice and traced it to a bedroom, where they found a heavy cabinet pushed up against a closet door. Police moved the furniture and released her from the closet, where she had been for nearly three days. She was still lucid and, as they waited for an ambulance, told them what had happened. Someone had knocked on the door, she said, and after asking who it was, she had opened the door. A man then displayed a knife and asked where her money and jewelry were kept. He dragged her around the house, demanding to know where the valuables were. The woman said the man also punched her in the face, then forced her into the closet. Police said they are grateful for Dague's call so that they could help the woman. Dague says he was just doing his job and looking out for customers on his route. "If you're lucky enough to be on a route long enough, you get to know people," he said. "You become friends. It's almost like a second family." ✉

## Carrier pulls unconscious driver to safety after crash

**Michael Berry** was working his route March 25 when he stopped at an intersection and noticed a car coming toward him. He saw it veer off the road, bounce off a large pine tree and slam into another tree.

"It just happened so quickly," the Chattanooga, TN Branch 62 member said. He secured his LLV and ran across the road toward the scene of the accident. Since Berry was the only one there, he called 911 to report it and then went to the car, which was still running. "When I saw that a tree had gone through the windshield, I prepared myself for the worst," he said.

He peered into the car and saw that the woman was knocked unconscious and bleeding profusely. He reached through the driver's side to feel for a pulse, but he couldn't find one. Another woman came upon the scene and screamed that the dashboard was on fire. Berry asked the woman to call 911 again just to be sure responders were on their way. The two then tried to pry open the door enough to get the driver out, but it was too smashed.

Then, smoke and flames started to erupt. Berry told the woman to step back. "The adrenaline started flowing through me—that helped me get the door open enough to get access to the driver," he said. He turned the key in the ignition to turn the car off and pulled the driver out onto the ground, away from the car. He still couldn't feel a pulse, so he began CPR until a police officer arrived. "I'm no soldier, but I did what I could until help came," he said.

Another driver appeared and asked if he could help. Berry asked if he had a fire extinguisher. He did, and the two men used it to put out the car fire.

Once Berry saw that the woman and the situation were all right, he filed a statement with the police and continued on his route. An officer contacted him later to let him know the woman was still in the hospital, but that she was going to be all right.

Berry said he was just being a good Samaritan. "I did only what anyone else would do for another," he said. "I was just thankful she's OK." ✉

# NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

**Cincinnati Branch 43 member Jared Kriger** had switched routes one day in May and was getting ready to start delivering mail when he looked up at a busy intersection and saw a tiny girl on the corner. Thinking that the adult nearby was her mother, he grew concerned when he saw the woman pass by and the child start to wander toward him. As she came closer, he began to ask her questions, including what her name was and where her parents were, but she was too young to know. Kriger secured his LLV just in time to prevent her from stepping into traffic. He tried to identify the toddler by knocking on doors and asking passersby, then eventually called police. While he waited for them to arrive, a neighbor went to a corner store to buy diapers and wipes for the child. Kriger, having a 2-year-old at home, knew what to do and went ahead and changed the diaper in the back of a police car that had just shown up. After almost an hour, emergency crews found the child's mother in her home, unresponsive, and another infant unattended. "I'm just glad I traded routes that morning," Kriger told the *USPS Cincinnati District Digest*. "I was in the right place at the right time."



**Cincinnati Branch 43 member Jared Kriger recently saved a young girl from wandering into traffic at a busy intersection on his route.**

**Richmond, VA Branch 496 letter carrier Vallarie Brown** was delivering mail to a house on her route on Saturday, March 26, when she was suddenly confronted with an odor so strong, "I could taste it in my mouth," she said. A few days earlier, Brown, the shop steward for Richmond's East End station, had detected the tell-tale indication of a natural gas leak somewhere on her Wood Street route, although the scent had been so faint then that she hadn't given it a second thought. But this time, the smell was potent enough to let Brown know something was seriously wrong. "I was especially worried because I knew that a handicapped child in a wheelchair lived in that house," Brown said. After first determining that no one was home, the letter carrier used her cell phone to alert the fire department to this potentially dangerous situation, and also notified residents in the houses next door and across the street. Once authorities arrived, Brown returned to her duties. And when she delivered mail to the house the following Monday, there was no sign of the offending odor.

**Valparaiso, IN Br. 753 member Joanne Woods** smelled the unmistakable odor of natural gas as she made her rounds in the cold on Jan. 25. Having been on the route for 12 years, she knew the neighborhood well and always notified residents when she thought something was wrong. The smell seemed to be coming from between two houses on the street. "It hit me like a wall—it was that strong," she said. She knocked on the door of one house to let the residents there know of a possible leak, then continued on her route. The residents called the gas company, which responded and discovered that the leak actually was emanating from next door, from the back of the Epples' house. The gas company showed up soon after with equipment and, after a few hours, repaired the leak. Woods heard the next day that it had been a very serious gas leak, and that the dryer vent near the piping easily could have caught on fire. The Epples wrote a letter to the local postmaster to commend the carrier. "If Joanne Woods had decided to simply walk on and not alert anyone, this gas leak could have developed into a situation that could have threatened not only our lives and property, but the lives and property of those around us," they wrote. "Joanne clearly went above and beyond the call of duty." Woods said she just did what anyone would do. "I don't think it's that spectacular," she said. "How can you walk by somewhere when you smell natural gas and not tell anyone?"

**This past winter, carrier Tom Dunlap** was surprised to see a stack of \$900 in cash, plus a deposit slip, with a pile of letters he had picked up at a residence. He wrote to the woman whose name and address were on the slip and told her that he had found the money. The customer, Shirley Barone, came to the post office the following Monday morning to collect the money, and she thanked the Sun City, AZ Branch 6156 member profusely. The week before, Barone had tried to deposit the money at her bank, but it had already closed for the day. She later began addressing letters to mail out and put the large sum of cash into the stack and placed all of the envelopes in the outgoing

mail. She didn't know until later that it was gone. Dunlap was sorting mail over the weekend and discovered the envelope. "It's amazing that I was able to return it, because I never would have known who it belonged to if the deposit slip didn't have her name and address on it," he told the *Daily News-Sun*. Barone noted how much it means to her that the money was returned. "Part of the money was for my rent, and I would have been devastated if I lost it," she told the paper. "This just proves that Sun City has the best postal workers, and they're really looking out for residents in this community." ✉

## FIRE & RESCUE

**STATEN ISLAND, NY BRANCH 99 member Angel Rivera**, along with a driver-safety instructor, noticed smoke and flames billowing from a six-family home on his route in October. Rivera warned residents of the potential danger by knocking on doors and alerting the community of the fire. The carrier was commended for potentially saving many lives. ✉