

# 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 rescues passenger from sinking runaway car

**Laura Garibaldi** was on her route around 9 a.m. on June 14 when she heard a loud series of noises followed by a woman's screams.

The Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member ventured forward and saw a garage door open and then saw a car in a swimming pool. Her 86-year-old customer, Mr. Riggs, had driven his car completely through his garage and

into his back yard pool, and the man and his daughter were now trapped inside the car. Garibaldi sprang into action, running toward the pool, yelling, "Hold on! Hold on! I'm going to help you!"

She opened the partially submerged car's door and helped Riggs' daughter work herself loose. A neighbor who had heard the commotion helped Riggs exit the vehicle on the other side. Garibaldi called 911 as she was pulling at the door. "I got really nervous," she said, and she knew the woman needed oxygen. Once both father and daughter were clear of the car and the pool, the carrier comforted her customers and kept an eye on them until response units arrived.

Once she saw that everyone was in good hands, Garibaldi continued on her route. "I do what I have to do," she said of her actions. "I knew she needed help, and no one was around."

Laura Garibaldi, a Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member, visited customer Mr. Riggs and his daughter to recount details of the day she saved them after the car Riggs was driving burst through the garage door and into the pool.





## Eye on the ELDERLY

### Smoke no match for attentive carrier

As **Carl Fondelheit** was on his route one day this past summer, he saw something unusual at the house of some customers he was delivering to: flower beds in the front of the house smoking and smoldering. The Portland, OR Branch 82 member knew the family, and he quickly ran to the front porch and knocked on the door to get someone's attention, but no one answered. Seeing where the fire line was approaching, Fondelheit ran across the street to see if the workers he saw there could help. He then multi-tasked and called 911 as he found a garden hose at the side of the house and turned a stream of water on the fire to quench it.

The fire department showed up soon to monitor the situation, but found there wasn't much left to do. Resident Ellen Blomquist arrived home from her walk at the same time, and the carrier took it upon himself to explain what had happened. The fire captain commended Fondelheit for handling the situation so well. At the time, Blomquist's husband and hard-of-hearing dog were inside the house and hadn't heard the carrier's warnings.

"We live in a very old house with very dry wood. Just down the street, another house of our vintage burned to the ground a couple of years ago in a matter of minutes," Blomquist wrote to the postmaster. "However anticlimactic the outcome, [Fondelheit] prevented a tragedy and we can't thank him enough."

Fondelheit can't see what all the attention is about. "As letter carriers, we tend to take pride in taking care of our neighborhoods," he said. "You're charged with that responsibility when you see that kind of situation." ✉

**SEEING QUITE A BIT OF MAIL ACCUMULATED** in an 80-year-old customer's box on May 6, carrier **Tanin Taylor** became worried. She's been on the same route for about four years, so she is familiar with her customers, especially the elderly ones. "I try to keep tabs on them," she said. The man didn't come outside his home very often but always picked up his mail on time. When the Cleveland Branch 40 member came by that day, the amount of mail that was piled up "was just outrageous," she said. She knocked on the door to try to check on him, but received no response. So she called police, who arrived shortly and gained entry. The customer was found on the floor under a large amount of debris, and had been there for a number of days. It was unclear why there was so much accumulation inside the house and whether the man had fallen, though police said the house needed to be condemned. Responding officers told Taylor that if she had not intervened when she did, the man would have died.

**WHILE MAKING HER ROUNDS LAST** spring, **Victoria Detty** saw her 84-year-old customer walking down the street. The Columbus, OH Branch 78 member had just parked and was coming back from her second relay. "There was a car coming down the street, and then she disappeared" from view, Detty said. The woman had tripped on a bad spot in the sidewalk and hit her head. The carrier went to the woman and helped her back up to her feet, then retrieved tissues from her truck to help the woman sop up the blood. After she regained some composure, Detty walked the woman several blocks back to her home and returned to the station without telling anyone what she had done. Not long



Cleveland Branch 40 member Tanin Taylor

after, a relative of the customer stopped Detty to thank her for her efforts. "I was just helping her back," Detty said.

**WHEN HE HEARD A LOUD BOOM WHILE** on his route on May 15, **Brian Glaab** looked around to see what was going on. He found what the pandemonium was about: A vehicle heading toward townhouses at a very high rate of speed. Seconds later, the car plowed through the front of a house and came to a stop in the kitchen area. The Jeffersonville, IN Branch 553 member sprinted to the vehicle, where he found an elderly woman who was confused but conscious. He yelled into the house to make sure everyone was all right, and asked the residents to call 911. He turned his attention back to the elderly woman and asked if she was hurt, and she responded that she had back and neck pain. Because Glaab was a former police officer and had medical training, he knew how to safely stabilize her neck and back. A resident observed that the engine was starting to smoke, so Glaab had to get the woman out without causing further injury. One of the residents helped him pry the door back so the woman could get out. The carrier moved the woman to a safe area and stayed with her until EMTs arrived. It was later determined that the diabetic woman had been rendered temporarily unconscious, causing the accident. ✉

# HELP on the Way



When Mid-Michigan Branch 256 member Joshua Kean saw a customer start to have a seizure in the middle of the street, he summoned help and waited with him until paramedics arrived. Kean was recently recognized for his actions by District Manager Charley Miller.

On Saturday, August 20, Mid-Michigan Branch 256 member Joshua Kean was just leaving a building he had delivered to when he saw a man in distress in the middle of the street. Thinking, "This guy could get run over," Kean got out of his truck and ran over to him. The man, David Kirksey, who Kean soon realized was a customer of his, had been waiting for the bus to go home when he started showing signs of a seizure. Kean called paramedics as he comforted the man. He also safeguarded the man's keys and money until medical personnel arrived, to make sure he was safe. "Too often people and institutions in Flint are described as being mean-spirited," Kirksey wrote to *The Flint Journal*. "So we need to acknowledge people like Josh, who are kind, honest, caring and decent." Kean takes the events in stride. "I really didn't think it was all that big a deal," he said. "I was just doing the right thing."

This past spring, José Lugo was out on his route a little earlier than usual delivering curbside mail. In one customer's mailbox, he discovered what appeared to be a suicide note. He thought

it could be a hoax, but didn't want to take any chances. The Central Florida Branch 1091 member called his supervisors and then called authorities to report it so the situation could be investigated. Responding police officers discovered an additional note inside the door, but were unable to get inside. They gained entry through the back of the house and found the man collapsed on the floor after taking a large amount of pills. The customer was rushed to the hospital and was revived. Police said that if the carrier hadn't responded when he did, the man would have died. "I happened to be in the right place at the right time," Lugo said. "It's what ordinary people do."

On a Saturday afternoon this past summer, Youngstown, OH Branch 385 member Marcus Merrell was filling in on a co-worker's route, driving from box to box, when he saw a customer sprawled out in his driveway, unconscious. Merrell called out to the man, but received no response. The carrier quickly called 911, learning the man's name, Tom Kilar, from the letters he was about to deliver, and requested an ambulance. Kilar briefly regained consciousness and was trying to speak to Merrell when he



photo by M.A. Lark/Hubbard Soaring Eagle

Seeing patron Tom Kilar (l) sprawled across his driveway, Youngstown, OH Branch 385 member Marcus Merrell (r) called 911 and tried to keep the man conscious until help arrived. Kilar recently met with Merrell to thank him.

fell unconscious yet again. Afraid the man would continue this cycle and hit his head among the stones outside, "I held him so he wouldn't hurt himself," he said. Merrell "tried to keep his attention and keep him focused" and stayed with Kilar to comfort him until paramedics arrived. An ambulance soon arrived to take the customer to the hospital to address what turned out to be a heart attack. Word reached the post office when the Kilar family called on Monday to give an update on Kilar's condition.

Sandra Zender was finishing up her loop on Saturday, August 20, when she heard customer Mary Dull yelling for help from inside her home. The carrier went to the house and discovered Dull lying on the floor after falling. The customer said she had been on the floor since early that morning and that she knew she could count on her mail carrier to be there. Zender, a Fostoria, OH Branch 279 member, called 911 and got a pillow for Dull's head to make sure she was comfortable. The woman had a broken hip, and had Zender not found her when she did, Dull might have not been discovered until Monday.

When the power went out in the home of 82-year-old Virgil Gottschalk April 28, so did the oxygen he relied on to stay alive. Alone in the house, he panicked. Though he can't get around well, he made his way to the front porch, where he yelled for help. Carrier Nick Meadows was across the street delivering mail when he heard Gottschalk's cry. The Wichita Branch 201 member immediately came to the customer's aid and assessed the situation. He asked a neighbor to call 911 while he helped Gottschalk hook the oxygen tank back up and then stayed with him until paramedics arrived. An hour later, Meadows stopped by again to ensure the man was doing OK. "Without Nick's quick thinking, my brother may have died," Gottschalk's sister Carlotta told the USPS about Meadows. "Thank you' just doesn't seem enough." Meadows said events like this happen across the country all the time. "Anybody else would have done that," he said. ✉