

# 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.

**W**hat is a hero? Someone who rescues residents from their burning homes? Letter carriers do that.

Someone who attends to pedestrians knocked unconscious in car accidents? Carriers also do that.

Someone who helps a scared and frustrated woman get her just-snatched purse back? Carriers even do that.

This month, we showcase some letter carriers who did all that and more. The following stories document their heroism. For them, it's all in a day's work.

and dizzy, and he had trouble breathing. He grabbed onto a tree for balance, but soon passed out. When he came to, he saw Brauer standing over him, telling him not to get up.

Brauer had worried when he came back around the neighborhood on Groen's side to deliver his mail and didn't see him. So he got out of his LLV and found him on the ground, on his back in the snow. He tried to wake him up but to no avail, so he hurriedly called 911. "It looked like he stopped breathing for a minute," Brauer said. The operator kept him on the line and told him to perform CPR, but as he was about to begin, Groen started to stir and began talking.

Emergency personnel, as well as Groen's wife, Debbie, arrived soon after to take him to the hospital. Doctors discovered that two of four chambers in his heart had stopped pumping blood and also found bleeding in his brain caused when he hit his head and fell.

Since Groen lives on a part of a street that is somewhat hidden, he said he could have easily been on his driveway for a long time without being seen. The 40-year postal veteran highly praised Brauer. "Had he not been there, I would have died," Groen said. "He's my hero. Every time I see him, I tell him thank you."

But Brauer downplayed his actions. "I really didn't do anything," he told the *Harrison Press*. "Ed thanked me today. Then I thanked him and told him, 'You're making me look good.'"

## One letter carrier saves another

Retired Cincinnati Branch 43 member Ed Groen was out shoveling the heavy, wet snow off his driveway around noon Dec. 16. He saw his letter carrier, fellow Branch 43 member **Greg Brauer**, going down a nearby road and waved, noting that he'd probably be by in the next 20 minutes.

Groen had just finished salting the driveway when he became light-headed



Cincinnati Branch 43 member Greg Brauer recently received thanks from customer Ed Groen, a retired Branch 43 member, for getting help when he found Groen unconscious in his driveway. Pictured (l to r) are Branch Vice President David Kennedy, Groen, Brauer and Branch President Gerald Giesting.

# NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

**H**arold Dade noticed an out-of-place bicycle at customer Denise Davis' home June 4, so he looked a little closer and saw that the glass on her front door had been broken by a brick. He looked into the house and saw a man. "The scariest part was when I was eye to eye with him, because I knew that he didn't belong in that house," the Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member told the *Orange County Register*. Dade took off to his car and cell phone to alert authorities when he saw a neighbor, Scott Stone, who was driving to the bank. As Stone slowed down to approach a stop sign, Dade ran in front of Stone's truck and told him to call the police. While Stone was on the phone, the man inside the home left on the bicycle. Stone followed the man to a local McDonald's and identified him to police when they arrived. The man had a criminal record and had served time in prison. Davis was able to recover some of her valuable possessions that had been stolen, thanks in part to Dade. "More of us should be like that, keeping an eye out for each other," she told the *Register*. "A lot of people probably would have just walked away."

**S**outhwest Minnesota Branch 2939 member **Crista Stahl** was delivering her route on March 26, 2010, when she saw a man carrying a 42-inch television from a home and loading it into his car. The scene struck her as odd, so she got a good look at the man. A few days later, she found out that the TV had been stolen, so she alerted the police department. She was able to provide a detailed description of the man she had observed, and when the victim identified a man she believed to be the suspect, Stahl was able to pick a photo of the same man out of a lineup. The positive identification led to the man's arrest and charges of burglary and theft.

**D**ottie Wickham was delivering mail in the rain on May 17, 2010, when she came across a 4-year-old boy walking alone, wandering the streets. She asked him where he lived, but he was unable to tell her. The Cambridge, OH Branch 634 member called authorities for help. When police arrived, they, too asked the boy where he lived, but he still was unable to say. As the boy's well-being was being

evaluated—because he had gotten soaked while outside—officers began speaking with residents nearby to try to determine where the child lived. An officer soon found the boy's mother at a house in the neighborhood. She said she had just returned from her GED class, but that the child was in the care of another person who lived there who was baby-sitting. All the roommates denied being asked to baby-sit, so the child, along with his two siblings, was taken into the care of child services and the mother faced charges of endangering children. Wickham was commended by the community for her conscientiousness toward local citizens.

**W**hile delivering mail to Ralph's Pharmacy in November, Shawnee, OK Branch 883 member **Dustin Lawson** sensed trouble. He could hear crying from somewhere in the store. As he approached the counter to present the mail, he heard four or five shots fired in the store. Lawson ran back outside to his LLV and grabbed his cell phone to call 911. He reported shots fired and a possible armed robbery in progress. He watched one robber run out of the store to a parked van that then headed west. The other robber ran out and fled east on foot, followed by the armed pharmacist, though no shots were fired outside of the pharmacy. Lawson went back inside to see if anyone was injured; luckily, no shots had connected. The carrier stayed on the phone with local police to let them know what was going on. One robber was captured on foot a block away. The other, who had abandoned the stolen van and had stolen another car, was soon captured by police in the next county after the vehicle's tires were flattened with stop-sticks the police had put out. The duo had been on a crime spree in which they had allegedly shot two citizens and conducted at least two car-jackings.

**O**n Dec. 31, **Jerry Ronan** was on the route he's had for 25 years when he found a dog in the hallway of a four-family building. The animal, a lab-pit bull mix, had no collar and was cowering in the hallway. "I rang all the doorbells and a kid came down," the Yonkers, NY Branch 387 member told the *Lower Hudson Journal News*. "I said, 'Whose dog is this?' Nobody knew."



Shawnee, OK Branch 883 member Dustin Lawson

The dog was emaciated, and Ronan could tell it hadn't eaten in days. He continued on his route, but later in the day drove back to the building to retrieve the starving dog. It was noticeably weak, but still strong enough to climb into the vehicle. Ronan wasn't sure how his wife, Tara, would react to another dog; they already had three, two of which had been rescued. Tara wasn't sure they could keep her, but she took to the animal quickly, naming her Ridley. The Ronans took Ridley to a veterinarian to make sure she had up-to-date rabies and distemper shots. As Ridley settled into the Ronan household over the next month, news surfaced about the theft of eight dogs from a local shelter. Eventually, six dogs were found, and police arrested three suspects. The newspaper had written a story about the troubled shelter's budget woes and included photos of a few dogs that were missing. One of these was Layla, a lab-pit bull mix, and a reward was posted for her return. A few days later, Ronan's mother-in-law saw the photos and instantly recognized Layla as Ridley. Ronan took her to the shelter, where it was confirmed that Ridley indeed was Layla. Ronan turned down the reward, but is now trying to decide whether to keep her in foster care or adopt her outright. "I'm trying to talk my wife into it," he told the newspaper. ✉

**While out on his route in the spring of 2010, Dwayne Hayes** had just left a residence when he heard a cry. He turned around and noticed a woman lying face down on the ground. The New York Branch 36 member rushed to the woman's side. When she turned over, he not only recognized her as his customer Greta Caballero, but also saw that blood was all over her face. Hayes quickly entered a nearby chiropractor's office. Staff there provided some tissues, and Hayes used them to apply pressure to Caballero's bleeding as he called 911. "I kept her calm, making sure she wasn't going in and out of consciousness," Hayes said. "I had the ability to keep her comforted until the ambulance came." When Hayes saw her a few days later, he found out she had received stitches for the injury.

**On Monday, Nov. 30, Milwaukee Branch 2 member Robert Fritz** was on the route he's had for 25 years when he came to Leslyn Clason's house and saw newspapers piled on the porch and mail still in the wall slot. "Every day she gets the *Wall Street Journal*," he said. "Over the weekend, she should have picked it up." Concerned, the carrier rang the doorbell, but received no response. So, Fritz removed the mail to look through the opening and saw a hall light on. A neighbor who saw him came over and asked Fritz if he had noticed the mail pile. Fritz said he had, and asked if the neighbor knew of Clason's whereabouts or if he knew of anyone to contact. The man responded that the next-door neighbor, Korinne Neher, would have a phone number for the woman's mother. Fritz went to Neher's house and knocked on the door, but when he didn't get an immediate response, he went back to Clason's residence. "I went around her house, knocking on doors and windows," Fritz said. He was able to open the screen door and knock, but still didn't get an answer. Eventually, Neher came to see what was happening and asked what was going on, so Fritz explained the situation. Neher called Clason's mother, but the woman said she could not come right away and said to go ahead and call 911. A few minutes later, rescue squads pulled up to the house. The carrier heard from the EMT driver that Clason was in the house and alive, but she had been lying in the hallway for a few days, unable to move. Clason's mother and sister soon arrived and thanked Fritz for looking out for their relative.



**Seeing overflowing mail in a customer's box on Saturday, May 29,** alerted New York Branch 36 member **Gamila Miller** that something might not be right. The customer in question, Mrs. Pitrelle, was always seen coming and going. Miller knocked on the door and Pitrelle cried out, "I can't walk!" Miller called 911 and waited until emergency services came to break down the door. Pitrelle, who had been lying on the floor for a number of days with all the windows closed, was taken to a hospital and treated for severe dehydration. Miller stopped by the hospital the next day, Sunday, to check on her patron.

**Charles Vector had been weeding in his front yard on a hot day last August** when he stood up and instantly knew something was wrong. He hadn't brought water outside with him and felt overheated, so he stumbled to the front porch, where he sat down and passed out in a chair. Cleveland Branch 40 member **Hammond Ford** was delivering mail across



the street and, as usual, waved to Vector. This time, though, the man didn't wave back.

Ford went closer and found Vector incoherent on his porch. "He was breathing real hard and slow," he said. The carrier helped him inside and put him to bed before getting him a glass of water, an ice pack for his forehead, and something to settle his stomach. He continued his route, but stopped back in a few times later that day to check on Vector, who felt much better and said he believed he had a minor heat stroke. "[Ford] certainly deserves any plaudits that there are for people who are concerned and aware of people around them," Vector told the *Cleveland Sun News*. "He is a remarkably nice guy." Once Ford left the scene, he didn't mention to anyone what he did. "It was just a part of the job," he said. "I was just glad to be there at the right time."

**Sue Hucal was driving on her route June 28** when she saw customer Dan Bass running from his house to the Salley house next door. Knowing that the neighbors are close friends and pranksters, the Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126 member's initial thought was that Bass was playing a joke with his neighbor, Bruce Salley. She observed a moment longer, however, and realized that Bass was indeed in trouble. Hucal followed Bass to the Salleys' front door. Bass was screaming that he thought he had cut his hand off. Hucal saw that Bass' hand was bleeding profusely and went closer to the scene. Bruce Salley wasn't there, but Hucal found Salley's wife, Gail, in the house and yelled, "Call 911; this is no joke! Get a towel!" After making sure the two young girls and the great-grandmother in the house were safe, Hucal followed Gail out the door to tend to Bass, who was on the ground, going into shock. They found that Bass had cut through the whole top of his hand—from fingers to wrist—with a miter saw. As Salley attended to Bass' hand and restrained his upper body, Hucal held his flopping legs until EMS personnel arrived. Hucal helped to answer paramedics' questions about the situation. While Salley went to the hospital with Bass, Hucal made sure the Salley household was secure with a neighbor before she returned to her route. "If Sue were not so in touch with her patrons and their daily activities, the scenario would have been much more chaotic," the Bass and Salley families wrote in a joint thank-you letter. "Her quick, decisive actions certainly are appreciated by all involved with this situation." ✉



## Carrier foils thieves' neighborhood crime spree

In April 2010, there were numerous break-ins on carrier **Jack Wood's** route. He regularly kept in touch with his customers as part of a neighborhood watch, and several customers approached the Huntsville, AL Branch 462 member about the break-ins and asked him to look out for anything suspicious.

One day, when Wood was delivering mail, he saw three men down the street. He turned off onto a connecting street and came back up the opposite side, where the men's view of the LLV was blocked. As he cleared the last house, he witnessed two of the burglars jump the fence toward a home, while one stayed on the sidewalk as a lookout. "It was quite a shock," he said. "I couldn't believe I was seeing what I was seeing—it was broad daylight." He knew right away what they were up to, so he stopped to call the police.

Noticing the carrier, the lookout started to walk away from

the house and pulled out his cell phone, apparently to alert the others. Wood got out of his LLV and approached the house from the opposite side. He saw that the back door was open, and he reported the break-in to the 911 operator as it was happening. At that point, the lookout made a run for it.

Minutes later police responded, and Wood was able to describe the suspects' clothing from the brief time he saw them. The two who had broken in were caught one street over after jumping over several fences trying to escape; the lookout was caught shortly thereafter. Items taken from the house were found in their possession. From the arrests, police were able to close more than 20 cases of break-ins of houses and cars in the area.

Wood says he was just looking out for the neighborhood. "I have a sense of ownership of my route," he said. "So I took it personal." ✉



Huntsville, AL Branch 462 member Jack Wood (l), who helped notify police about a neighborhood break-in in progress, recently was named Outstanding Community Watch Citizen of the Year by the Huntsville Community Watch Association. Wood is pictured with Chad Bryant, who was named Police Officer of the Year.



**ROBERT CARDAZONE** WAS on his route when he saw heavy smoke coming from a nearby house. The Brooklyn Branch 41 member got out of his

truck and ran toward the scene to investigate. He went to the back and found the yard, the trees and the whole back of the house were engulfed in flames. He didn't see anyone around, so he went to the front door to warn the residents, and a few kids answered. Carda-

zone thinks he scared them. "I was ringing the bell constantly," he said. The father, a rabbi, came to the door and asked what was going on.

"Look up," he said, indicating the smoke. They had no idea the house was on fire. The older son came to the door, and Cardazone told him, "Take care of the house on the left," while the carrier took the right. They went to each house to warn those residents of the situation.

By this time, people began coming out of their houses to see what was going on. An emergency helicopter arrived on the scene. Cardazone, suspecting other vehicles were en route, moved his truck out of the way and, seeing that the situation was in good hands, continued his route. He checked back later in the day to make sure everything had turned out OK. The carrier doesn't think he did anything special. "What was I supposed to do, keep driving?" he said. "I just had to do my thing." ✉

# FIRE & RESCUE