

# HEROES OF THE YEAR 2011



**NALC honors six carriers and one branch for their heroic and humanitarian accomplishments by naming them NALC's 2011 Heroes of the Year. >**



**NALC President Fredric Rolando opens the ceremony.**

**W**hat does it mean to be a hero? Everyone knows what heroes look like on TV or in the movies, but real-life heroes look different. Sometimes they look like letter carriers.

“Letter carriers feel the pulse of everyday life as they stop at every home and business along their routes. They can tell when something is not right, and they are often the first to act, sometimes putting their own lives at risk,” NALC President Fredric Rolando told the large group gathered for the presentation, an assembly that included the union’s resident national officers, leaders of other postal unions, top Postal Service executives and other honored guests.

“[Our heroes] cannot leap tall buildings,” Rolando said. “They don’t have costumes or secret identities. They didn’t know that they’d be called upon. But, on the streets where they deliver the mail, they were indeed called upon.”

In the yearly event showcasing special acts of bravery and compassion by letter carriers, the NALC honored six members and a branch as its 2011 National Heroes of the Year during a celebratory luncheon in Washington on Sept. 29. The gathered crowd were moved to applause and to tears by the emotional stories.

Before presenting the awards, Rolando thanked the panel of independent judges who reviewed the stories about heroic and humanitarian acts published in *The Postal Record* between July 2010 and June 2011. Those who selected this year’s recipients were: Bud Biscardo, AFL-CIO Community Services liaison at

the United Way of America; Richard Bowers, chief of the Montgomery County, MD, Department of Fire and Rescue Services; and Richard Daschbach, chair and chief judge of the Employees’ Compensation Appeals Board at the U.S. Department of Labor.

Rolando also recognized a number of special guests, including Postal Regulatory Commission Commissioner Nanci Langley, National Postal Mail Handlers Union President John Hegarty, USPS Deputy Postmaster General Ronald A. Stroman and USPS Vice President of Labor Relations Doug Tulino.

The president then introduced Postmaster General Patrick R. Donahoe, noting to the audience that the postmaster general sends hundreds of letters out to letter carriers each year to acknowledge their brave deeds.

In brief remarks, Donahoe said, “It’s great to see letter carriers represent so



well,” citing the NALC Food Drive, the Muscular Dystrophy Association Telethon and those who give bone marrow to save lives. He praised “those who respond in true times of need, like the heroes we have today.

“Let me thank everyone here today for the excellent representation and excellent service that we give the American public,” Donahoe concluded.

Rolando then recounted each hero’s story to the crowd before presenting the awards.

#### **The 2011 NALC Heroes of the Year are:**

**National Hero of the Year:** Keith McVey of Akron, OH Branch 148, who is a three-time hero, recently performed CPR on a man who was not breathing and, in the past 20 years, has also pulled a drowning girl from a lake and saved a teenager who tried to take his own life by jumping off a bridge.

**National Humanitarian of the Year:** John Conde of Wilmington, NC Branch 464, a Bronze Star winner and Iraq veteran, went on a medical mission to the Dominican Republic and assisted in 30 surgeries and helped 50 seriously ill patients.

**Branch Service Award:** Wheeling, IL Branch 4739, whose members worked with the USPS to ensure that a boy with

inoperable cancer fulfilled his lifelong dream of becoming a letter carrier.

**Eastern Region Hero:** Paula Johnson of Lynchburg, VA Branch 325, who rescued a 95-year-old customer from her burning home.

**Central Region Hero:** David Bartaway of Western Wayne County Branch 2184, whose keen eye on his route helped police track down and arrest a habitual burglar.

**Western Region Hero:** Dustin Lawson of Shawnee, OK Branch 883, who provided eye-witness information to police about a robbery in progress at a pharmacy where he was delivering mail, leading to apprehension of the suspects.

**Special Carrier Alert Award:** Laura Garibaldi of Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100, who jumped into an 86-year-old customer’s swimming pool to help the man and his daughter escape after their vehicle became submerged.

More details about each hero’s actions appear on the following pages.

“You may never see [these heroes] immortalized in a comic book, or in a Hollywood movie,” Rolando said, “but these are real people who have performed real heroics. They represent the nation’s letter carriers well—and for that, we are proud of them.” ☒

**Below:** Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe thanked the carrier heroes for the service they give to their communities.

**Bottom:** Rolando expressed his pride in the heroic and humanitarian deeds that the award winners performed.



# NATIONAL HERO OF THE YEAR

## KEITH MCVEY OF AKRON, OH BRANCH 148



President Rolando presents the National Hero of the Year award to Keith McVey (above). Among the crowd that attended the ceremony (below) were NALC's resident national officers, leaders of other postal unions, top Postal Service executives and other honored guests.

## Third time's a charm

**S**houts coming from the parking lot of a laundromat across the street caught the attention of Akron Branch 148 member Keith McVey. That day, in July 2010, he had been on his usual rounds to an apartment complex on the route he had had for about 22 years.

McVey ran over to evaluate the situation and, upon moving closer, saw an unconscious man lying in the back of a pickup truck. He had apparently fallen and hit his head in the truck, and another man was yelling at him, shaking and hitting him, trying to revive him. "He had him by the shoulders and was trying to get his buddy to come to," the carrier said. McVey—who had been in the Air Force and also had served as a firefighter and emergency medical technician before joining the USPS as a carrier 30 years ago—rushed to the scene to take over.

McVey and another man carefully pulled the man out of the pickup. They placed him on the ground to start CPR until an ambulance arrived. "The back of a truck is not a place you want to do something like that," McVey said.

The man wasn't breathing. "He was real gray," McVey said. "His lips were purple."

As a crowd began to form, McVey started chest compressions and forced air into the man's lungs. A woman joined the group and held the victim's wrist while searching for a pulse, which returned after McVey had performed CPR. "I was as surprised as anyone else that he started breathing again," the carrier said. Paramedics arrived within a few minutes to take the man to the hospital.

But McVey's heroics don't begin there—the carrier has been recognized for saving lives twice before. Almost 20 years ago, McVey witnessed a teenager who tried to take his own life by jumping off a pedestrian bridge on a snowy day. McVey rescued the teen, covered him with blankets and helped keep him alive until an ambulance arrived. And two years before his latest feat—almost to the day, in July 2008—he jumped into a nearby lake to save a drowning girl. (See the January 2009 Postal Record for more details.)

"After three times, I'm beginning to think there might be a little divine intervention of some sort," McVey told the Associated Press. "It is kind of eerie."

NALC President Fredric Rolando told McVey: "Keith, you are the best intervention anyone could hope for. You enter people's lives, help them when they most need it, and we're all better off for having you here among us."

In selecting McVey as the 2011 NALC National Hero of the Year, judges pointed out how the carrier "demonstrates dedication and commitment to what the letter carriers are all about on a consistent basis."

McVey has been getting media and attention for his heroics from all over the place—including newspapers, the Associated Press, local TV affiliates, and even a letter sent from Germany. "Of course I'm very honored," he said of being named National Hero of the Year. "It's nice to think you've made a small difference in this big old world."

But, he insists, "I was just in the right place at the right time." ☐





# Giving back through a medical mission

**T**his is not the first time John Conde has been honored as a hero.

Before joining Wilmington, NC Branch 464, Conde earned a Bronze Star as an Army captain in Iraq after he quickly organized a rescue mission. He got another chance to go on a mission of mercy when he helped about 50 patients in a single week as a medical assistant at a clinic in the Dominican Republic.

Conde, who has both EMT and military medical training, accompanied his wife Jenifer, a physician, to the women's clinic in the remote town of San Juan de la Maguana in April 2010. He assisted Jenifer and other doctors from the New Hanover Regional Medical Center in Wilmington and from Pitt Memorial Hospital in Greenville, SC, with about 30 major surgeries and a few dozen outpatient treatments. Conde started IVs, sterilized instruments and kept the clinic running smoothly so the doctors could focus on their marathon surgery sessions.

The trip was organized by Solid Rock Missions, a Christian organization that built the clinic and a school in the town.

The patients in this rural region were poor and also were isolated from medical care, Conde said, putting a high demand on the doctors. That made serving them quickly a top priority.

"The lines would start as early as 7 in the morning and patients were seen until 5 in the evening," Conde recalled. "Some of them would ride on the back of a motorcycle from many miles away, only to find themselves riding back after surgery the same day."

The routine was a snap for Conde, who has experience working under

pressure in foreign lands. Conde served two deployments in Iraq as an artillery platoon leader and signal corps leader with the rank of captain. And now he can add "2011 NALC Humanitarian of the Year" to his list of accomplishments.

The judges praised Conde's dedication to the mission and his strong sense of teamwork. "He did so much," they said. "There was work to be done, and he got it done. It's how letter carriers do things every day. He clearly brought his military experience with him as well. He helped make the lives of many women and children better."

Conde, who still calls everyone "sir" and "ma'am" thanks to his Army days, was humble about the award.

"I'm honored to receive the award," he said. "I think any mail carrier who was presented with the opportunity would do what I did. I look forward to continuing my humanitarian endeavors both locally and internationally."

"John, we look forward to seeing what you do next," President Rolando said at the ceremony.

Conde's wife did not attend the ceremony in Washington because she was busy caring for a recent special delivery—the couple's first child, Jacob, who was born on Sept. 3. ☒

Several of John Conde's relatives attended the ceremony (below) to witness him receive the award (bottom) for NALC National Humanitarian of the Year.



## NATIONAL HUMANITARIAN OF THE YEAR

### JOHN CONDE OF WILMINGTON, NC BRANCH 464

# EASTERN REGION HERO

## PAULA JOHNSON OF LYNCHBURG, VA BRANCH 325



President Rolando presents Paula Johnson with the certificate proclaiming her NALC's Eastern Region Hero.

## Growing inferno doesn't deter carrier

**D**ark smoke swirling its way up from a customer's house caught the attention of Paula Johnson on Dec. 16, 2010. She hurried to the house to investigate. Through the window, she saw 95-year-old Virgie Johns, whom Johnson had gotten to know over her nine-plus years on the 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—to no response. "I kept banging," she said, eventually kicking the door while dialing 911. Johns finally responded. "She grabbed both of my hands," Johnson said, and invited the carrier inside to get out of the cold. The carrier could see smoke drifting into the dining room. "No, Miss

Virgie," Johnson replied. "You have to come with me."

She grabbed Johns' shoes and led her outside. "I was going to get her out," Johnson said. "No way I was going to let her stay in there." Firefighters soon arrived on the scene and told Johnson to take her customer to the truck so she could keep warm.

The fire was determined to be caused by an electrical problem, with the damage 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 18-year carrier continued on her route. "I'm so happy I was there. I knew if I weren't, she wouldn't be here today," she told the *Lynchburg News & Advance*. "I love my route and I love my people. I am their family and they are my family," she said.

In naming Johnson the 2011 Eastern Region Hero, judges said her attitude "epitomizes letter carriers everywhere." They also commented that it was a very courageous act since "she only had seconds to react."

Johnson doesn't consider herself a hero, though. "I am honored to receive this award," she said, "but what I did was what any normal citizen or carrier would have done."

NALC President Fredric Rolando disagreed. "Paula, believe me," he said in announcing the honor, "to all of us in this room, and to your fellow carriers throughout the country, you are a hero." ✉

Among the many well-wishers who joined Johnson at the ceremony was her husband, Anthony.





# Crime spree prevented by repeat hero

**D**avid Bartaway noticed an unfamiliar person walking in the neighborhood while on his route April 12, 2010. "I knew he didn't live there," he said.

The Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 member observed the man walking up to various houses, knocking on doors. Later that morning, Bartaway saw the same man walking around customer John Lemmer's yard, seemingly looking for an open door or window and getting on the porch to do the same. Then, the carrier said, "he took off running."

Concerned, Bartaway called the local police to inform them of the suspicious activity. Meanwhile, Lemmer had returned to find footprints outside his garage door and a broken doorjamb and door, but the burglar had been unable to get inside.

By the time police arrived, the man had already fled the scene, but Bartaway was able to provide police a description and possible location of the suspect. "I was watching out when something was unusual on my route," said Bartaway, who has had this route the past 18 of his 30 years as a carrier. "I kept a mental note."

Within minutes, officers were able to locate the would-be burglar and arrest him. "They went over and knocked on his door," Bartaway said. They saw stolen items in his apartment from another burglary in the neighborhood and obtained a confession from him. He was charged as a habitual offender and later was sentenced to prison.

Bartaway said he just acted on impulse. "I didn't really think much about it," he said. "I was just keeping an

eye on the neighbors."

In selecting Bartaway as the 2011 Central Region Hero of the Year, judges commented that the carrier demonstrated excellent situational awareness, and that he is "the eyes, ears and hands of the community."

This was not the first time Bartaway, a former Marine, has been recognized. He also was named the NALC's Central Region Hero in 2004 for risking his life to divert a truck heading toward people attending a festival in Trenton, MI.

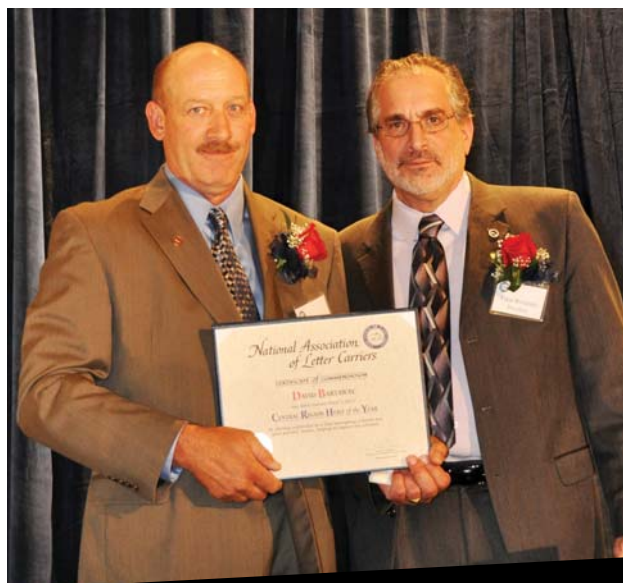
For that feat, the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission awarded him the Carnegie Medal, given to those who risk their lives to an extraordinary degree while trying to save the lives of others.

Bartaway said he is humbled to be selected as an NALC Hero for a second time. "I didn't think this could happen twice," he said, "because lightning doesn't strike twice."

NALC President Fredric Rolando praised the carrier. "Clearly, this is a man who knows how to look out for trouble and isn't afraid to confront it when it comes calling," he said. "David, we are honored to give you this award—again." ☒



David Bartaway's wife, Teresa, (above) was among those on hand to honor the carrier. Bartaway was named Central Region Hero (below) for helping keep the houses on his route safe from thieves.



**CENTRAL REGION HERO**  
**DAVID BARTAWAY** OF W. WAYNE CO., MI BRANCH 2184

# WESTERN REGION HERO

## DUSTIN LAWSON OF SHAWNEE, OK BRANCH 883



Lawson's wife, Ashley (above), joined Dustin at the ceremony (top).

## Carrier stares down armed robbers

**O**n his route in February, Shawnee, OK Branch 883 member Dustin Lawson went into Ralph's Pharmacy in the nearby town of Tecumseh to deliver the mail. As soon as he opened the door to the pharmacy, Lawson sensed that something was seriously wrong. "It was kind of odd because there were a lot more people in the store than usual. Everyone looked nervous," Lawson said. "One of the girls behind the counter was crying."

Lawson didn't know it yet, but two armed men had invaded the store. The pair had been on a drug-fueled crime spree, hitting pharmacies statewide. They had shot one victim, beaten another, and carjacked two vehicles in the nearby town of Konawa. The men had even invaded a church day-care center, where they robbed two women at gunpoint. Police had chased them as they fled Konawa but lost track of them before they reached Tecumseh. The desperate gunmen had entered the pharmacy and immediately begun swallowing narcotics. They then began moving innocent bystanders toward a back room.

As he picked up the pharmacy's outgoing mail, Lawson heard gunshots from a back room. The gunshots, it turned out, came from a pharmacy employee who had opened fire, sending the attackers fleeing. The pharmacy's employees had tried to set off a silent alarm to summon police, but the alarm had failed, making Lawson their only link to help that day.

At the sound of the gunshots, Lawson's instincts and training as a former volunteer firefighter kicked in, and

he calmly went back to his LLV to get his cell phone and call 911. As he waited for the police to arrive, he came face-to-face with one of the armed men leaving the store.

Lawson believed that the sight of the letter carrier on the phone prompted the gunman to flee on foot. Police later caught him and his partner, who had left the store in a van that Lawson saw and described to police.

If the armed men hadn't been interrupted, Lawson said, "it could have been a massacre."

After assisting police, Lawson finished his route.

"It all happened very fast," he recalled. "It's definitely an experience I don't want to go through again. I have a 6-year-old and a wife. Going through something like this opens your eyes and makes you think about how quickly things can go wrong."

When Lawson first learned he would be honored as a hero, he didn't think he deserved it. "I felt like I was doing what anyone would do." After colleagues and friends congratulated him, they convinced Lawson that his actions deserve hero status because some people would have "fled and not looked back."

"Dustin Lawson showed an unbelievable display of courage and dedication to do the right thing," the judges said. "He hears gunshots, and he doesn't run away. He clearly risked his life to save others."

"You have shown astounding courage and we honor you as our Western Region Hero of the Year," President Fredric Rolando told Lawson. ☒





# Sinking runaway car no match for this carrier

**L**aura Garibaldi heard a loud series of noises followed by a woman's screams as she started her route the morning of June 14, 2010.

The Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member approached the house where she heard the commotion. Looking through the open garage door, she saw that her 86-year-old customer, Mr. Riggs, had driven his car completely through his garage and into his backyard pool, and that the man and his daughter were trapped inside the car. The vehicle was precariously tilted forward, partway into the water.

"I put my satchel down and ran," Garibaldi said. As she did so, she yelled, "Hold on! Hold on! I'm going to help you!"

Garibaldi leaned into the pool and opened the door of the partially submerged car to help pull Riggs' daughter out. Since the door was stuck against the side of the pool, she had to help the woman maneuver to work herself loose. A customer who had heard the commotion and seen Garibaldi run over 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, believing the woman needed oxygen. "And the man was bleeding from his

face." 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, a 10-year letter carrier, continued on the route she's had for the past six years, checking back later that afternoon to make sure her customers were all right.

In choosing the carrier for the 2011 Special Carrier Alert award, judges noted that "her situational awareness is impeccable." They also said they were impressed that she didn't hesitate—she sprang into action. "You only have seconds to get someone out if the car were to submerge," they said.

NALC President Fredric Rolando said at the awards ceremony: "I want to take the opportunity to say to Laura what I'm sure the Riggses said to her many times—thank you."

Garibaldi said she would do it again if she had to. "My dad always told me to help others," she said. "I knew she needed help, and no one was around." ✉



Garibaldi checks in on her patrons (above), whose car went crashing through the garage and into the pool. For her quick response in getting the passengers out of the car, NALC awarded Garibaldi with the Special Carrier Alert Award (below).



## SPECIAL CARRIER ALERT

LAURA GARIBALDI OF GARDEN GROVE, CA BRANCH 1100

# BRANCH SERVICE AWARD

## WHEELING, IL BRANCH 4739



Left: President Rolando presents the award to (from r) stewards Stefania Alfano and Mary Deegan, along with Elgin Postmaster Susan Meathe.  
Bottom: Joel Hasken

## Branch members, co-workers give gift to dying boy



**"T**his story was truly a tear-jerker," the judges said of Wheeling, IL Branch 4739 letter carriers and other postal workers in Elgin, IL, who helped a boy get his dying wish. He dreamed of being a letter carrier.

Joel Hasken had always loved the mail. He waited eagerly for his letter carrier, Bruce Beu of Branch 4739, to arrive each day. While other kids played house, Joel played "mailbox." He even tagged along with Beu to the end of the street sometimes.

The second of three children of Faith and Lloyd Hasken of Elgin, Joel had a form of autism that could interfere with his ability to communicate, but it didn't suppress his enthusiasm for life or his desire to greet people like Beu with a friendly wave.

In December 2009, when Joel was 12, his family noticed that he was limping

and strangely weak on one side of his body. A trip to the hospital revealed a brain tumor—one that could not be removed surgically. After several weeks of treatment, it became clear that the growing tumor was not responding. Doctors predicted Joel would live another six to 12 months.

Faced with this devastating news, Joel's mother approached John Serrato, a Branch 4739 letter carrier she knew from the family's church. Could he help Joel achieve his dream of delivering the mail by helping a letter carrier on his route?

Knowing Joel's time was running short, Serrato took the request to steward Stefania Alfano and the branch, who contacted managers. The request went all the way to L'Enfant Plaza in Washington, DC. They got permission for Joel to put some mail in mailboxes and get a tour of the Elgin post office.

But the mission to make Joel's dream come true became more urgent when Joel's cancer grew much faster than expected. In late January, Joel was released from the hospital to spend his last days with his family at home. By then, the tumor had made him partially paralyzed and blind in one eye. Joel was too weak to walk a route or come to the post office.

Letter carriers at Elgin's two postal facilities, along with other postal workers and managers, mobilized. "The intention was to bring joy to this child, but what happened was so much bigger," said Alfano, who attended the hero awards ceremony on behalf of her branch with fellow steward Mary Deegan.

The letter carriers brought Joel his very own letter carrier uniform and hat, and they set up a special mailbox in the





front yard that he could see from his window.

On Friday, Feb. 12, 2010 Elgin Postmaster Susan Meathe, who also attended the hero award ceremony, went to Joel's bedside and officially swore him in as an honorary letter carrier. She brought with her an official proclamation by then-Postmaster General Jack Potter declaring that day "Joel Hasken Day."

Then the letter carriers, joined by local firefighters and police officers, put on the best parade a boy could ask for. Deegan joined other postal workers to drive LLVs past Joel's house. Each truck stopped to deliver letters and cards to Joel's special mailbox. Beu, Serrato, neighbors, family and friends joined Joel's family in the front yard to accept the greetings and to pray for Joel.

Joel passed away that evening.

"We didn't get the chance to have the kind of memories we would have liked with Joel," said Faith Hasken. "That gave us a great one."

The next week, mourners overflowed a church to say goodbye to Joel. The mailbox that letter carriers had placed in front of his home to accept deliveries now stood next to his coffin, and more cards and greetings were delivered. Another parade of postal trucks now followed Joel's body to a cemetery, where Joel Hasken, letter carrier, was buried in his uniform.

"Losing a loved one is never easy, but having to watch and wait helplessly for the inevitable to happen to your child is unimaginable," Alfano said. "The postal employees of Elgin, which included Branch 4739 members, responded to the Hasken family in a way that only first-class people do, and that is with

love and compassion. I accept the 2011 Branch Service Award for all the wonderful members of this branch who selflessly took time out of their day to bring a little joy to a dying child and his family. They truly exemplify the caring and giving nature of all letter carriers."

Making a boy's dream come true and giving comfort to his family came naturally to Branch 4739 letter carriers, since many are active in other charitable and community events. They raise about \$1,000 each year for MDA and have supported a local orphanage with a clothing and coat drive and needy schoolchildren with a school supply collection. They even raised money to help the Haskens with medical expenses after Joel's death.

"Letter carriers should be exceedingly proud of their uniform when they read this extraordinary story," the judges said, "because of a young boy who admired it and the letter carriers who did all they could to make his dream come true."

"This award goes to all of the members of Wheeling, IL Branch 4739, who selflessly gave of themselves to bring a little joy to a child and his family," President Rolando said. "They exemplify the caring and giving nature we hope not just letter carriers, but everyone, will work to foster in this world." ✉



**Top: Joel Hasken's funeral procession included a series of LLVs.**

**Above: Joel's family gathers around his special mailbox.**