Despite the sometimes extraordinary circumstances, most letter carriers take their role as heroes in stride. From being the first on the scene to going above and beyond to make sure all is well in the neighborhoods they serve, these men and women make a difference in the lives of patrons who find themselves in situations where a little extra help is just what is needed. Here are the stories of some of those special letter carriers.

**Observant carrier saves fallen customer**

Seeing a few days’ worth of mail outside 82-year-old customer Edward Hill’s home on Dec. 2, Fall River, MA Branch 51 member Gil Canuel became worried about Hill’s health. The 25-year postal veteran had been on the route for the past 17 years and said that he knew that Hill, a retired city firefighter and Korean War veteran, was an avid newspaper reader and was always happy to talk to him about the latest news. “I noticed that the man had two newspapers sitting there,” he said. “And his car was in the driveway. It just didn’t feel right.”

Canuel knocked on the door, but didn’t get a response, so he went to a neighbor next door, who said, “If the car’s there, he’s going to be home.” They were both concerned, so the neighbor called police.

Responding officers soon arrived and found Hill lying under his kitchen table, where he had been stuck for about two and a half days after falling and breaking his hip. Hill’s son told the *Herald News* that Hill had crawled across the floor in an attempt to reach the kitchen table where his cell phone was, but on the way he suffered a minor heart attack.

“I thank you,” Hill’s son told Canuel during a ceremony that awarded the carrier with an honorary citation. “I think we know what the results could have been.” And because of Canuel’s actions in Fall River, Mayor Will Flanagan is pushing for adoption of the Carrier Alert program, which helps identify where elderly customers live and whether letter carriers should keep an eye on them.

This wasn’t the first time Canuel has helped out in a situation like this. Eight years ago, he called the police when he noticed that an elderly customer on his route had stopped retrieving his mail. Police were able to rescue the man.

Canuel brushed aside praise for himself, but noted during the ceremony: “I know they initiated in Congress the elimination of door-to-door delivery, but this is one of the things that would go missing by doing that,” he said.
Sometimes, carriers are saved by patrons

Carriers aren’t the only heroes in their communities—on occasion, the residents are, too. On July 22, during a heat wave, carrier Mary Denise Ortman was doing her rounds on the first day on her readjusted route. The Hazelwood, MO Branch 5847 member had evidently pulled up in her LLV and subsequently collapsed from heat exhaustion.

Luckily, customer Karen Mull, who was outside watering her flowers, noticed. “I was totally out of it,” Ortman said, noting that Mull took every step possible. “She got water, elevated my legs, called my husband and secured my truck.” She also made sure the carrier got medical attention, and she called Ortman’s supervisor. And, after spending two days in the hospital, Ortman was OK. “She really went above and beyond,” Ortman said of Mull. “She may have saved my life.”
On July 7, Debra Burzycki was starting her deliveries for the day when she noticed her 80-year-old customer Marvel Kononowech lying in his yard after falling and struggling to get up. The Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 member went to the man and helped him to his feet and inside his house before continuing her route. “Thanks be to God for people like her,” Kononowech wrote in a letter to the post office. “You’re very lucky to have her for a hardworking gal.”

While delivering his rounds on Monday, Aug. 1, Jason Snavely saw a pile of mail and newspapers at an elderly customer’s house. “I noticed the mail wasn’t picked up from Saturday,” he said. Knowing this woman’s habits and that this was unusual for this customer, he became concerned and knocked on the door, to no response. He then went next door to the neighbor’s house to see if they had seen the woman, but they hadn’t. So, he called the police to ask them to do a welfare check to see if the woman was OK. Officers had to break in to the house to gain entry, and found that the customer had died. The Wichita, KS Branch 201 member took time to contact the patron’s family and discuss the situation with them. The woman’s family expressed their gratitude to Snavely for his concern for their mother’s welfare. “Jason is a fine representative for the Wichita postal system and deserves whatever recognition you can bestow upon him,” the woman’s son, Roger Marshall, told the post office. But Snavely was modest about the praise. “I don’t think I’m a hero,” he said. “I was just doing my job.”

Noticing an unusual pile-up of mail at an elderly customer’s house worried carrier Davena Howell on Oct. 7. “I just got a weird feeling,” the Alliance, OH Branch 297 member said. “She always picked up her mail.” So, she knocked on the door and rang the bell—no response—and then peered in through the window but didn’t see anything. Howell then went to a neighbor to ask if he had seen her. He told the carrier that she was a woman who kept to herself, but he would usually see her come and go in her car and hadn’t seen her in quite a while. Knowing that the woman lived alone, Howell called the local postmaster, who came to the scene. He also looked through the window. “He said he saw a hand outstretched,” Howell said, and he called 911. Responders broke into the house and took the woman, who had been on the floor four or five days, to the hospital. Doctors said the woman would have died if she had been there for another day. Howell laughed off the idea of being called a hero. “We’re kind of like the eyes of the city,” she said. “I’m just doing my job.”

When carrier David Duff Jr. came across an elderly patron on his hands and knees one day in May, he knew he needed to check on him. He went over and asked if he was OK, and the man responded that he could not get up. So, Duff helped the man stand up and then called 911. The Tacoma, WA Branch 130 member stayed with the man until the arrival of paramedics, who said the man had broken his leg. Duff was commended for his thoughtful actions.

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When Jim Davis saw a small pile of mail outside 82-year-old customer Fred Kline’s house on a Friday, he was concerned. He knocked on the door, but when no one answered and Kline’s dog didn’t bark as it usually would if it were inside, Davis didn’t panic. But, when he saw an even larger pile of mail when he returned the next day, Saturday, Oct. 1, the Saginaw, MI Branch 74 member took action. “I’ve known this guy pretty much my whole life,” Davis said; growing up, Kline was one of Davis’ Scoutmasters, and they also attended the same church. “He had a routine, and I knew his routine pretty good.” He knocked again. This time, the dog barked, but there was no response from Kline. The carrier went around to the back of the house and knocked again, and still got no response, though he could see a light on. “At that point, I called 911, because I had a really bad feeling that something happened and wasn’t right,” Davis said. Responding officers looked through a window and spotted Kline lying on the floor. They then broke out a window in a door to gain entry to reach the man, who had been lying there for three days. Kline was alert but shaking, and said he had fallen in his kitchen and broken his hip after he suffered a mild heart attack. The man also was a diabetic and was in dire condition since he hadn’t had any insulin, food or water in days. Kline told The Saginaw News, “I didn’t even know that I fell. I was there alone, just me and the dog. I didn’t wake up until the next morning.” He had yelled at some point, but wasn’t heard, so he dragged himself around, trying to reach a phone, but was unsuccessful. Davis was just glad he could be there to help. “If we weren’t delivering mail on Saturday, I don’t think he would have made it ‘til Monday,” he said. Kline’s daughter, Kim Grierson, credited Davis with saving her father’s life. “I think the world of the mailman,” she told the News. “I told him he was a godsend. He saved my dad’s life.” Despite being in a similar situation at least a dozen times on his route before, Davis downplayed his role. “I don’t feel in my own mind that I am [a hero],” the 27-year postal veteran said. “To me, it was just doing what I do.”