

Giving more for those we serve

Throughout the year, the men and women of the National Association of letter carriers deliver millions of letters, cards and packages. As the holiday season approaches, though, many deliveries involve special tokens of love and friendship.

This is the time when we are reminded that letter carriers do so much more than deliver the mail with a smile and a wave. So many go out of their way to bring cheer to the people they serve. They give their own time or money or caring,

without expecting anything in return, whenever they see the need. Active or retired, on the job or on their own time, many letter carriers give more to those they serve.

In this special season, *The Postal Record* brings you a few stories about selfless letter carriers who make the extra effort to bring joy to others. Whether they are feeding needy families, making Christmas toys, or saving the life of a stranger, these are examples of letter carriers across the country who make people's lives a little brighter.

Helping for the holidays

Members of Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 help ring the bell for the Salvation Army.



Those in need in Franklin County, PA, have a powerful force watching out for them: Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 members.

These carriers are no strangers to selfless actions. Over the past decade, not only have branch members rung the bell for the Salvation Army, hosted MDA golf tournaments and participated in the March of Dimes, but carriers from the Chambersburg and Harrisburg post offices also scope out families in dire situations every year to help provide Thanksgiving dinner for their families.

"We find out who's in need, who's been laid off, whose family member has passed away," said Darrel Vance, a Chambersburg station coordinator. "Last year it was 27 families that we helped out."

Now in its sixth year, the program began when a carrier from the Chambersburg station reported that someone on her route told her that she

had to go to a shelter for her Thanksgiving meal. So, the carriers started brainstorming ways to help both those on their routes and others in the community.

They start by getting wind of those in need. "Carriers pretty much keep their eyes and ears open," Vance said.

The group finalizes the list of families in late September or early October and then starts collecting money at the office. From there, a few carrier volunteers go to the grocery store to purchase gift cards. The amount placed on each card depends on the number of families the volunteers select each year. After Thanksgiving, the Branch 500 carriers gather at the station and report on how it went that year.

"It's a group effort," Vance said of the process. "They are very happy and enthusiastic to do it."

When carriers have the gift cards in hand, they deliver them to the recipients a few days before Thanksgiving so the families can buy what they like for their holiday dinners.

Vance said that the card recipients "are most appreciative. They've got tears in their eyes and are very thankful." ✉

The gift of blood

Branches don't always wait until the holidays to give back in their communities. Many, like Flushing, NY Branch 294, spread their charity throughout the year.

Twice a year for the past 12 years, Branch 294 members gather at the local Knights of Columbus hall to help with organizing blood drives. Every March and August, carriers come together to deliver cards to promote the event for the Long Island Blood Service and provide catered food for the event. Many donate blood themselves.

"We try to stay involved and do community events," said Branch 294 President Tony Paolillo. He said the carriers thought it would be nice to put on blood drives to help those in need. "We see the shortage. One donor could save four lives," he said. "We usually have about 40 members who turn out to donate blood."

Paolillo said the carriers try to stay positive. To help do that, the branch also holds a "Heroes Night" in conjunction with the blood drive to recognize their branch members' heroic and helpful actions.

The Flushing carriers look forward to each event. "We have carriers from Day 1



NALC Region 15 National Business Agent Larry Cirelli gives blood for Branch 294.

who make it their business to be here to donate blood," Paolillo said. "Religiously, they show up."

Branches or individual members wishing to give blood should contact Red Cross at redcrossblood.org/donating-blood. ✉

The toymaker

Like most carriers, Al Meloccaro doesn't stop until his job is done. Meloccaro, age 91, a member of Omaha, NE Branch 5 for 63 years, hung up his satchel in the 1970s, but he still does his part to make sure boys and girls get a special delivery each holiday season. Meloccaro is again busy in his workshop this year making wooden toys to donate to Toys for Tots, as he has done every year for half a century.

He started making toys, first in his basement and then in a workshop he built with his brother, after he signed up with the Post Office in 1946. "I would come home from work and change clothes, and my wife would have some pie waiting for me and then I'd work on toys."

Meloccaro says he has made several thousand toys over the years. After building his workshop, he filled it with power tools so he could build a dozen or so sets of toys, with four or five toys per set, each year in time for Christmas. He builds cars and trucks, sometimes modeled after real ones. His latest model is a tot-sized Ford F-150 truck. The children receive the toys unpainted, so they can decorate them how they wish.

After serving as an airman in World War II, Meloccaro joined the Postal Service in Omaha, where he was born. He started as a clerk, but he wanted to work outside, so he applied for a letter carrier job. At 5 feet, 5 inches, his supe-

riors were skeptical of his ability to handle the physical toll of the job, but he proved them wrong.

Things were different back then. Meloccaro's starting salary was 75 cents an hour. Supervisors would sometimes line up carriers for uniform inspections in the morning to assure they looked their best.

He walked only two routes in his career. When he retired in the late 1970s, his salary was \$17,000 a year.

"Those were the best years of my life, working in the Postal Service," he said. "I loved the Postal Service and I still do." Meloccaro is proud that he never got a "hickey" on his record—a complaint for poor service.

He worked on toys again this fall despite a diagnosis of cancer, and his refusal of treatment for it will likely make this Christmas season his last.

"I'm 91," he said. "My wife's gone, my children are all grown up. I don't have anybody to worry about." Meloccaro's wife Esther died two decades ago, and life alone has been hard, he said.

Though his own children are grown, Meloccaro has worked hard to assure that a new generation of children experience the joy of receiving special toys on Christmas morning.

"If we could all be just a little bit like Al," said Branch 5 Director of Retirees Dave Looman, "wouldn't it be a wonderful world?" ✉



Al Meloccaro

A friend's final ride

Like the typical letter carrier, John Dick is there when you need him.

The Royal Oak, MI carrier, who serves as NALC Health Benefit Plan and Mutual Benefit Association rep for Branch 3126, is an outgoing man who makes friends easily, including patrons on his route. One customer he bonded with, Gregg Glowacz, learned just how faithful Dick is to his friends.

The two became buddies when Dick, a motorcycling enthusiast, noticed Glowacz's bike while delivering his mail. But when Glowacz fell to the floor one day in 2007 with a severe headache, their relationship took a new turn.

Glowacz had suffered an aneurysm—a burst blood vessel—and after two strokes that followed, Glowacz was left with little motor or speech function.

For seven months, while Glowacz slowly regained his health, Dick visited him in the hospital frequently. He delivered cards and letters from well-wishers right to Glowacz's bed.

For Dick, it's all in a day's work as a letter carrier.

"Every letter carrier has someone they've done something special for," he said. He's proud of what NALC and other unions do for the community, whether through support for charities such as the Muscular Dystrophy Association or the NALC Food Drive or just lending a hand to customers in need. He recalls an elderly patron he discovered on the floor of her home with a broken hip. "I knew you'd come," she told him.

Dick finds many opportunities to lend a helping hand. The Christmas after Glowacz fell ill, he went to a party in Glowacz's neighborhood disguised as Santa Claus. He played the part well—he knew every neighbor's name and address, after all.

Glowacz made it back home, but he was permanently disabled. Though Glowacz couldn't speak, he was able to communicate using glasses with a laser that allowed him to point to words and letters. In March, Dick and Glowacz organized a motorcycle poker run to help Glowacz with his expenses. They weren't about to let Glowacz miss the fun either—he would ride in a sidecar.

Before the ride, though, Glowacz ended up back in the hospital with pneumonia and missed the poker run. His heart weakening, Glowacz chose to stop life support.

"He told his wife, 'Get me home; get me off of the feeding tube; I've made my decision,'" Dick said.

But before Glowacz died, Dick was determined to give his friend the motorcycle ride he had been promised.

"Let's do that ride," they said, "but we've got to do it quickly."

Dick and his friends carried Glowacz to the sidecar. "We took him on what he knew was to be his last ride," Dick said. All the neighbors came to the house and celebrated Glowacz's life. "He's the only guy I know who has attended his own wake," Dick said.

As Glowacz had requested, his funeral was a motorcycle affair. He had a full cycle escort, with his wife Vicki carrying his ashes in a specially made leather-and-chrome urn. Dick and other friends and family wore leather jackets at the ceremony.

With the help of his family and community, Glowacz made the decision to end his life on his terms and even chose the details of his own funeral. "He had friends to make it happen," Dick said. "His wife, his friends—and his mailman." ☒



Photo courtesy of Patch.com

Branch 3126's John Dick with his friend and patron Gregg Glowacz.