

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. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

Heroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or firefighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the form of concerned letter carriers.

Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they are often the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

'There's nothing greater than helping someone'

When San Diego Branch 70 member **Leonard Kemp** saw an accumulation of mail at customer Fred Wilkens' house on Feb. 24, he was concerned. "He was a loner—he knew a few neighbors and me," Kemp said. "I have a lot of customers who are in their 80s and 90s, and sometimes I'm the only person they see all day.

"I had a hunch," Kemp said. So, he went to a few neighbors' houses to check with them—but got no response. "I said I'd give it until tomorrow, a Saturday," the 25-year

postal veteran said. But on Saturday, the mail still wasn't picked up.

Kemp went next door to Em and Georgia Cummins' house to see if they had heard from their neighbor. "I have a funny feeling," Kemp told them. The Cumminses said they hadn't checked on him in a few days, and they called Wilkens. When they got no response, they knocked on his door and then walked around the man's house to determine whether he was home. They noticed that Wilkens' car was in the garage but there was no sign of him.

They got a roofing ladder and gained access to the house through a second-story bathroom window, which seemed to be slightly ajar. When they got inside, they found Wilkens lying on the floor near the kitchen, alive but in bad shape because he had been there for three days. They immediately called 911 and Wilkens was soon rushed to the hospital.

The Cumminses wrote a letter to the local postmaster to commend Kemp's actions. "Leonard's attentiveness and thoughtfulness helped us avoid a terrible tragedy here," they said.

That's not the first time Kemp has helped an elderly customer on his route. About a decade before, the carrier saved a 94-year-old customer's life when he hadn't picked up his mail—and later Kemp attended the man's 100th birthday party. "There's nothing greater than helping someone," Kemp said. "The two best days in my postal career were when I got to help these men." ✉

WHEN CARING STILL MATTERS Postman's heroics draw adoration from neighbors

MANASSA KEY SPY | Photo by Eric Potts



Crown Point postal worker Leonard Kemp, who has helped save the lives of two of his patrons during his 24-year postal career, shares his down-to-earth skills and congeniality with a young boy along the route. Residents said they adore his good-natured manner and his watchfulness over their homes in their absence.

to pneumonia in a convalescent home. "Kemp, 54, has been at his job 24 years, starting his work for the post office on Feb. 28, 1988. He's had his current route in Crown Point for 21 years and said he hopes to work until he's 62. The devoted letter carrier, who certainly appears fit from walking four to five miles a day, five days a week. Recent knee surgery and a bad back haven't slowed him down.

An article in the *Beach & Bay Press* describes San Diego Branch 70 member Leonard Kemp's heroics on his route.

AS ROGER BESTE WAS DELIVERING TO an elderly customer's house last January, he thought he heard his name. "I could hear her call for me," he said. Beste, a South Macomb, MI Branch 4374 member, spoke to the woman through the door and found out she had fallen in the bathroom, which was near the front door. Since he didn't have a cell phone on him, Beste quickly went to a neighbor's house to call 911. He then returned to the woman's house to wait until paramedics could arrive to gain entry to the house and bring the patron to the hospital to treat her broken hip. Beste brushed off any praise. "I was just happy that she's OK," the 24-year postal veteran said. "To me, it's just part of the job."

ON APRIL 5, MT. CLEMENS, MI BRANCH 654 member **Corry Smith** had just talked to an elderly customer and was continuing on his route. As the woman went to collect her mail from the cluster box, "she twisted her ankle and fell backwards," Smith said. "I saw her going down in my rear-view mirror." The woman had recently had surgery and still wasn't very strong. A neighbor came by and tried to help her up from the ground but was unable to pick her up. Smith jumped out of his LLV and hurried over to her. His initial thought was to not move her until the ambulance came, but "she wanted to get up, so we helped her up," Smith said. They carried the patron into her house and got a blanket to keep her warm. After he helped stop some minor bleeding, Smith called the woman's son and then waited for help to arrive. Smith said his actions were "nothing thrilling," noting that he doesn't consider himself a hero. "It's just my responsibility," the 19-year postal veteran said. "I used to work in a senior citizen facility, so I know how it is to care for them."

WHILE DELIVERING ONE DAY LAST MARCH, Pensacola, FL Branch 321 member **Charlotte Alexander** heard sounds coming from a customer's house. "I thought she was hollering at her dogs," Alexander said. When she heard the woman again and the barking at the same time, Alexander glanced around and determined they were coming from



Pensacola, FL
Branch 321 member
Charlotte Alexander

Martha Vallia, who is in her 80s. Vallia had gone from her kitchen to her garage to get something when she tripped and fell and couldn't get back up. She laid flat on her back, calling out in hope someone on her cul-de-sac would hear her. Alexander quickly came to Vallia's aid. Alexander knew the woman well. "She's a sweet, sweet lady," she said of Vallia. The carrier asked where the woman's walker was, and when it wasn't nearby, she stood behind her customer and put her arms under Vallia's to pull her up so she could get back inside. Alexander said she was glad she was there for her customer, but doesn't think she's a hero. "It's just the way I was raised," she said. "God put me in a place to be able to help." Alexander's customer certainly appreciates the 23-year postal veteran's actions. "I want you to know you have an exceptional employee, Charlotte Alexander," Vallia wrote to the local postmaster. "Not too many people would have tried to help me. I just wanted you to know that she went beyond her duties to help me."

ON SATURDAY, FEB. 11, **MICHAEL Bergin** was on his route and walked past a church. "I just happened to look over and Mrs. Archer was laying there," the Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 member said. He ran over to Julia Archer, his 82-year-old customer, and found that she had slipped while cutting through the area. "The parking lot was a solid sheet of ice," Bergin said. He assessed Archer's situation and asked if she needed an ambulance, but Archer said she just wanted to go home. The carrier helped pull Archer up and "I made sure she had her senses," Bergin said. He then carefully walked her back to her home. She complained about arm pain, and Bergin suspected she had a broken arm, which was later confirmed by a doctor. The 32-year postal veteran

made sure Archer was OK and had notified her daughter before continuing on his route. "Because of Mike's caring and thoughtfulness, I was able to get home and make the necessary calls to get medical attention," Archer wrote in a letter to the post office. "Mike is my hero and should be commended for his caring attention on this day to a senior citizen in desperate need of help." Bergin said he was just glad that he was there and he had seen her. "If you see a little old lady laying there, you help her up," he said. "I'm sure anyone would have done the same thing."

WHEN BILLINGS, MT BRANCH 815 member **Kathy Schanno** walked up to the door of an elderly customer on a Saturday last winter and saw mail from the previous day, she immediately knew something was wrong. This customer never missed a day of mail. Schanno found no neighbors home, so she called her supervisor for a wellness check. After work, Schanno went to check on the woman and found police and an ambulance at the home. The patron had apparently engaged the child-lock button and got trapped in the back seat of her car in the garage. It was very hot in the garage, and she was disoriented and dehydrated. Schanno said "it was great" to have been able to help her customer out.

ON APRIL 19, BUFFALO-WESTERN NY Branch 3 member **Barbara Zuffoletto** noticed an elderly woman wandering the street and saw that she seemed disoriented. The woman knew her name, but she didn't know how to get home or how long she had been out, so Zuffoletto called police. "I just stayed with her and helped her out," the 25-year postal veteran said. "You could tell she was really scared, so I kept talking to her about her grandchildren and just trying to keep her happy." Police showed up soon after and were able to get the woman home to her grateful husband. "She had gone a mile, mile and a half with her walker," Zuffoletto said. The carrier didn't think her actions were a big deal, though. "I was just a person who helped someone else," she said. "It could have been anybody's mother." ☒