

# 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.

**In this modern age, with greed and violence staples in the news, examples of courage and compassion are more important than ever. Across this nation, letter carriers are often the first to discover people in need due to accidents, attacks or fires. The following reports are offered to honor the actions of NALC members whose quick thinking and sharp reactions have saved lives.**

## Brave carrier helps elderly customer escape house blaze

**Richard Talley** was delivering his route on Dec. 21 and because a package of medicine wouldn't fit into elderly customer Lois Hudspeth's mailbox, he decided to ring the doorbell. The Dallas Branch 132 member knew Hudspeth well and had a special doorbell ring that signaled to her that it was him delivering the mail.

Hudspeth had been in the shower but came to the door when she heard the bell. When the door

opened, Talley could clearly see smoke coming from the back of the house and he asked her if she had a fire going. She said no, so he proceeded to check around the back of the home when he heard Hudspeth scream, "Help!"

Talley ran back inside and found a fire on the stove where the woman had been baking fudge. He grabbed a fire extinguisher to put out the flames on the stove but realized that the fire had spread upstairs. So, Talley led Hudspeth out of the house and called 911. The carrier waited with her until firefighters arrived.

Hudspeth's home was destroyed by the fire, but she was grateful to Talley for his actions. "I cried. I thought I lost everything," the customer told the local CBS affiliate. "He saved my life, he really did." Her grandson, Jeff Copeland also credits the 26-year postal veteran with saving Hudspeth. "Without a doubt in my mind, my grandmother wouldn't be here today," he said.

Talley brushed off the praise. "I don't know if I saved her life or not. I know God put me right here at this time," he said.

Dallas Branch 132 member Richard Talley recently spoke with the local CBS affiliate about how he helped to save his customer Lois Hudspeth from her burning home. Pictured (l to r) are Talley, the aftermath of the residence, and the carrier with Hudspeth.



## 'The angel on my route'

On Dec. 15, carrier **Pauline Ceglarz** knocked at a house to deliver a package. When she heard a knock from inside in response, she worried about her customer. She knocked again and heard another knock. She feared it might be the son who lived there, who was handicapped.

"Are you OK?" the Detroit Branch 1 member called out. "No," was the response. Ceglarz tried the door, and it was open, so she entered. She saw her customer, Pat Halon. "I found her laying across the floor by the door," Ceglarz said. "Right away, I assumed she had a stroke because of the way her face was twisted."

Assessing the woman's condition, the carrier asked, "Are you diabetic?" Halon answered, "Yes, but I think I am just dehydrated. Just get me to the couch." Ceglarz replied, "I can't leave you here." The carrier's mother is diabetic, so she assisted the woman as she took a reading. Since it was very high, she worried and called 911, comforting Halon until paramedics arrived.

Though Halon had recently checked her blood sugar and her levels had been fine, she hadn't been feeling well that afternoon. She grabbed her cell phone and unlocked the door "just in case," she later wrote in a letter to Ceglarz—then she suffered a stroke and fell asleep. "I honestly don't know if I would be writing this thank-you note today if it wasn't for your insight to acknowledge a simple knock-back on my door," Halon wrote to Ceglarz. "My family, friends and especially myself thank you for taking the time, for going the extra mile and helping me in my time of need. From now on, I will refer to you as 'the angel on my route.'"

But Ceglarz said she doesn't consider herself a hero. "If her sister had never sent that package, I would have never been at the door," she said. "I thank God I was there."

**While driving his vehicle on Oct. 30,** **Arturo Cervera** noticed a police officer holding onto a man who was hanging from the highway overpass. The El Paso, TX Branch 505 member reacted quickly, stopping his vehicle and ran to see if he could assist the officer, who was exhausted. Another passerby also stopped and, as a team, the three helped to pull the man, who was dangling precariously over the edge, to safety. The officer said that if it weren't for Cervera and the other good Samaritan, he probably wouldn't have been able to hold on much longer. But that's not the only time the 27-year postal veteran has been in the right place at the right time—23 years earlier, he also was credited with helping to save a man's life. While on his route, he heard that a water utilities worker had fallen into a five-foot-deep trench. Without a second thought, Cervera jumped into the hole with the other workers to help pull out the man, who was starting to drown in the water-filled hole, and assisted in aiding him until paramedics arrived.

**Santa Clara, CA Branch 1427 member Christina Mariani** was very concerned when she saw that there was a pile-up of two days' worth of mail outside a customer's house on Oct. 15. She knocked on the door, but to no avail, and she was unable to see inside the home. So, Mariani ran next door to check with a neighbor, but she wasn't able to reach her, either. The carrier left a note on the neighbor's door requesting that she check on the resident. The neighbor eventually saw the note and immediately went to check on the resident, calling 911 when she was unable to reach her. Responding officers found the woman on her bathroom floor, where she had fallen two days prior, unable to get up. Police credited Mariani for saving the woman's life, saying that she might have died if she had lain there for another 12 hours.

**On June 22, Longmont, CO post office** custodian Mike Farnham asked clerk Sue Kachnic to call 911 when he saw that a customer had collapsed on the sidewalk outside the post office. Once Kachnic got off the phone after reporting the incident, she looked up and saw carrier **Cindy Pasquale** in front of her. Knowing that

Pasquale had CPR skills, the clerk asked her to come outside to check on the customer—who by now had stopped breathing and had no pulse. The Longmont Branch 1105 member immediately asked everyone to stand back, and started doing chest compressions on the man. A nearby customer saw what was going on and started giving assisted breathing. Because of Pasquale's actions, the man began to regain consciousness about a minute later as emergency responders arrived to take him to the hospital.

**Cleveland, OH Branch 40 member Phil Kiriazis** was on his way home from work on Aug. 28 when he stopped at a traffic light. Five children were crossing the street on skateboards when the opposite light turned green. The fifth child was straggling, and Kiriazis watched in horror as the driver of a large vehicle advanced forward to make a left turn and hit the child. Seeing that the driver was unaware of what happened, the carrier stopped his vehicle in the road and quickly ran to the driver to tell him he had struck a child, who was stuck under the wheels of his truck. Kiriazis called 911 and stayed on the scene for rescue crews. The bleeding child was taken to the hospital to treat his broken bones.

**Returning to his route after lunch last** fall, carrier **Andres Aguirre** saw something horrific: a man lying facedown in a pool of blood. The San Antonio Branch 421 member immediately called 911, and he recruited a nearby person to try to get a response from the man. When Aguirre saw the man's fingers move, he knew he was still alive. He comforted the man until EMTs arrived to take over treating the 2-inch gash on the man's forehead.

**While on his route on July 5, carrier** **Joe Leger** came upon a resident who had fallen outside of his home. The Massachusetts North Shore Branch 33 member called 911 and stayed with the man to comfort him until emergency responders arrived. "We are fortunate to have such a caring person delivering mail in our community," Topsfield Fire Chief Ronald Giovannacci wrote to the local postmaster.



Davenport, IA  
Branch 506  
member  
Michael  
Bitterman

**A PILE OF MAIL** clued in carrier **Michael Bitterman** that something was wrong at his elderly customer Bettie Mantzke's house on Nov. 16. "Her box had all her mail in it from four days ago," the Davenport, IA Branch 506 member said. Since she usually gets her mail every day, Bitterman knew something

was up. "On the fourth day, I happened to hear her," he said. When Bitterman approached Mantzke's mailbox, he could hear screaming from inside the home. He knocked, and she told him she had fallen and couldn't get up. "She kept telling me to break down the door," he said—so he did. When he got inside, he found her on the floor with a broken hip and called 911. "She's a real firecracker," the eight-year postal veteran said. "She seemed exhausted and a bit dehydrated, but she was talkative." The carrier waited with Mantzke, got her water and comforted her before EMTs arrived to take the woman to the hospital, where the carrier later visited his customer to check on her. Bitterman said he was just in the right place at the right time. "I feel lucky in my job," he said. "I've never saved anyone's life like that. But I think she's the hero—she's the one who held on for four days."

**MISTY BREAKFIELD** WAS DELIVERING mail on Aug. 31 when she glanced over at a house on her route and, through an open doorway, saw her elderly customer Louise Dover making strange motions. "I just heard her choking," Breakfield said. So, the Kings Mountain, NC Branch 3145 member entered the apartment, positioned herself behind Dover, and performed the Heimlich maneuver. The blockage was cleared, Dover started breathing normally again, and the carrier called Dover's daughter to make her aware of the situation. Once Breakfield saw that her customer was all right, she continued on her route.

The seven-year carrier doesn't think she is a hero, though. "I knew God had put me there for that reason," she said. "I feel like it's something anyone would do."

**MARK MERFELD** WAS DRIVING DOWN the street on Saturday, Feb. 4, when he saw an elderly woman lying on the ground underneath her bird feeder. The Park Rapids, MN Branch 3270 member stopped to speak with the woman, who otherwise appeared to be OK. "She said she had waved to people in the road, but they just waved back," the 10-year postal veteran said. After a few attempts, Merfeld was able to get the woman to her feet. "I helped her up and back into the house," Merfeld said. Her husband, who was inside but had the television volume turned up too loud to hear his wife, thanked Merfeld for his care.

**ON NOV. 29, WILLIAM BACHINSKI** was going about his route when he heard someone yell, "Help!" The Rutland, VT Branch 495 member quickly figured it was coming from inside the house he was delivering to, so he looked inside. Bachinski saw that his elderly patron, Ms. Way-Skelton, was lying on the floor. The doors were locked, but from the outside, the carrier instructed her to stay still and kept her calm as he called 911 and contacted a relative of Way-Skelton. He then waited outside the house until help arrived. Emergency crews arrived within a few minutes and were able to get to the woman through a window to treat her injuries.

**ON APRIL 2, STATEN ISLAND, NY** Branch 99 member **Dwayne Davis** was going about his route. He got to the house of 84-year-old customer Tom Mannino, and started up the man's steps. Mannino, a retired New York Branch 36 member, reached down to grab the mail, but his foot got stuck on the landing and he lost his balance. "I went head over heels down seven steps," Mannino wrote in a statement. But Davis was alert and caught Mannino, saving the customer from hitting his head on the concrete or worse. "When you do something good, it's nice to be recognized," Mannino wrote. "So thank you, Dwayne Davis."

## Carrier helps save life of boy hit by drunk driver

Virginia Beach, VA Branch 2819 member **Celia Ruiz** had just put her daughter securely on a school bus one morning in January when she heard a loud noise. She saw in horror that her neighbor's children had been thrown airborne after being struck by a drunk driver. "When I turned around, all I saw was people falling from the sky," she said.

Ruiz, who had recently received training as a first responder, jumped into action. "My first thought was, 'These are kids, and kids I know. My daughter stays with them after school,'" she said. "I had to help."

She quickly assessed the situation. The father was moving and conscious and the two young girls were moving their legs, but the 5-year-old boy was oddly still. His grandmother was on the scene and beat Ruiz to him. The woman began trying to move him. Ruiz tried to calm the woman and explain to her that the boy needed to stay still.

Ruiz called 911 and stayed on the line with the operator as she checked the boy's pulse—very weak—and then began CPR. The amount of blood on the child's face presented a challenge, so at the operator's prompting, Ruiz removed the child's backpack so the boy was lying on a hard, flat surface. "This time, there was no pulse," she said. "I gave two rescue breaths and began chest compressions. It felt like a long time, but it was probably two to three minutes."

As she completed these actions, Ruiz kept everyone calm and still to prevent further injury and assured the rest of the family that help was on the way. Though her arms began to tire, she pressed on with the CPR until emergency responders arrived to continue to try to revive him.

Ruiz, a 12-year postal veteran, was just happy she was able to be there that day. "It hits really close to home. I feel like he was my own child," she said. "I couldn't not help."

The carrier also said that she was glad she had had the proper training. "Now I know I can do it," she said. "And I'm recruiting for more first responders at my station. The reason I took the training was because I have little kids at home."

# NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

**Kenosha, WI Branch 574 member Tom Leber** smelled a strong odor coming from a home on his route on April 1, 2011. “I was thinking it was a vacant house,” he said. But he wanted to make sure, so he immediately went to the door, without getting a response. Leber called authorities to ask them to check on the situation. Two years ago, a house on his route had blown up, and he wanted to make sure it didn’t happen again. When the police and fire department arrived, they discovered a dangerous amount of carbon dioxide in the area at the house next door. “They ended up red-tagging the furnace,” Leber said, and the gas company turned the gas off right away as a precaution. The woman who lived there had recently been complaining about headaches. The following weekend, the man who lived at the house came up to Leber and said, “Tom, I don’t think you know, but I think you saved our lives.” But Leber took his actions in stride. “I don’t think it was that big of a thing,” the 28-year postal veteran said. “I was only doing what anyone else would do.”

**A Houston neighborhood had been** experiencing a surge in copper wire thefts. A resident on **Gabriel Guerrero’s**

route saw suspects in the area on Aug. 26 and told the carrier that 911 had been called, but that if police didn’t arrive soon, they would get away. The Houston Branch 283 member had the contact number for the specific officer who patrolled the neighborhood, so he immediately called him. The officer arrived on the scene a few minutes later and quickly apprehended the suspects. Guerrero was commended by the mayor for his “valiant efforts” to keep the community safe.

**When Lubbock, TX Branch 2589** member **Wade Davis** noticed a person entering the backyard of a vacant home on his route on Aug. 26, he grew suspicious. As Davis gathered surveillance, he noted the person’s license plate number before the suspect lifted a lawn mower over the fence, put it in the vehicle, and drove away. Wade immediately called neighbors and police, who were quickly able to arrest the thief because of the carrier’s vigilance.

**Dwain Smith heard something shocking** on Dec. 16 as he delivered mail to a cluster box. When he looked up, he saw a man beating a pregnant woman on the balcony of her apartment. The Tulsa, OK

Branch 1358 member immediately called 911, and police arrived on the scene right away to answer the call. Officers left the house with the man in handcuffs. They also were carrying metal poles the man had been using to beat and threaten her. On their way out, they commended the carrier for helping to potentially save the lives of the woman and her unborn child.

**Early on Jan. 12, carrier Jacob Brown** was on his way to his route, driving on a road made slippery and treacherous by an ice storm the night before. As the Ballwin, MO Branch 5050 member drove up a steep incline, the car in front of him started to slide backward. Brown was able to avoid a collision, but he ended up in a ditch, along with three other vehicles ahead of him. With effort, the carrier managed to get his vehicle back on the road, but before leaving the scene, he checked to make sure everyone around him was OK and helped them to get their vehicles back on the road. Once he got back in his vehicle, he used a lesser-traveled back road, leading one woman who didn’t know the area and who otherwise would have had to wait for the road to become unblocked to make it to work.

## In the right place at the right time—twice

**Bruce Foster** was on his route on March 23 when he came upon a horrific sight. “A car had T-boned another car,” the Syracuse, NY Branch 134 member said.

Without hesitating, he secured his LLV and ran toward the broadside collision that had occurred in the middle of an intersection. Getting closer, he could see a car had been struck on the driver’s side and a woman inside was injured. He called 911.

Using skills he had gained as a volunteer firefighter and EMT for the local fire department, Foster quickly assessed the condition of the woman, who also had suffered a head injury and who said she had pain on her left side. “She was bleeding pretty profusely,” Foster said. Emergency crews arrived shortly and asked Foster to assist them with spinal stabilization and extrication of the woman.

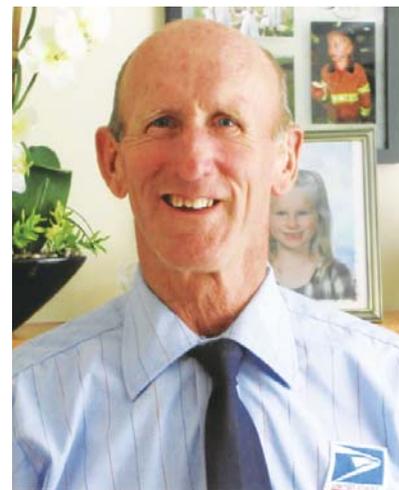
The 26-year postal veteran took his role in stride. “I was glad I was able to

stabilize the victim,” he said.

The previous month, on Feb. 6, after finishing collecting mail from a box in an industrial park, Foster noticed an elderly man on a motorized wheelchair in a yard about 20 feet off the road. The letter carrier thought it was an unusual place for the man to be, so he went to him to see if he was OK.

Foster found that the man was only able to communicate using sounds, not words. “He was pointing to the controls on his motorized wheelchair,” he said. It became apparent that the man was stuck in the yard with a dead battery. “I noticed that he seemed to have paralysis in his right arm,” Foster said. “It took some effort to communicate with the man, but I was able to get him to show me some ID.” The carrier realized that the man lived about two miles away and had decided to go on a joyride on the warm winter afternoon. Foster called 911 to request a rescue squad.

“It’s fortunate to have noticed the man when I did,” the carrier told his branch. “It was getting dark out. Soon he would have gone unnoticed due to the poor visibility in the park.” Since overnight temperatures had dropped to the 20s, “if he remained outside, his body would have suffered from hypothermia,” Foster said, noting that the man also would not have been able to effectively call for help. “I was thankful I was there,” he said.



## Preventing a fiery catastrophe

On Feb. 13, Holland, MI Branch 601 member **Noah Barnes** was delivering mail and saw a customer and her two children going from an SUV to their apartment on the second floor.

As he was looping around on the other side of the street on his route, he saw a plume of smoke rising from the driveway where the woman's vehicle was parked—only five feet from the door of the home. "There was this huge 10- to 15-foot flame coming from the car," Barnes told *The Holland Sentinel*.

The carrier called 911 and asked if he could alert the family. "[The dispatcher] said if I thought it was safe, to go ahead and get them out," he said. So, Barnes banged on the door. "They weren't coming to the door, and I was yelling," he said. The mother was in the shower, and the children didn't want to open the

door to a stranger.

The woman finally opened the door, and Barnes ushered the woman and her 3-year-old daughter out of the house as a neighbor arrived. He then ran up the stairs to get the woman's 5-year-old son. "As soon as we got them all out, the fire department was rounding the corner and they got the fire out pretty quick," Barnes told the *Sentinel*.

That day, Barnes, an Air Force veteran, had covered a few extra streets on his route, as he did every Monday. "Normally, I do those at the end of my route, but for some reason, I did them first today," he told the paper. "If I hadn't, I wouldn't have seen the fire. Everything happens for a reason."

But Barnes doesn't think he's a hero. "I just did what I would want someone else to do if my family was in that situation," he said.



Holland, MI Branch 601 member **Noah Barnes** recently was recognized for helping to save a family on his route when their building was on fire. Pictured are **Captain Chris Tinney** of the Holland Fire Department (l) and Barnes.

## FIRE & RESCUE

ON DEC. 12, **KIM HAWKINSON** WAS delivering mail on the route she's had for 12 years when she looked up and saw flames at elderly customer **Mary Lou Smith's** house. "The curtains were on fire," the Omaha, NE Branch 5 member told local NBC affiliate *WOWT-TV*. "Both sets were on fire and I set down the mail and I went into the house and I started yelling, 'Mary Lou, Mary Lou, where are you?'" **Hawkinson** finally caught sight of **Smith** in the basement and began pulling her outside. Once she got her outside the house, the carrier sat **Smith** down and had her call 911 as they waited for firefighters while trying to avoid the heavy smoke pouring from the house. "I've never seen anything like it," **Hawkinson** told *WOWT-TV*. "I don't think I've ever. The windows started busting out." Fire officials arrived soon after and put out the fire, discovering that **Smith** had been cooking when some ingredients caught fire. She tried to douse it in the sink, but

the fire then spread to the walls of the kitchen. Though there was damage to the structure and contents of the residence, **Smith** was unhurt. **Hawkinson** told *WOWT-TV* that she doesn't consider herself a hero, just someone who cares about people. "I think something like instincts took over to get her out," she said. "She's a friend. I've known her for 12 years and I hope anyone would do it for me."

**GULF COAST MERGED, MS BRANCH** 1374 member **Maurice Gary** was on his route on Oct. 18 when he smelled smoke coming from a house. The homeowner was at the funeral of a friend and had left her son in charge of cooking a post-event lunch, though he wound up watching *TV* with his girlfriend and forgot about the food. **Gary** went to the house and asked, "Is something burning?" The son immediately got up and took care of the smoking stove. Once **Gary** saw that everything was OK, he returned to his route. "You may have saved my kitchen from catching on fire. God bless you," homeowner **Laurie Allen** wrote in a letter thanking the carrier.

WHILE IN AN APARTMENT BUILDING ON her route last year, **Lea Grendziak** grew concerned when she discovered smoke in a hallway. The Green Bay, WI

Branch 619 member took action quickly, knocking on the doors of all the apartments to alert the tenants to evacuate the building. **Grendziak** was commended for being such a caring member of the community and for potentially saving many lives.

**AMY BARTELS** BECAME ALARMED WHEN she saw and smelled smoke as she approached a customer's home on her route last September. The Warren, MN Branch 1959 member shouted the patron's name, but received no answer. She opened the door and could see that the fire was coming from the stove. She continued to call the customer and was able to extinguish the fire before continuing her search of the one-level house. **Bartels** eventually found the woman in the garage and proceeded to fill her in on the situation. The patron had completely forgotten that she had left food cooking on the stove. The woman contacted her family, and she thanked **Bartels** for her quick actions in helping to preserve the house and prevent injuries, as well as for staying with her until family members arrived on the scene.

ON NOV. 4, **JOE MILLER** WAS DELIVERING mail to an apartment complex for elderly and disabled residents when he saw smoke emanating from one of the units. ►

**S**eeing several days' mail stacked in customer Stan Tuhoski's mailbox last September, Fort Collins, CO Branch 849 member **Ronald Sundsted** thought something might be wrong. So, he went next door to the neighbors' home, the Tuckers, to alert them. The husband gained access to Tuhoski's house, found the man semi-conscious in bed, and called 911. The husband was told by responding paramedics that Sundsted's action probably had saved Tuhoski's life.

**O**n a Friday, Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 member **Jean Koontz** saw accumulated mail in a mailbox, which wasn't unusual for the customer. But when she returned the next day, on Saturday, Oct. 15, she noticed that the pile was still there. "I thought something might be up," she said. "I went across to a neighbor who I knew cut her grass." When they went to check on the woman, they found her slumped over after apparently suffering a stroke. Koontz and the neighbor

called 911 and the woman's niece while they aided the woman until an ambulance arrived. Koontz played down her role, though. "I'm not a hero," the 18-year postal veteran said. "I just try to look out for my customers."

**W**ichita, KS Branch 201 member **Tracy Hamilton** was in the neighborhood he served on Saturday, Aug. 6, when he saw a woman fall down a flight of stairs on the side of her home, face-first. "I put my LLV in park and went running," he said. He rushed over to her and saw that she was unconscious. The husband also witnessed the incident and rushed out. The husband kept trying to turn his wife over, but Hamilton advised him to let her stay still to prevent further injury. She was in a precarious position, half on the stairs and half off. Since the couple lived next door to a hospital, Hamilton instructed the husband to stay with her and not move her as he went to get help. The seven-year carrier returned a

few minutes later with a nurse from the hospital, who helped to aid the woman until an ambulance arrived soon after. But Hamilton doesn't think he's a hero. "I think I did what anyone else would have," he said.

**W**hile delivering on Saturday, Feb. 4, carrier **Travis Mustard** heard a noise coming from inside a customer's home. He couldn't quite make out the sound, but he eventually realized it was a cry for help. The Richlands, VA Branch 5457 member walked around the house, trying to find an open door but was unsuccessful. Knowing that the patron's son lived across the street, Mustard hurried over to his house. They both went back to the patron's house and entered, finding that the woman had fallen and broken her hip. She had been on the floor for several hours and blood had started pooling to her side. Doctors said that if the woman had not been found when she was, her injury may have been fatal.

The Winona, MS Branch 2995 carrier rushed to the door to knock. The wheelchair-bound resident answered the door, and Miller could see that the whole apartment was filled with smoke—though the resident was oblivious to the problem. The carrier grabbed the woman's wheelchair and quickly ushered her outside to safety before he returned to the smoke-filled unit. Miller saw a smoking pot on the stove and removed it from the apartment before opening the windows to air out the smoke. He also called the apartment manager to stay with the woman until it was safe for her to re-enter her apartment.

**GREENVILLE, MS BRANCH 516 MEMBER Ivory Walker Jr.** was on his route one day last November when he went back to his LLV. "I was changing a tray when I smelled something," he told the *Delta Democrat Times*. He thought it may have been coming from a chimney, but the odor didn't smell like wood smoke. He went around the house looking for a chimney, but all he saw was smoke. Walker called 911. "I started pounding on the windows, and I was joined by another man, a neighbor, and we pounded on the windows and doors," Walker told the *Times*. "I was afraid that someone was trapped inside." The 26-year postal veteran went to the doorknob, felt

that it wasn't too hot, and opened the door to look around. He was greeted by a huge plume of smoke. Firefighters arrived on the scene and quickly determined that no one was home. The smoke had been caused by a pot left on the stove, and the homeowner was visiting a spouse in the hospital. Walker credits his years in the Marines for his instinct to help—he served in Iraq and Kuwait. "You can train anybody for any job, but you can't train courage," he told the newspaper. "I would have done this for anyone."



photo by Bill Johnson/Delta Democrat Times

**GARY SZALEWSKI WAS DELIVERING MAIL** on March 1 when he saw an elderly customer and her granddaughter run out of a house where a fire had started. The Milwaukee Branch 2 member called 911 but, realizing that his call wasn't getting through, he jumped in his van and drove to a nearby fire house to sound the alarm. Fire trucks were immediately dispatched and firefighters brought the blaze under control within a few minutes. Gary was commended by North Shore Fire Department Captain David Myer, who wrote to him, "Your quick thinking and action...helped to mitigate the situation in a timely fashion."

**WHILE DELIVERING HER ROUTE ON AUG. 25, Susanne Hayes** noticed something out of the corner of her eye: 10-foot-high flames coming from a customer's backyard. She quickly parked her LLV and sprinted to the house, where she called 911. Then, she jumped over the fence and grabbed the nearby garden hose, which she used to put out the grass fire that was just feet from the house and had already consumed the wooden fence, telephone pole and a tree trunk. Firefighters arrived shortly. No one was home at the time, and the Wichita, KS Branch 201 member was credited with saving the customer's home and two dogs that were inside. ✉

ON A SATURDAY IN FEBRUARY, CARRIER **Carol Mesford** found a newspaper still in the box of a 90-year-old customer. “When I saw the newspaper in his mailbox, I knew something was wrong,” she said. The Tacoma, WA Branch 130 member called the family of the man, who was a relative of another letter carrier. The relatives found him on the floor inside his house, where he had been lying for seven hours after falling. He was dehydrated. Mesford, a 32-year postal veteran, said that this sort of thing happens all the time with letter carriers. “It’s not ‘heroic,’” she said. “It’s just what letter carriers do and is an essential part of our connection to America.” Mesford has written letters to members of Congress describing the importance of this connection between letter carriers and the people they serve. “If we allow Congress to take mailboxes off houses, bad things can happen to people,” she said.

ON APRIL 19, **GEORGE PULEO** SAW A buildup of mail at an elderly customer’s house. “Newspapers were on the ground and his car was in the driveway,” the Brick Town, NJ Branch 5420 member said. “I had a gut feeling something was wrong.” He knocked on windows and the door, and called 911 when he didn’t get a response from the man. Upon arrival, police officers entered the house through a window and found the

customer lying on the floor of the kitchen, where he had been for two days. Police praised Puleo’s actions in helping the man get the medical attention he needed. The 27-year postal veteran brushed off any superlatives. “I’m not a hero,” Puleo said. “That’s our job, to keep an eye on our customers.”

WHILE ON THE ROUTE IN LATE JANUARY that he’s had for 10 years, carrier **Robert Broad** noticed an abundance of mail outside the house of his elderly customers, the Niensens. “When I got there Monday, I noticed they hadn’t picked up their mail since Saturday. That was unusual,” the Binghamton, NY Branch 333 member told *The Press & Sun-Bulletin*. “When I got there Tuesday, there was a two-day buildup, and that didn’t seem right.” Broad went to neighbors’ doors to knock, but no one he spoke to was familiar with the Niensens. “I don’t think they had a lot of contact,” Broad said. The carrier then called his branch president, who advised him to call his supervisor and 911. Broad did so, and then continued on his route as he kept an eye out for responding emergency personnel. When the crew arrived, they discovered Mr. Nielsen lying on the living room floor, unable to move, possibly due to a broken hip. The man told them his wife had suffered a heart attack in an upstairs

bedroom, and he had gone down to the first floor to get help and had fallen. Though the woman died, Nielsen was able to receive urgent medical attention. Broad, an 18-year postal veteran, told the newspaper he was happy he took the time to check on the house.

WHILE ON HIS ROUTE ON JAN. 31, **JOE Adamczyk** walked down the long driveway of a 90-year-old customer to deliver his mail. “I just heard a guttural noise,” he said. He found the man lying on ice, flat on his back with only a shirt on. The Waukesha, WI Branch 397 member quickly went to the man. “I got behind him and got a firm balance and used the leverage of my legs and lower torso and got him upright,” Adamczyk said. The carrier got the man his cane, which was about three to four feet away. “I left-right-left-right walked him to my postal vehicle,” he said, where he stabilized him before slowly walking him back to his house. “All the vitals were there, and I made sure he got out of his wet clothes,” Adamczyk said. He called 911, covered the man with winter coats to help stop him from shaking and waited until police arrived. The 33-year postal veteran was just glad he was there at the right time. “What a day,” he said. “It felt good to do something out of the ordinary, to help someone.” ✉

## Keeping an eye on the patrons

**Alan Williams** tries to look out for the patrons he serves. “Generally, I have a route that has a lot of elderly on it, and I keep an eye out,” he said.

For example, the Fairbanks, AK Branch 4491 member would always try to position the mail in the mail slot at the arctic entry at the Halls’ house so that they wouldn’t have to reach so low to get it. But on Dec. 6, as Mrs. Hall went to get her morning newspaper from the entry, she lost her balance and fell in between the house and the arctic entry.

“They would always leave the arctic entry open,” Williams said. But when he came by to deliver

the mail, “I found a resistance to the door,” he said. He realized that Hall was lying on the other side. “I had to maneuver around her so I wouldn’t injure her,” he said. Mr. Hall was asleep and not wearing his hearing aid, so he couldn’t hear his wife’s calls for help. Hall had been there for three hours trying to alert her husband or anyone who walked by, but to no avail.

When Williams got inside, he woke up Mr. Hall and filled him in, and then his training from serving a decade in the Army kicked in. He assessed the situation and asked the woman if she was injured. She replied that her leg hurt—it wasn’t bleeding, but it was painful to the

touch. Williams called 911, and was advised not to move her. The carrier waited with the family until ambulance services arrived, and he explained to them how Hall was positioned by the door. EMTs took the woman to the hospital to treat her broken hip.

“She said to me, ‘I knew that it was going to be you that found me,’” the 18-year postal veteran said.

Williams was just glad he had been in the right place at the right time. “I just watch for things that pop up,” he said. “I love the job that I do. It’s a blessing to be able to help others and to watch out for them.”



# NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

**H**earing screams of “No! No!” jolted carrier **Mike Hollman** to attention as he was preparing for his park-and-loop route. He hurried toward the cries and also heard the sound of angry barking dogs, but the situation was obscured from view. He jumped up to see over a secured fence and saw that three pit bulls were attacking a woman lying on the ground near her wheelchair. Hollman used his dog spray through the fence but was unsuccessful in shooing away the dogs, and so he scaled to the top of the fence as he dialed 911. The Phoenix, AZ Branch 576 member stayed on the line while he simultaneously tried to distract the animals until police arrived. Responding officers fought off the dogs, and even had to shoot one, to save the woman’s life. When Hollman saw that the situation was being handled, he left to continue his route.

**W**hen **Richard Barrett** was substituting on another carrier’s route on May 18, he smelled natural gas as he delivered a package to customer Muriel Maat’s door. He quickly investigated and then knocked on the door, informing the woman that there seemed to be a serious gas leak at the corner of her garage where the gas pipe comes in from the street. The Toms River, NJ Branch 2128 member told the surprised customer to evacuate her home and wait by her mailbox while he called 911. He stayed with her until emergency vehicles arrived shortly thereafter to repair the leak. When Maat went to thank Barrett, she discovered he had left to cover the rest of the route. She contacted her regular carrier to find out the name of her mystery hero. “I am eternally grateful to him for averting what might have been a serious catastrophe,” Maat wrote to the local postmaster about Barrett. “I might not be here if it wasn’t for his vigilance.”

**C**arrier **Camica Tiffith** was on her route last winter when she noticed an elderly woman walking up and down the street without a coat on in below-30-degree weather. Tiffith stopped the woman to ask if she was all right. She responded that she was trying to go to a street a couple of miles away. Tiffith asked the woman where she lived, and the woman told her that she lives in a senior home a few blocks away. The carrier called fellow Chicago Branch 11 member **Frank Camacho**, because he delivered mail to the home. Camacho quickly went to the residence and told the management office about the woman. Managers came to pick her up and drove her home.

**O**n Saturday, Dec. 31, **Andrew Petik** was delivering mail at a local community center for the handicapped, WATCH, when he



Phoenix, AZ Branch 576 member Mike Hollman

smelled propane. Petik, a Murray, KY Branch 2156 member, immediately went to the police station to file a report. The gas company followed up right away, and the fire marshal reported that the propane leak was fed by two 500-gallon tanks. By the time Petik filed the report, the gymnasium of the center was full of gas and an explosion would have killed many people and destroyed an entire city block—including residences, the library, a sheriff’s station and a car dealership. But once Petik knew everything was under control, he continued on his route, not telling anyone about it. Petik’s heroics were discovered only when T-6 Jim Daquilla was delivering Petik’s route and the center director told him about it. “WATCH is closed on Saturday,” Daquilla told the branch. “No one would have had any reason to go back to the mail receptacle where Andrew detected the smell of propane on Saturday except for the mailman. If we didn’t have Saturday delivery then Andrew wouldn’t have been back there. The heat would have kicked on, if not during the day, then surely that night. Murray would have suffered her worst disaster in history.”

**W**hile making his daily mail delivery to a local elementary school on Feb. 25, carrier **H. Keith Ray** found a flurry of police activity. The St. Louis, MO Branch 343 member soon found out that an autistic boy had been reported missing from the school playground. Police and school officials had mobilized officers and others to search for the child, and Ray volunteered to assist. The

weather forecast called for very cold temperatures, which added further urgency to the search. After searching for the boy around a local pond, Ray turned his attention to a nearby chapel that appeared to be closed. Upon finding entry to the chapel, the carrier found the young boy curled up in an effort to stay warm. After making sure the boy was safe, Ray alerted the police, bringing the search to a close. Officers commended Ray’s actions, saying if not for him, the boy may have not been found for hours and could have succumb to the cold or other potential harm. Ray, a 30-year postal veteran, was recognized by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at its recent National Missing Children’s Day ceremony.

**S**t. Louis, MO Branch 343 member **Darryl Vaughn Sr.** was going about his route on Dec. 5 when he smelled the pungent odor of natural gas as he neared a home. He knocked on the door to inform the residents, but he got no response. So, he contacted neighbors, who in turn reported their concern to the gas company. The company immediately investigated and quickly discovered a gas leak at the house. Vaughn was commended by the gas company, which said that without his concern, the house would have blown up.

**O**n Nov. 30-31, **Larry Warren** noticed a strong natural gas odor while walking his route. The Columbia, MO Branch 763 member saw a gas company truck in the neighborhood and approached the worker to let him know the address of the residence Warren suspected was having a problem. The employee went to the house and woke up the occupants—Charlotte Hughes and her five grandchildren—telling them about Warren’s concern. He discovered that the furnace was old and clogged, leading it to leak a dangerously high level of carbon monoxide into the house, which could have killed the residents. Hughes called the post office to commend Warren for his actions to help save the house and their lives.

**R**eniece Palmer was on his route on April 5 when he noticed a child about 2 years old walking along a heavily traveled street, shoeless. The Staten Island, NY Branch 99 member moved the child out of harm’s way and called his supervisor, who called police. The supervisor joined Palmer on the street about the same time that police officers arrived. Soon, a very upset man came running over. Palmer was credited with helping to potentially save the young child from harm. ✉

## Flooding gas no match for alert carrier



While delivering to an apartment building on his route Nov. 12, carrier **Miguel Munoz** smelled an abundance of gas. Knowing something was wrong, he started running around to apartments to alert residents.

"By the time I had gotten into the hallway, I could easily tell that the entire hallway (leading up to two other units) was flooded with gas," resident Justin Byrne wrote to the Postal Service. "A single spark from static, from a flame...or a small spark

from some other source could have ignited those fumes...and a lot of us would have lost a lot."

Munoz gave instructions to Byrne to turn off the gas, but since he didn't have the proper tools, Byrne called the landlord, who rushed over. Munoz continued to warn residents, finding that a child was home in one apartment. The Tri-Valley, CA Branch 2902 member tried to warn the boy of the impending danger in six different languages, but the child didn't speak any of them.

Byrne saw the exchange and took the child out of the building as Munoz tapped into his instincts and military training, hurrying upstairs where he knew more chil-

dren and where at least one elderly resident lived. "At the time, I didn't worry about the danger," Munoz told his branch. Although no one else was home at the time, he made the rounds to be sure. It was later learned that an elderly resident who lived upstairs had turned on her gas stove without realizing the flame was out and had left the building.

"I thank God that there are still people out there that are willing to go out of their way to help others," Byrne wrote in his letter. "I am thankful that there are still men and women like Mike Munoz who understand that when someone requires help and could be within a life-threatening situation...they step up to the plate." ✉

## HELP on the Way

During a snowstorm on Nov. 11, Minneapolis Branch 9 member **Terry Anderson** was delivering his route when he heard gunshots. He immediately looked in the direction of the noise and saw several men walking toward him and then pass by. He looked behind them and saw a man lying in the street. Anderson ran over to the man and found him conscious but confused and bleeding. The carrier moved the man out of the street and asked a neighbor to call 911.

Thinking that the man had been shot in the neck, Anderson used his scarf as a bandage to apply pressure to the wound. He also placed his satchel under the man's head and used his jacket to keep the man warm until EMTs arrived. When responding officers arrived, Anderson gave a statement and helped them find the gun's shell casings.

**Southeast Pennsylvania** Merged Branch 725 member **Joe Frumento** was delivering mail the morning of Dec. 15 when he noticed that a particular customer's lights were not on yet. He knew the woman's routine—the fact that she is ill, unable to walk, and is visited daily

by a health care agency. Frumento knew how to gain access to the home in case of an emergency, so he opened the door and called out to the woman. She answered and told him that she needed assistance, saying the health care agency hadn't show up. Frumento picked the woman up from her hospital bed and put her in her wheelchair, moving her to the kitchen. There, he fixed her a cup of coffee so she could take her medication. Frumento called the agency and found out it had forgotten to schedule someone that morning to check on the woman, so he made sure that someone would be coming out soon. In the meantime, the carrier made the woman another cup of coffee and made sure she was comfortable and safe before he headed back out on his route. The customer soon called the post office in tears to say how Frumento had treated her wonderfully, showing her respect and kindness and going above and beyond his duties.

**Lynnden, WA Branch 4132 member Nigel Sulley** was delivering his route on a rainy Jan. 23 when he heard a patron calling for help. He investigated, headed toward the sound, and found customer Bernice Vossbeck on the ground behind her home. She had fallen, broken her leg and was unable to get up. Knowing she could not be seen from the street, she had yelled for help as she laid on the ground and became soaked from the rain. When Sulley reached Vossbeck, he covered her with his coat as he called for an ambulance and then waited with his patron until the emergency crew arrived. "Thanks for the good Samaritans working in our town," Vossbeck wrote in a letter to the editor of the *Lynnden Tribune*. "I will be forever grateful to my mail carrier, Nigel Sulley. He saved my life."

When **Carrie Peck** noticed last winter that she had not seen one of her customers in two days, she began to worry. The woman had

a routine of walking the neighborhood every day, and the Jackson, MI Branch 232 member usually passed her on her rounds. The carrier went to the back of the woman's house and then heard the customer yell. Peck saw that the woman had fallen down the steps and was lying on the basement floor, and learned that she had been there for the past two days. The carrier called 911 and waited with her patron until emergency services arrived.

**Melissa Gonzales** was driving her LLV on Jan. 21 when she came upon a woman lying in the street. The woman had slipped while stepping off the curb and landed on the pavement, suffering several facial fractures and some bleeding from her skull. The Midland, TX Branch 3792 member called 911 and stayed with the woman until help arrived.

On Jan. 27, a carrier had been sorting parcels when a clerk noticed he was suddenly on the floor gasping for air. A nearby supervisor discovered the carrier had stopped breathing and dialed 911. He quickly looked around and asked if anyone knew CPR. Bradenton, FL Branch 1753 member **Raymond Cruz** and another carrier stepped forward. Cruz began chest compressions while the other man assisted, helping to revive their co-worker before EMS units arrived. Cruz is credited with helping to save the carrier's life.

While on his route on Jan. 30, Wenatchee, WA Branch 1350 member **Sewell "J.R." Morgan** saw a customer collapse on the street. He ran over to the person and directed a passerby to dial 911. Meanwhile, Morgan began CPR and continued until medical assistance arrived. Wenatchee Fire Department Chief praised Morgan, saying, "This was a life-saving act of kindness that was critical to the successful outcome for this patient." ✉



Minneapolis Branch 9 member Terry Anderson