

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.

In this modern age, with greed and violence staples in the news, examples of courage and compassion are more important than ever. Across the 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.

Carrier saves residents, animals from approaching wildfire

Noticing smoke while delivering mail last fall, **Steve Omatsu** jumped into action. He

thought from its location that the smoke must be coming from brush burning behind the houses on his route. When he saw flames as he neared the scene, he quickly called 911. The Honolulu Branch 860 member was right: A wildfire had begun moving from the edge of a nearby golf course toward residents' homes.

He went to check on his 89-year-old customer, Eloise Monsarrat, who lives alone. "I found her on the stairs," Omatsu told the USPS' *Pacific Isles Update*. "At the time, the flames were right up against her fence line." So, he picked her up and carried her across the street to get her out of harm's way. "It was scary, very scary," Monsarrat said. "When Steve saw I was in trouble, he came and took me away. Seeing him made me feel less frightened."

But the carrier didn't stop there—before returning to his LLV to finish his rounds, he assisted another flustered resident who was trying to evacuate her menagerie of animals.

When Omatsu returned later in the day to check on the situation, he was praised by his customers. But he doesn't consider himself a hero. "I wasn't thinking, just reacting. It looked like the houses could easily catch fire, so I wanted to make sure everybody was safe," Omatsu told the newsletter. "I talk to these residents every day. They're like friends to me. If your friends were in trouble, you'd help them too. I'm just glad I was there to help. I'm no hero." ☒

Steve Omatsu, a Honolulu Branch 860 member, visited with patron Eloise Monsarrat, whom he saved from a wildfire. Together, they surveyed the charred aftermath just beyond her backyard fence.



AS HE HEADED TO WORK ON THE morning of Jan. 31, **Kevin DeMouth** saw a plume of smoke emanating from an apartment complex that was about five blocks away. “I could see the smoke billowing from the housing area, and I said, ‘That’s too much smoke to be normal,’” DeMouth said. When the Easton, PA Branch 389 member pulled up to the building, he saw flames coming out of the front door and climbing up the building. He also noticed that no one was standing outside, so he jumped from his vehicle and hurried to the building. “I ran around pounding on the doors and windows,” he said, alerting people of the fire and urging them to evacuate to the parking lot. “I lost track of time; my heart was pounding,” DeMouth told *The Express-Times*. Firefighters arrived a few minutes later and were able to bring the blaze under control. The building sustained significant damage, but no one was hurt in the fire. The 27-year carrier was heralded for his role in this incident, though he said, “it feels weird being called a hero.”

BILLOWING SMOKE COMING FROM THE direction of a house on his route alerted Tompkinsville, KY Branch 5883 member **Ronnie Stinson** as he delivered on May 3. He ran to the house and banged on the door to alert the elderly customer who lived there, Jim Proffitt. “He said he thought he smelled smoke, but didn’t see anything,” said Stinson, who has had this route all 33 years he has been a carrier. The customer also mentioned that the electricity had just gone out. Stinson suggested he notify authorities, so Proffitt called 911, and firefighters arrived shortly and found that smoke was emanating from the attic due to a short-circuiting wire. Because of Stinson’s early warning, Proffitt’s home suffered only minor damage and there were no injuries. “They said in a few more minutes, the whole house would have been blazing,” the carrier said. The customer stopped Stinson on his route soon after to thank him for his quick actions. Stinson doesn’t consider himself a hero, though. He says he was just at the right place at the right time. “I didn’t rescue him or drag him out,” he said. “I just found it in time.”



Raleigh, NC Branch 459 member Jimmy Seberry

RALEIGH, NC BRANCH 459 MEMBER Jimmy Seberry was delivering his route on June 16 when he saw something unusual at a house. “I noticed a lot of smoke coming from the air-conditioning unit,” he said. “It didn’t seem normal.” Then, he started smelling the wires burning. Noticing that he was the only one out and about, the carrier reached for his phone and immediately contacted the fire department, which arrived a few minutes later. Seberry stood outside and waited until they got there and directed them to the fire. Firefighters were able to extinguish the flames before the blaze consumed the house. “I just looked at it as being a person observing,” Seberry said. “I was glad I was able to contact the authorities.” That wasn’t the first time Seberry has gone above and beyond the call of duty. The carrier, who recently retired after nearly 30 years of service, saw smoke pouring out from all parts of a house a year earlier. He ran to the door of the elderly customer and was knocking, about to kick it in, when she came outside, because his banging had awoken her. Of both instances, Seberry said, “It made me feel good about being a mailman.”

WHILE DELIVERING MAIL THROUGH A slot in the door of a customer’s house on April 4, carrier **Henry Snyder** saw

smoke billowing out. The Northern Virginia Branch 3520 member immediately located a neighbor and asked them to call 911. Firefighters arrived on the scene shortly thereafter to put out the fire. “The firemen told us that Postman Snyder had made the difference between a destroyed kitchen and our house burning to the ground,” the residents wrote to the post office. “We are very grateful to Henry Snyder, who not only delivers our mail, but also is part of our neighborhood.”

LUBBOCK, TX BRANCH 2589 MEMBER Roy Estrada noticed smoke coming from the fence between two houses on his route on May 15. One house was unoccupied, so he rushed to the other house and knocked on the door. The resident, A.O. Ferguson, answered and handed the carrier a water hose as he called 911 and grabbed another hose from the back yard. Flames had already started to reach the eaves of Ferguson’s home by the time Estrada noticed the blaze. The two men were able to control the fire until firefighters arrived. College students had left a fire pit burning nearby, which had caused the grass to catch fire and spread. Ferguson thanked Estrada for helping to save both homes.

MINNEAPOLIS BRANCH 9 MEMBER JOHN Elofson was on his route on Nov. 14 when he noticed a girl walking slowly around a house and then leaving. Soon after, “I looked up and I saw flames,” he said. A small pile of newspapers was burning on the front porch, so Elofson hurried over. “I was trying to kick it and put it out,” he said. At the same time, he called 911. The noise he created alerted the homeowner, who came outside with a garden hose and put out the fire. The homeowner thanked the carrier for his quick response in helping to quell the fire. When authorities arrived, the carrier tried his best to help identify the suspect. The carrier doesn’t consider himself a hero, though. “I reacted the same way anyone else would have,” he said. ☒