

# 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.

**H**eroism, 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.

## Carrier saves the day for victim of runaway car

**Mike Sylvester** was heading up a street at the start of his route on Saturday, Feb. 4 when he saw a runaway vehicle headed straight toward him. The vehicle was careening out of control down the sidewalk at high speed, knocking over traffic signs and telephone poles in its path before it ran into a house about a half block ahead of him.

"[The car] sent a large cloud of debris into the

air, as well as chunks of concrete, which showered down on the intersection to which I was pulling up," Sylvester said. The vehicle kept going until it finally came to a complete stop against a telephone pole mere feet from where the Duluth, MN Branch 114 member was sitting in his vehicle.

Sylvester secured his LLV, grabbed his blue-tooth and phone and sprinted to the vehicle. Another bystander also saw what had happened, and as the two approached the vehicle, they noticed that the car's fuel tank was punctured and rapidly leaking gas, and that smoke had begun billowing from under the hood. To make matters worse, the car also had ruptured a natural gas meter and gas line at the house.

Sylvester approached the vehicle and could see that the driver was an elderly woman. "I honestly thought that it was entirely possible that she wouldn't be alive," he said. He was able to speak to her through the broken driver's-side window. People who now surrounded them began yelling, "It's going to blow!" and telling them to vacate the area, fearing that the car would soon explode.

Duluth, MN Branch 114 member Mike Sylvester recently helped to save a woman whose car ran into a house and a telephone pole, rupturing two different gas lines.

Right: The crash scene. Far right: Sylvester with a customer.



### AS ROCHESTER, NY BRANCH 210

member **Donna Haight** made her rounds on Oct. 21, she checked on her 92-year-old customer. "We go into this woman's house every day, because she's elderly and lives by herself," the carrier said. Haight didn't see the woman in her usual chair, so she called out to her and asked if she was OK. The woman cried out for help, so Haight searched the home and found the patron in the laundry room. The woman had fallen, suffered a head wound and was bleeding. The customer said, "I just need help getting up," but Haight called 911. "I propped her up so she was leaning against the washer," the carrier said. The woman also asked if Haight could call her son, so she left the room, looked up the number, and then notified the son to let him know what was going on. When Haight came back, the woman was lying on the floor again. So, the carrier placed a blanket over the woman to keep her warm and comforted her until the ambulance arrived. Haight denied any serious heroics, saying she was just helping out. "I treat people how I want to be treated," she said. "I don't look at it as being a hero; I just look at it as doing my job."

The carrier got on the phone with a 911 operator and filled him in on the situation as he took action. "We opened the door, and as the other guy worked to unjam the seat belt, I had to use my body to bend the door outward so we could get the victim out," Sylvester said. Gasoline continued to leak and the natural gas smell became more and more pungent, but the two continued to try to get the woman out. Sylvester asked if she was hurt, and she responded that she didn't think so. He asked if she could move, and she said, "Yes." "We then each put an arm under her shoulder and carried her out of danger as I continued to relay information to the dispatcher," the carrier said.

Sylvester asked the woman if he could notify anyone, and he subsequently called her husband to fill him in. The woman said she suspected that her brakes failed, and she had been trying to stop her car by pulling it off the road.

Once responders arrived, Sylvester gave a statement and told them the woman's information before continuing on with his route. Officials also got ready to evacuate several blocks because of the potential for gas-line explosion.

The eight-year postal veteran didn't claim any heroics, saying that he just reacted. "If it were my mom in the vehicle, I would have wanted someone to help," he said. "The miracle of everything is that no one got hurt."



Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Donna Haight** recently recounted her story of aiding her elderly customer for local NBC affiliate WGRZ.

### A SHOUT FOR HELP ALARMED OAK

Brook, IL Branch 825 member **Wayne Waltz** as he was making his rounds on Oct. 4. "I was familiar with the woman," he said. It was his customer, 89-year-old Ms. Herrington. Waltz quickly went to the house and entered, finding the woman lying on the floor after falling. She had been lying there for about two hours and had broken her hip and severely injured her knee, making it impossible for her to move. Waltz called 911 and also called to alert Herrington's daughter, then comforted Herrington until an ambulance arrived. "I was just doing my job," the 26-year postal veteran said. "I was fortunate enough to be at the right place at the right time."

### TRAVERSE CITY, MI BRANCH 618

member **Richard Brown** was on his route approaching a house on Nov. 4 when he thought he heard a woman's voice. "I happened to hear someone yelling up by the house," he said. It was coming from an elderly woman nearby who had fallen on her cement driveway an hour earlier while using a leaf-blower. He rushed over to her and tried to help her up, but she had broken her hip during the fall. The 32-year postal veteran called 911 and stayed with the woman to comfort her until assistance arrived. Brown said it was just the right thing to do. "It wasn't that big of a deal," he said. "Anyone would have done it."

### MINNEAPOLIS BRANCH 9 MEMBER NICK TIEMANN

was delivering to the home of an elderly customer on June 13 when he heard a banging noise coming from inside the home. He entered and found that the woman was having trouble breathing. She had been hooked up to an oxygen tank but was in obvious distress, and she was making noise by banging her cane against the door in hopes of attracting attention. Tiemann called an ambulance and waited with her until EMTs arrived to assist.



# Eye on the ELDERLY

## ON JAN. 20, CAPE ATLANTIC, NJ

Branch 903 member **Mary Beth Gaskill** noticed that one of her regular customers, an elderly man, had an accumulation of mail in his box. "I had been off the day before," she said. "But every day, by hand, he would collect his mail from me." She knocked on the door, but received no response. So, she went to a neighbor's house nearby to ask them if they had seen the man, but they hadn't. Worried, Gaskill called the local police to report her concern.

They arrived soon after, broke into the house and found the customer. "His head was pinned between his night stand and his bed," Gaskill said. He had been lying there for two days. Paramedics said the man would not have survived had it not been for Gaskill's concern. The six-year carrier said she was just being observant. "I just care about my customers and I look out for them," she said. "My story is the face of many mailmen across the country, and although I do not consider myself a hero, it is part of what we all do, and I am proud to work amongst such amazing people."

## SEEING A HUGE STACK OF MAIL IN

94-year-old customer Marjorie Hart's mailbox on Sept. 22, **Matt Simon** knew something wasn't right. "A lot of days, she'd be standing at the door, waiting for her mail," the St. Paul, MN Branch 28 member said. "She was very colorful and had a lot of personality. I got a kick out of her." Hart gets a lot of mail each day, Simon said, so it was kind of strange that mail was still there from the previous day. So, the carrier knocked on the door and heard a faint response: "Come in," Hart said. Simon entered through the unlocked door, and he saw Hart in her chair, grimacing and seeming to be in a lot of pain. The elderly woman said to Simon, "I think I need to go to the hospital." He called the police and talked to the woman as they waited, trying to distract Hart from her pain. Hart's son, Gary, explained to the *Northfield News* the extent of his mother's ailments. "Her doctor said that if she wouldn't have responded and sat there one more day, she most likely would have died of dehydration and other complications," he said. "She's a stubborn German woman and she doesn't like to



**Mary Beth Gaskill** of Cape Atlantic, NJ Branch 903 wrote a letter to Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-2), saying, "We are more than just mailmen." While in Washington, DC, she met with LoBiondo, who thanked her for her heroics in saving her patron.

ask for help. This time it was almost fatal." Gary went on to call Simon a hero. "He's helped Mom before, but this time was different," he told the *News*. "He saved my mom's life and I will always be grateful." Simon, however, said it was another day on the job. "I just tried to watch out for somebody," the 18-year postal veteran said. "That's what Americans do. I don't consider myself a hero or anything like that. I just enjoy people, and because I knew Marjorie, I was able to help."

**BENSON LEE HAD JUST RETURNED TO** his route after his vacation one day last fall when he noticed that his elderly customer, LuDell Lindemann, had not picked up her mail for several days. He knew this was unusual for the woman. He went to the house next door to ask if they had seen her—they hadn't. The Portland, OR Branch 82 member and the neighbors knocked on the woman's door, and they heard a faint cry for help in reply. A window on the house was open slightly, and the group used it to gain entry. They found Lindemann on

the floor, where she said she had fallen several days earlier, and called 911. Lee comforted the dehydrated woman until paramedics arrived to take her to the hospital. Neighbor Bonnie Dahlman told a local TV news station, "That mailman is a hero—he saved her life." But Lee was modest about his actions.

"Well, I don't know if I'm a hero," he said. "I think the neighbors did a good job. People need to look out for their fellow senior citizens. Glad I did my part, as far as that's concerned."

## THERE'S AN ELDERLY CUSTOMER ON

Charleston, WV Branch 531 member **Diana Jenkins'** route who she talked to every day. "I love this woman like she's my grandmother," Jenkins said. "I've been delivering mail to her for 11 years." Jenkins would go up and knock on the door each day to let her customer know that the mail was there. But when Jenkins realized the woman was having trouble with blood levels and had been going back and forth to the doctor, she decided to step up her efforts. "I started knocking on the door and going in to check on her," she said. One day, the carrier went in and the woman wasn't sitting there. Jenkins called out her name and heard a reply from the bedroom. She went there, and the woman was hanging off the side of her bed. She told Jenkins that she wanted to lie down, but that was as far as she got. The carrier swung her legs around, but realized the woman did not look like she was doing well and asked the woman if she could call one of her children. The customer said she was all right and just needed a nap, but reluctantly allowed Jenkins to call her son. He told Jenkins his wife would be over shortly. Jenkins stayed with the patron to comfort her until the daughter-in-law arrived and eventually took the woman to the hospital. The family later told Jenkins that the doctors said that if the customer hadn't sought medical attention, she probably would have died in her sleep. Jenkins said carriers are like family to the people on their routes, but that she was just in the right place at the right time. "I felt like I did what I needed to do at the time," she said. "I would hope someone would do that for me or my family."

# NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

## Actions by alert carrier help to capture career criminals

**Rolando Ramirez** was walking on the sidewalk while delivering mail on June 29 when he heard an alarm sound. A car the Houston Branch 283 member didn't recognize was parked in front of a customer's home. Then, "I saw three guys running from the house," Ramirez, a 35-year carrier, said. With 15 years on this route, he knew something was wrong.

Meanwhile, a neighborhood patrol officer had just turned onto the street in response to a phone call from a housekeeper who had reported seeing three suspicious men in front of another house on a street nearby. Ramirez continued toward the house, where he saw the three men hunched down around the parked car. When the carrier approached, they jumped in the vehicle and sped off. He tried to read the license plate number, but when he saw there was no plate, he said, "I knew something was fishy."

Ramirez saw the patrol car coming toward him and flagged it down to report what he had seen. The officer immediately made a U-turn, chased the car and called other police units and a police helicopter already out on patrol. About 20 minutes later, several police officers who were chasing the burglars were able to stop their car and arrest the men. Ramirez stayed at the home and was able to identify the men as the ones he had spotted coming from the home.

"I'm grateful to everyone who helped that day, but mostly to Rolando," customer Katie Oxford wrote to CultureMap Houston. She said she wondered if someday the idea of the letter carrier might vanish. "As this day proved, there will never be a substitute for people. Those boots on the ground, who walk door to door delivering mail and a caring heart. Sometimes a hell of a lot of courage, too. Long live the postman (and postwoman), especially Rolando Ramirez—and all those just like him."

But Ramirez doesn't think he's a hero. "It was a stroke of luck that everyone was there at the right time," he said. "It just ended up perfectly for everybody." ☐

**M**ark Jones was on his neighborhood route on June 20 when he saw a 10-year-old child he recognized, Timberline, looking confused. "I was coming around the corner, and he was crying," the New Castle, PA Branch 22 member said. The boy, who is autistic, told Jones that he was on the way back from summer camp, but had been left off the bus at the wrong location. He was supposed to have gone to his grandmother's house. Jones calmed the child and asked Timberline if he knew where his grandmother lived. The boy said he did, but he didn't know how to get there. But, he did know the address, which he gave to Jones. The carrier knew exactly where it was, and he told Timberline, "I'll make sure you get to your house." With all his mail in his hand, Jones walked the child to his grandma's house, about three blocks away. The grandmother thanked Jones profusely, and the boy's mother visited the post office the next day to report Jones' actions, saying that without the carrier, her child might have never made it home. The eight-year carrier brushed off any accolades. "I just did what I had to do," he said. "I was just glad the kid got to his grandmother's safely."

**J**ohnson City, IL Branch 1197 member Lee Anne Wood was delivering mail in 90-degree heat on July 6 when she came across a 3-year-old boy in distress. He had ridden away from his home in a battery-operated toy car, but the battery had weakened and he couldn't get his toy turned around. Wood saw that he was red-faced, crying and potentially going to be physically sick from the heat. She also knew that he lived a block and half away. So, she placed her satchel in the vehicle with the boy and pushed him back to his home, making sure he made it safely back to his parents before she continued the rest of her route.

**W**hile walking his route on May 28, 2011, Central Florida Branch 1091 member Anthony Facchini discovered a 4-year-old girl by herself. "I saw this little girl walking around," he said. "She was 50 to 100 feet from a major intersection." He saw someone come from a house to speak to the girl, and then the girl walked away. He went up to the house and asked the person if they knew the girl, and they said she lived in the neighborhood. He

went to the house the person pointed to, and the little girl answered, crying. The five-year postal veteran called the police, who took the girl into custody. The father admitted to leaving his daughter home alone for several hours while he and his wife were at work. Facchini downplayed his actions, though. "It's just the right thing to do," he said. "I'm glad it turned out well for the little girl."

**S**anta Clara, CA Branch 1427 member Reynold Besona was delivering mail on his route on July 18 when he saw a trio of men looking suspicious as they loitered in front of a home. Looking closer, he also noticed that the fence gate to the backyard was open. Besona couldn't pinpoint the men as residents of the house or neighborhood, so he took precaution and called 911. Police who came to investigate and found stolen property from a neighborhood home in their possession and apprehended them. Thanks to Besona's keen eye, police were able to charge the men with burglary, conspiracy and possession of stolen property.

**O**n Saturday, Dec. 3, Cathy Hiers was stopped on her route when a small child approached her LLV. "He told me he was home alone," she said. When she looked toward the boy's home, Hiers noticed a younger girl standing in the doorway. "She was only wearing a diaper, and it was cold," Hiers said. The Walterboro, SC Branch 6123 member called the police and then her supervisor. Both times she was on the phone, the child asked Hiers, "Are you calling my mama?" She asked the boy his name and age, and reported it to the police. He was 5 years old, and the girl was 2. Upon arrival, the police checked out the scene. There was an adult home at the time who came to the door when police arrived, and it was apparent that the woman had been sleeping. The guardian was overheard making abusive remarks to the 5-year-old, and the responding officer called the Department of Social Services before telling Hiers that they had the situation under control. Hiers said she was just looking out for her route. "I was glad I was there to comfort the child," the 36-year postal veteran said. ☐

# HELP on the Way

**C**ustomer Brenda Baumgartner had been eating a piece of broccoli on Oct. 31 when it became lodged in her throat. Having trouble breathing and unable to call 911, she went to her car to try to go the fire station right in her neighborhood. Meanwhile, carrier Rena McVey was on her rounds when she passed Baumgartner. "She jumped out of the car and was holding her throat," McVey said. Being trained in CPR and first aid, the Central Florida Branch 1091 member recognized the signs of distress and choking and immediately grabbed the woman to perform the Heimlich maneuver, explaining what she was doing as she went. After five to six



**Central Florida Branch 1091 member Rena McVey (l)** recently was presented with a medal for her role in saving the life of a customer who was choking. Pictured with McVey is Postmaster Jean Lovejoy.

attempts, McVey was able to successfully dislodge the food. Baumgartner told the carrier that she had begun to black out and wasn't sure she would have made it during the drive to the station. McVey said she was glad she was able to help. "It makes me proud, because I was trained through the Postal Service," she said. But this wasn't the first time the 18-year carrier has helped out in that complex. About six years ago, McVey helped a man who had suffered a seizure and fell under her LLV, and a few years ago she helped a man who had fallen and broken his foot.

**L**orain, OH Branch 583 member Kevin Powers and his wife Allison DiGian-domenico were out floating on a raft in

Lake Erie on July 31 when he saw two men in trouble by a nearby spot known for its strong undertow. He grabbed his raft and swam about 200 yards over to the men. "The guy who was yelling for help closest to me was kind of big, 250 pounds," Powers told *The Chronicle Telegram*. "I knew if I didn't have a flotation device, they would have had two victims on their hands." The carrier was about five or 10 feet from getting to them when another swimmer got there first and held on to one of them. Powers got there moments later with the raft. Powers, the second swimmer and DiGiandomenico were able to pull one man, a 24-year-old named Randy, to safety, but not the other man, a 17-year-old. The two men, who were cousins, had waded into the water, Randy said. He couldn't swim, though his cousin tried to save him. The U.S. Coast Guard, the county sheriff's office dive team and the local fire department searched the area until the following morning to try to locate the 17-year-old. DiGiandomenico told the paper, "I saw his head go under and it never came back up. I wish we could've got both of them. At least we got one."

**M**ilwaukee Branch 2 member James Czarnecki was delivering the mail when he saw a man who had apparently collapsed while walking his dog. The carrier rushed over to the man, assessed his condition and called paramedics. He kept a watchful eye on the customer until paramedics arrived.

**O**n rainy and blustery Oct. 12, Matt Cain spotted his customer, Randy Breault, on the ground in his backyard. He was on his stomach and "he had his arms under his body," the carrier said. When Cain reached Breault's side, he asked, "Randy, are you OK?" The patron had apparently fallen from the steps much earlier in the day. He was conscious but he could not speak. "I tried to get him up but I couldn't move him," Cain, a St. Paul, MN Branch 28 member, said. So, he called 911 and then went inside to grab towels to cover Breault up. The carrier then stayed with the man until paramedics arrived to treat him for hypothermia, and Cain stuck around for a while longer to answer the EMTs' questions. Cain downplayed his heroic role in the incident. "I called the heroes," he said. "They're the ones who helped him."

**L**ouis DeBernardo knew something was wrong on Oct. 27 when he saw two days' worth of mail outside a customer's house. He also realized that he hadn't seen the man walking in the neighborhood in recent days, so he went to knock on the door. He could see through glass in the front door that the man was lying on the floor. The Staten Island, NY Branch 99 member called 911 and relayed through the door that help was on the way. When responders arrived, they broke in through the back door and discovered that the patron had been on the floor for at least two days after falling. He was dehydrated and in danger of frostbite because the heat was not on. Responders commended DeBernardo for helping to save the man's life, but the carrier said he was just doing his job. "I just looked out," he said. "I've been on the route for 21 years. I know people."

**M**ansfield, OH Branch 118 member Aaron Warner was delivering his route one day last fall when he saw a woman, Stephanie Blevins, approach a nearby residence. The woman, who was holding a baby and had two other children with her, suddenly fell to the ground. "I waited to see if she popped back up, and she never did," he said. Warner ran to her and saw that she appeared to be having a seizure. He found out from the kids that this was the baby-sitter's house. He tried to knock on the door to alert the sitter to watch the children as he called the emergency squad and rendered aid as she shook for a few minutes. He acted quickly, pulling the baby out from under Blevins, putting his bag



**St. Paul, MN Branch 28 member Matt Cain**

under her head, and calming the other children. "She finally came to, and they were able to get her in an ambulance," the four-year carrier said. Blevins wrote a note to the postmaster thanking Warner for his heroics. "For sure, anyone else would have done what I did," he said.

**H**eaded to the door of a customer's house with a signature confirmation package on Dec. 28, Southern Delaware Branch 906 member **Jay Stevenson** noticed that mail had collected outside his customer's door. "I knew him well, knew his family," Stevenson said. He was especially concerned because he could see that some of the packages contained medicine. When he went to knock, "I noticed the door was ajar," he said. Since he was familiar with the customer, he called inside but got no answer. "I called the postmaster and told him I was going to go in," Stevenson said. The carrier found the patron on the bedroom floor. Stevenson called 911 and had the postmaster come to assist him until medical personnel arrived. They found out that the customer had been there a few days after suffering a heart attack. The two notified the patron's family and helped to keep him calm until they could be transported to the hospital. Stevenson said it's evident from Proud to Serve articles how often letter carriers see situations like this. "We check on our customers every day in one way or another," the 30-year postal veteran said.

#### Ft. Collins, CO Branch 849 member

**Laurie Meek** was stunned when she saw several packages from other couriers accumulated outside a customer's door on May 25, 2011. Besides that red flag, "I noticed that the flowers weren't watered and other indications that she wasn't around," Meek said. She checked with a neighbor, who said they hadn't seen her, but that the woman's car was there. Meek also called her supervisor to tell him she suspected something wasn't right. Both the carrier and the neighbor called 911 to request a wellness check. Emergency responders arrived and discovered the woman inside her bathroom—she had suffered a stroke three days earlier and was unable to call for help—and transported the customer to the hospital. Meek denied any heroics, but of the incident, she said, "It's good to remind all of us to keep alert." ☐

**HEARING AN ELDERLY CUSTOMER IN** her 80s shouting instantly alerted carrier **Valerie Marsh** on Nov. 2. The voice was coming from inside the home, so the Lansing, MI Branch 122 member peered inside through the living-room window and saw that the woman was lying on the floor. "She was calling my name," Marsh said. The carrier checked both doors, but they were both locked, so she quickly ran to the neighbor's house, who didn't have a key, but was able to contact the woman's daughter, who called 911. The woman had fallen a few hours earlier, breaking her hip. She had tried to crawl to her phone, but pulled the cord out of the wall. She then crawled to the living room in hopes of being close enough to the front window and mailbox that Marsh might be able to hear her cry for help. Marsh stayed with the woman until paramedics arrived soon after to take the customer to the hospital. "If not for Val's reliable and trusty service, this elderly customer may have had a much longer wait for help," branch members wrote of Marsh. "Way to go, Val!" But Marsh deflected the attention. "I just did what anyone else would have done," the 13-year postal veteran said. "I'm just glad I was there for her. I'd do it again if necessary."

**WHILE DELIVERING HER ROUTE** Oct. 22, Pittsburgh Branch 84 member **Diana Adamson** noticed a dog barking furiously when she dropped the mail through the door slot of an elderly customer's house. She could hear the TV blaring and noticed there also were two uncollected newspapers on the floor. She knocked on the door but to no response. Adamson quickly contacted the neighbors to check to see if they had heard from the customer, Madeline Wilke Panza. The neighbors also tried to get a hold of the woman and, when their attempt was also unsuccessful, they contacted police. Responding officers found Panza unconscious and lying near a space heater with burns on her legs and immediately summoned an ambulance. Once Adams saw that Panza was in good hands, she continued on her route.

**SEEING ACCUMULATED MAIL IN HIS** 82-year-old patron's mailbox one day last summer, **Tim Beal** became very



Lansing, MI Branch 122 member Valerie Marsh

concerned. The Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member saw that the door was partially open, so he rang the doorbell. He noticed that the security door also was open and unsecured. He called into the house, "Mrs. Meyers, are you all right?" In reply, Beal heard a faint groan each time he called her name. Thinking she was in distress of some sort, the carrier entered the house and found Myers on the kitchen floor. The woman said she had been on the floor for three days, unable to get up. Beal called 911, and the dispatcher relayed questions to Beal to ask the woman to determine how coherent she was. The carrier stayed with Myers until the emergency units arrived to take over.

#### LAS VEGAS BRANCH 2502 MEMBER

**Rick Pinili** was walking back to his truck after a delivery last fall when he saw elderly customer Shirley Wallace walking with her dog about 10 feet away. When he looked up again to greet her, he saw her trip and fall on the sidewalk, hitting her mouth and right shoulder on the pavement and then passing out for about 10 seconds. He ran to her, kneeled down to check on her, and called 911 with one hand as he held her other hand to comfort her. He saw a passerby and requested that they check Wallace's house for any relatives, and asked another passerby to assist him lifting Wallace's head because her mouth was full of blood. Pinili kept Wallace calm as they waited for help to arrive. When emergency responders arrived, he explained what had happened before he continued on his route. ☐