

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 often are the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

'It's just a duty to act'

Flushing, NY Branch 294 member **Bruce Stock** was doing collections one morning last May when he looked up and saw a building on fire. Stock, the deputy chief of the local volunteer fire department, jumped into action and ran toward the small apartment building. He immediately heard dogs barking from inside.

"I jumped out of my truck and grabbed a bystander because we never go in by ourselves," Stock said. The two broke in the door and had a look around.

They suddenly heard glass breaking on the other side of the residence, so they ran over there and realized that the fire had spread. "It was parallel to a house—very close," the carrier

said. He quickly knocked on the door of that house to warn the resident inside that she should leave.

Then, Stock ran back over to the first house and opened the front door to vent the heavy smoke. "I did what we call a primary search of the apartment," he said. There wasn't anyone inside, but they knew there were two dogs there, which Stock saved by leading them out of the downstairs apartment.

The fire department arrived shortly thereafter and had an easier time putting out the fire, thanks to Stock's legwork. When he saw that the situation was in good hands, he continued on his route.

Later that afternoon, "something compelled me to go back," Stock said. He pulled up to the scene and saw firefighters, police officers and all kinds of investigators milling around. He saw that the letter carrier for that residence was being interviewed, and so Stock went over and was able to answer all of the questions about the earlier incident and his heroic actions.

The 32-year postal veteran said he's not a hero; it's just a duty to act. "I'd rather be considered a good citizen of the planet and be able to pay it forward," he said. "I try and tell my children we need to be helpful to society."

Right: Bruce Stock, a Flushing, NY Branch 294 member, ran into a burning building and was able to rescue dogs and prevent the blaze from getting worse.
Far right: The fiery scene, as captured by Stock.



DELIVERING TO THE HOUSE OF AN elderly customer on her route, 29-year postal veteran **Debbie Kielblock** grew concerned on June 1 when she noticed the previous day's paper still on the porch. In addition, she saw that the curtains were closed. "Her curtains are always open," said Kielblock, who has been on this route for the past 12 years. So, the Seward, NE Branch 1883 member knocked on the door. The woman responded, saying "I hurt my back, I'm going to call my daughter." Although the woman had responded, Kielblock said, "I just felt something was wrong." So she went two houses down to alert a neighbor, who Kielblock knew had a key to the woman's residence. Together, they entered the house and discovered the elderly woman on the floor after falling several hours earlier. They called 911 and the woman's daughter and were able to get the woman help. Kielblock said she watches out for the people on her route all the time, noting that she doesn't think the public realizes the depth of let-

ter carriers' jobs. "I was raised on the golden rule of do unto others as you would have them do unto you," she said. "You know these elderly people, and you notice when something's not right."

WHEN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA COAST Branch 52 member **Tom Mork** saw on March 14 that his customer, Ms. Littlejohn, had not emptied her mailbox for two days, he was concerned. He had helped her to get a box installed by her door so that the elderly woman could more easily get to her mail. "Each day I would see her or see that she picked up her mail," Mork said. That day, though, "it just didn't feel right." Knowing that the woman's daughter, Ms. Gonzalez, lived in the neighborhood, Mork notified her. Gonzalez immediately went to her mother's house and entered, found her mother in bad condition after falling and called 911. When Mork saw that Littlejohn was in good hands, he continued on his route. "You get to know your customers and you know when something's not right,"

the 25-year postal veteran said. He doesn't see it as being a hero; he says carriers just do what they can do. "I look at it as seeing someone who needs help and standing up to do it," he said. "That's the reward."

ON JUNE 8, VINCENT BROWN WAS delivering mail on his normal route, and as he was going up the steps to deliver to Mrs. Link's house, "I heard someone hollering for help," he said. Brown immediately went to his elderly customer. She was on all fours, saying her back hurt. The Northern Virginia Branch 3520 member rushed inside Link's home to call 911 and tell the woman's sister. Brown stayed with Link until the rescue team arrived a few minutes later. "I tried to assure her everything would be all right," he said. Don't try to call Brown a hero, though. "It's something anyone would have done," the 14-year postal veteran said. ☒

Wanted criminals halted by alert carrier

As Northeast Florida Branch 53 member **Pam Pontius** was going about her route on Jan. 9, she saw two individuals in the area whom she didn't recognize. "I kept watching this van going round and round and round," she said. A man driving would stop and point at various houses, and a female would jump out and go and knock on doors, over and over again. "This is shady," Pontius thought to herself.

At the end of the street, Pontius watched as they got someone to answer the door, an elderly couple. Pontius knew the couple and was worried. "I grabbed a handful of mail and walked over to the house," she said. She heard the woman say they could clean the couple's house, and then offered a discount if they did it that day. Pontius was very suspicious and shook her head "no" to alert the couple.

The 28-year postal veteran had a local police detective's number programmed in her phone, so she gave him a call.

"There's a couple casing the neighborhood," she told him. "Can you come check it out?"

Officers were dispatched, and the van and suspects were located. When questioned, only one of the suspects could produce a valid ID and neither could explain their activities or why they were in the area.

The female had active warrants out for two counts of child neglect and witness tampering, and the driver had active warrants out for sexual battery on a child and witness tampering. The female's 12-year-old daughter—whom she did not have custody of—was also found in the vehicle, and there was a pickup order for her issued by the county. The child was later reunited with her legal guardians.

"The observations and quick actions of Pam enabled the apprehension of two wanted felons, the recovery of a missing child and the probable prevention of other criminal activities by these indi-

viduals," Chief of Police William Hall wrote to the local postmaster. "In today's society, it is too often said that folks don't get involved and turn their eyes away when they see things. This is not the case with Pam Pontius, and because of her actions, criminals in two counties have been incarcerated."

Pontius is quick to brush off any accolades. "I was just doing what I'm supposed to be doing," she said. "I'm just looking out for my people."



Northeast Florida Branch 53 member Pam Pontius recently was recognized for helping to thwart a possible crime on her route. Pictured with her is Branch President Bob Henning.

HELP on the Way



Tampa, FL Branch 599 member **Tim Hurlstone** (r) recently met with his customer **Jedidiah Knowles**, who he saved by performing the Heimlich maneuver.

As Tampa, FL Branch 599 member **Tim Hurlstone** was walking up to customer **Jedidiah Knowles'** home around lunchtime to deliver his mail on April 17, he saw the customer running out of his home. "He signaled that he was choking and was wheezing," the five-

year postal veteran said. Hurlstone quickly assessed Knowles' condition and administered the Heimlich maneuver, which dislodged the piece of food that was restricting the man's airway. Once Knowles was breathing properly again, he thanked Hurlstone, went back inside the home, and the carrier continued his route. Hurlstone said it wasn't exactly an exciting situation. "I disagree with the hero appellation," he said. "A hero has to put himself in danger—I didn't endanger myself."

As carrier **James Gantt** turned his vehicle around after he finished delivering mail on a street on Feb. 23, he saw a customer in his back yard on his riding mower. Gantt

became concerned when he saw that the patron was leaning to one side and seemed to be in distress. The Charlotte, NC Branch 545 member parked his vehicle and ran to help. "I shut off his lawnmower and picked him up," he said. "He could barely speak and I thought he was having a heart attack. I dialed 911 for help." Fire department officials responded quickly. Gantt kept the man cool in the shade, and once he was sure the man was in good care, he secured the man's home and returned to his route. The carrier said that it makes his day to see his customers smile. "I'm just glad I came along when I did," Gantt said. "No one would have seen him in the back yard." Gantt said he doesn't consider himself a hero, though. "I just did what anyone else would do," he said. "I would do that for any of my customers."

Boston Branch 34 member **John Sawyer** was traveling from one route to another on April 10 and was about to turn left, and the man in front of him was about to go through the signal. Coming from behind, "I could hear what sounded like a car accelerating," Sawyer said. An elderly woman driving that car T-boned the man's car up ahead. "His car went up and over the sidewalk," Sawyer said, and the vehicle took out a non-working fire hydrant outside of a fire station. "It was shocking; it was like watching a movie that other people were in," Sawyer said. He stopped his mail truck and ran to the rolled-over vehicle. Spotting the man, Robert

Wright, inside, Sawyer carefully pulled him out. "He was in shock and a little unsteady on his feet," Sawyer said. The 28-year postal veteran attended to Wright until medical responders got to the scene of the accident. "I'm just glad he's OK," Sawyer said. "I don't really think I did that much." Wright disagrees. "The man is a 'hero' in my eyes," he wrote to the local postmaster. "This accident almost took my life. John reacted with great courage, care and passion."

While on her route delivering to a local mall on Feb. 27, **Lynette Fontes** walked out of the building behind a woman with mental disabilities and her mother. Soon after, the Hayward, CA Branch 1707 member saw the woman lying on the sidewalk nearby after suffering an apparent seizure. The mother was next to her, unsure of what to do. Fontes ran over to them to help. "I got security and got some blankets to put over her," the carrier said. The mother didn't have a cell phone, so Fontes called 911, giving them directions to exactly where they were. Since the 26-year postal veteran had been delivering to the mall for the past 14 years, she knew the area very well. Fontes stayed with the women to provide comfort until emergency units arrived, and when she saw that they were in good hands, she continued on her route. Fontes doesn't think she's any kind of hero, though. "I didn't really do anything," she said. "It's common decency to stop." ✉

FIRE & RESCUE

Carrier **Kristi Spindler** was on her walking route on a very windy March 28 when "a big gust of smoke came flying across the road," she said. The Chilton, WI Branch 2594 member quickly went to investigate where the smoke was coming from and realized that a fire had started at the back of a house. She was worried, knowing that an elderly resident lived there. A neighbor immediately called 911 as Spindler went up to the house. "I

decided to try the door," she said. "I went to knock, and no one answered." So, she checked to see if the door was unlocked, which it was. Spindler called out, "Is anyone home?" One of the two elderly people inside came to the door, and Spindler told them that their house was on fire and that they needed to evacuate immediately. The carrier helped both customers out of the house and stayed with them until emergency responders arrived. Smol-



Chilton, WI Branch 2594 member **Kristi Spindler** was recently recognized for her heroic actions in helping to save elderly customers from their burning home. Pictured with Spindler is local Postmaster **Pete Thielmann**.

dering charcoal that had been put outside the night before had started the fire. "We were lucky," the 16-year carrier said. Spindler left to continue on her route when she saw everyone was in good hands, but checked back in later to make sure everyone was OK. Spindler said she was just doing her job. "I just want to make sure everyone on my route is always safe," she said. "Anybody in my position probably would have done the same." ✉

Carrier helps prevent ‘every parent’s worst nightmare’

While delivering mail on March 9 on a day he was supposed to be off, Bux-Mont, PA Branch 920 member **Fred Ehrgott** watched in horror as a man grabbed two young girls, ages 8 and 9, by their necks and tried to kidnap them as they were walking to a friend’s house.

“I saw the girls break free from him and he was running after them,” Ehrgott

told a local CBS affiliate. “I knew something was not right, so I immediately stopped.” The carrier got out of his LLV and yelled at the man, who took off running. But the carrier recognized the man from his route. “I noticed him right away,” he said. “I knew where he lived, I knew his name.”

He called the girls’ parents and police. Once officers arrived, Ehrgott told the police where the suspect’s home was—not far from where the incident happened—and both he and the girls identified the man. “Within an hour, they picked him up and he was arrested,” 19-year postal veteran said.

“That day is absolutely every parent’s worst nightmare,” Ehrgott told the local CBS TV affiliate. “To this day, I still stare at the corner where it happened and can’t believe it.” Despite being recognized by the mayor and city council for his actions, the carrier doesn’t think he is a hero. “It was the right place at the right time, and instinct,” he said.

Others disagree. Blair Capriotti, the

father of one of the girls, told CBS that Ehrgott is now his friend for life, and “thank you” doesn’t describe what Ehrgott has done for his daughter.

“He doesn’t consider himself a hero because that’s who he is, that’s what’s in his heart,” Capriotti said.

After the man’s arrest, two more victims came forward and identified the man as someone who had stalked them. “I wish more people stepped up and did what he did that day. He did a great job,” Sgt. Joe Moors, one of the arresting officers, said of Ehrgott. ☒



The two young girls thank Ehrgott at a ceremony held in his honor.



Bux-Mont, PA Branch 920 member Fred Ehrgott recently recounted his story of saving two young girls from being kidnapped with a local CBS news affiliate.



New Prague, MN Branch 3196 member Pauline Brodeur

“I was just going to cross the intersection,” said New Prague, MN Branch 3196 member **Pauline Brodeur**, “when I looked up and saw two girls at the top of a hill.” The carrier glanced up again on that May 2 day and saw that

one girl had hopped on a bike and was careening down the hill toward the busy intersection. Brodeur yelled up to the other girl, “Does she know how to stop?” The response: “I don’t know.” The 10-year postal veteran jumped into action, running toward the girl. “She turned toward me because she was so scared,” Brodeur said. “I grabbed the

bike and it swirled around me.” The carrier asked the girl if she was OK, and she replied, “You’re bleeding.” Brodeur looked down and saw a gash on her leg that later required stitches. “My adrenaline was pumping so bad, I didn’t notice,” she said. Brodeur said she doesn’t consider herself a hero; she was just happy the little girl was all right. “Just about anybody in that situation hopefully would have grabbed the little girl and tried to save her.”

Pittsburgh, PA Branch 84 member Ben Kaiser was delivering mail on April 10 and climbed a flight of stairs to get to a mailbox. “I looked up and saw a child on the porch,” he said. “He had red marker all over his face.” The toddler had no shoes, socks or a coat on, the temperature was in the 30s, and the residence was on a busy street that connected two neighborhoods. Kaiser

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

tried asking the child questions, but he didn’t understand the carrier. “He pointed to the house,” the five-year postal veteran said. “I knocked on the door, no answer; I knocked on the window, no answer.” So, Kaiser called 911 and his supervisor and stayed with the child until police arrived. Responding officers broke in to gain entry and found the child’s parents asleep on the top floor. The child was taken into protective custody, and police commended the carrier for watching out for the child’s well-being. Kaiser brushed off any praise. “I was doing what any normal person should do,” he said. ☒