

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 at postalrecord@nalc.org. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

Honoring heroic carriers

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.

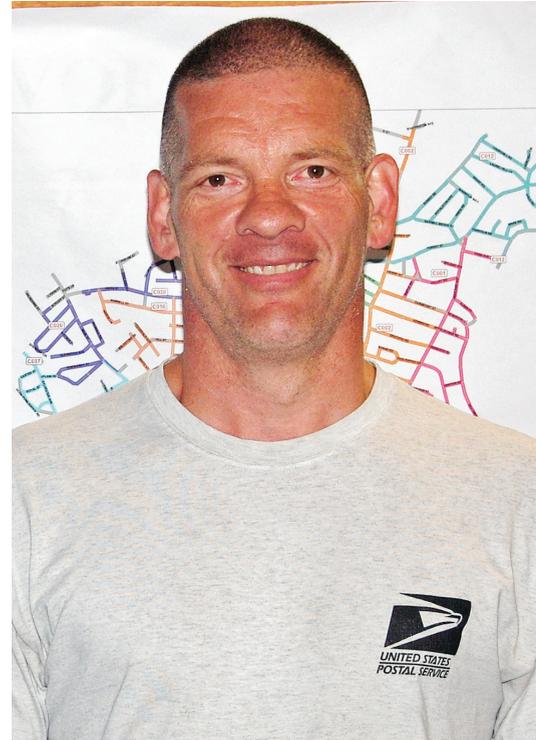
Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they often are the first to respond. The following stories document their heroism. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

Right place, right time

When **Scott Bernson** usually goes to octogenarian Delores Desilver's door, she always invites him to chat. On May 24, 2012, when he arrived at her house, Bernson heard her call, "Scott? Scott?" Concerned by her tone, the Massachusetts Northeast Merged Branch 25 member asked if she was all right, to which she replied she was hurt, and she asked him to call 911. Bernson called and the dispatcher told him that help would be on the way, but that he should get inside the house to wait with her.

Bernson, a black belt in karate, was able to break down the door, dead-bolt and all, with a couple of powerful kicks. He knelt beside

Desilver and comforted her until the police and paramedics arrived to take her to the hospital to treat her two broken legs. Once he saw that she was in good hands, he continued on his route.



Scott Bernson

The 19-year carrier had taken annual leave that day to make his long holiday weekend a little bit longer, but he was called in to work because of scheduling issues. Bernson reported to work in civilian clothes and proceeded to work his route.

"Had Scott not been called in from annual leave and started a couple hours late, there is a good chance that he would have delivered her mail and been on his way before the injury took place," Branch 25 President Dave Barbuzzi said. "Like so many others who rise to the occasion under such circumstances, he doesn't think of himself as a hero. We here in Branch 25 know differently." **PR**

"Like so many others who rise to the occasion under such circumstances, he doesn't think of himself as a hero. We here in Branch 25 know differently."

—Branch 25 President Dave Barbuzzi speaking about carrier Scott Bernson

Fire and rescue

John Camburn was on his route on Saturday, Sept. 1, 2012, when he heard a fire alarm going off inside an apartment complex. “When I got to the building, you could see the smoke coming from the bottom-floor window,” he said. The Bux-Mont, PA Branch 920 member quickly knocked on the door of his customers’ apartments to let them know what was going on. Camburn also notified the fire department, which arrived on the scene shortly. Firefighters were able to force their way into the home to put out the stovetop fire and vented the smoke out of the house using fans. “If the mailman didn’t find the smoke, there is a good chance this fire would have shot up right through the building, causing a big problem,” Towamencin Volunteer Fire Company Battalion Chief George Seifert told *The Reporter*. Camburn, who has helped out with other dangerous situations, such as gas leaks and burst water pipes in his 26-year postal career, took his actions in stride. “To me, it’s just doing your job,” he said.

Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 member **Steve Risser** jumped into action when he saw a house fire on his route on Feb. 29, 2012. “I noticed at the intersection what appeared to be fog, but I knew it wasn’t,” he said of the smoke. Risser went closer and saw that fire was pouring from the chimney. “I went up and knocked on the door and let them know there was a chimney fire,” he said. Risser quickly flagged down a car and had them call the fire department, which arrived shortly. The residents credit the 28-year postal veteran with saving their lives and their home, but Risser said that calling him a hero is “overkill.” Of his actions, he said, “I didn’t do anything out of the ordinary.”

Madison, WI Branch 507 member **Jim Crombie** was on his route on April 7, 2012, when he saw flames coming from a balcony of a two-story apartment building. The carrier went to the door and kicked it in, grabbing a fire extinguisher and going

to work on the flames. The apartment tenant and maintenance staff saw what was happening and joined in helping before the fire department arrived a few minutes later. It was later reported that the fire started because of discarded smoking materials that were deposited in dried potting soil. Though the blaze caused \$10,000 worth of damage to the apartment, Crombie was commended for putting out the fire before it could cause any extensive damage to other apartment units.

Al Font had just finished a relay one day during winter 2011 when he heard a car honk at him. He saw that it was an elderly customer, Patricia Petruzzelli, and once she got his attention, she asked the carrier to come to her car, which she said was on fire. Font looked inside and saw flames shooting out of the dash by the radio and he requested that the woman get out of the car, but Petruzzelli continued to drive, saying she just wanted to get home. The Toms River, NJ Branch 2128 member repeated his request, saying to get out of the car, and this time she listened. Once he led her a safe distance from the car, they watched in horror as the entire vehicle blew up into a ball of flames minutes later. Font was commended for saving Petruzzelli’s life.

Noticing flames as he was on his route on April 4, 2012, carrier **Michael Read** was alarmed. The West Warwick, RI Branch 2158 member discovered that a home was on fire and quickly called 911. He alerted the residents, a mother and son, who were unaware of the fire and were able to get out of the residence safely.

While **Earl Burns** was approaching a house on his route on Saturday, July 14, 2012, to deliver mail, he smelled something burning. So, the Washington, DC Branch 142 member knocked on the door to see if the customer, Charlene Wells, was home. After there was no answer, he realized that the customer’s car was not there and proceeded to quickly inform several neighbors on the block

about his concern. One neighbor sent her grandson to neighborhood resident Kenneth Burke Jr., a former firefighter and friend of the missing resident. Burke carefully walked around the house and could neither smell nor see anything suspicious. Burke’s wife was unwilling to let the situation stop there and managed to track down the homeowner by phone at her elderly mother’s home. Wells quickly returned home to find that food had been left burning on the stove and that the house was filled with smoke after the food and a utensil had exploded. Wells was extremely grateful that Burns was there that day. “Thanks to Mr. Burns’ alertness, caring, concern and follow-up, this situation did not become a terrible disaster,” she wrote to the postmaster general. “I am forever blessed, grateful and appreciative of Mr. Burns’ mail delivery service, pleasant manner and efficiency.”

Northern Virginia Branch 3520 member **An Huynh** noticed heavy smoke coming from a car while he was traveling on his route on July 5, 2012. So, he pulled up behind the car and was able to signal to the driver. Huynh saw four passengers in the car, all of them children. The driver was panicking and unable to turn off the car’s engine. “Call 911,” the carrier told the driver as he evacuated each child away from the smoking vehicle. Huynh then reached into the vehicle and shut the ignition off, and soon after, the smoke and fire subsided. As the family waited for 911 assistance, Huynh continued on his route. Later, after leaving the post office, he passed the still-stranded vehicle and noticed a police officer writing a citation. Huynh stopped and went to the officer to explain the earlier emergency. The officer called 911 and, satisfied that the story was valid, discarded the citation and went to the family’s home to make sure everyone was OK. The family saved by the carrier soon called the post office to commend Huynh’s actions. “This carrier was our guardian angel,” the caller said. **PR**

Neighborhood watch

On April 18, 2012, Ballwin, MO Branch 5050 member **Dave Howe** was driving by the post office when he saw a young boy next to the road, waving his arms to attract attention from passing motorists. "It's a very bad street," the carrier said. "Even for a grown-up, it's not safe." Fearing the child might be hit by a car, Howe pulled over and stopped traffic. He asked the boy what was wrong. "He was crying and didn't know where his house was," Howe said. The boy said he lived somewhere behind the post office. The carrier promptly called 911

worry and that she would help get him home safely. She got her cell phone from her mail truck and asked the boy if he knew his parents' phone numbers. He said he knew his mom's, so she dialed the woman, who was out of town. The mother said the boy was staying with his father, and gave Krueger the number. Once the carrier contacted the boy's dad, he arrived within 10 minutes to pick the child up and Krueger then continued on her route.

While on his route one day last spring, carrier **Sidney Flanary** saw a 4-year-

Greg Cales was on his route on Sept. 15, 2011, when he noticed two suspicious people leaving a patron's house. Cales recognized the couple from another part of his route, and the Beckley, WV Branch 2420 member became concerned because he knew they had had prior run-ins with the police. When he got to the house, the customer there said that the couple had requested to use the bathroom. When she noticed that money was missing from her purse, she called the police. When they arrived, Cales gave officers a description of the suspects as well as their address. Officers later arrested the suspected thieves.

When Syracuse, NY Branch 134 member **Glenn Beebe** saw what he thought were robbers fleeing on the morning of Nov. 7, 2012, he decided to chase them down. As it turned out, a woman, an immigrant who spoke broken English, had been approached by two men who tried to grab her purse. When she resisted, one man punched her in the face and knocked her to the ground. As officers spoke to the victim, two possible suspects were stopped nearby—but the victim could not identify them because their clothing didn't match what she remembered. Officers traced the robbers' path from the scene and met Beebe, who told

them that he had run after the men. They kept looking and found clothing on the ground matching the original description. With this information, the police were able to charge one suspect with felony robbery and assault; no charges were filed against the other suspect, aged 15.

As **Julian Rodriguez III** was making his rounds on May 17, 2012, he saw a man was breaking into a minivan to steal a purse. The Toledo, OH Branch 100 member called police and also followed the man. When officers arrived, Rodriguez pointed them directly to the suspect, and the officers arrested him before he could get away. "I think it's awesome that our mailman was able to see that and he took action," a neighbor, Patrice Hurt, told a local ABC TV news affiliate.

On Dec. 5, 2011, carrier **Anthony Mangiavellano** was on his route when he found \$2,500 in a bank envelope lying on the ground. The Rochester, NY Branch 210 member contacted his supervisor, who met Mangiavellano on the route and then contacted the bank to see if the owner could be identified. The bank was unable to help, so the supervisor turned the money over to the Rochester Police Department. Mangiavellano was commended for his integrity. **PR**

"I think it's awesome that our mailman was able to see that and he took action."

—Customer Patrice Hurt to an ABC news affiliate about Branch 100 member Julian Rodriguez III

and waited for a police officer to come to drive the boy home. Howe said it wasn't a big deal. "Nobody stopped for him. I just made sure he got taken to where he needed to go," he said. "I'm just glad I could help the little dude out."

As **Pamela Krueger** was nearing the end of her route on Saturday, Feb. 25, 2012, a young boy approached her. "Can you help me?" he asked. "I'm lost." The Omaha, NE Branch 5 member asked the child his address, but he said he didn't know. Krueger assured the boy, telling him not to

old girl wander outside her house as he was delivering mail to the residence. When the Big Stone Gap, VA Branch 3508 member saw no one else around, he asked the child a few questions and determined that she was home alone after getting off the school bus. Flanary went to neighboring homes to find someone to stay with the child until family could be located. He also made a call to notify the girl's grandmother, who was at work. Flanary was commended for finding supervision for the child until her grandfather could arrive.

Carrier helps break up scuffle

As Hopkinsville, KY Branch 836 member **James Barton** was out on his route one day last August, “I came up to a stop sign and happened to see a cop car on the side of the road and a group of people gathered around,” he said. Barton then saw a fight between a police officer and a suspect who was trying to evade arrest.

Relying on his six years of experience as a military police officer in the Army, Barton jumped out of his vehicle

to help. The police officer was wrestling with the man and was using a stun gun to try to subdue the suspect. “It had no effect on the guy,” Barton said.

The suspect then grabbed onto a part of a nearby van. “We got the guy loose from the railing and down to the ground,” the carrier said—but the man continued to try to evade arrest by not offering his hands to be cuffed. Barton pulled the suspect’s left hand out

from under him, and the police officer finally was able to arrest the man.

As Barton headed back to his LLV, the scuffle successfully handled, a plethora of police vehicles showed up.

The carrier doesn’t think he’s a hero, though. His only thought was “just to help the officer,” he said. “It just came as an instinct.” Barton, a 12-year postal veteran, was recognized at a city council meeting by the mayor and police chief for his acts. **PR**

Help on the way

On Feb. 26, 2012, Cleveland, OH Branch 40 member **John McReynolds** saw that his customer, Mrs. Dugan, had fallen and needed assistance. McReynolds quickly called 911 and stayed with Dugan to comfort her until assistance arrived. Dugan later told the post office that “the compassion and professionalism McReynolds showed that day was not surprising, since he goes out of his way daily to deliver the mail.”

On April 21, 2012, **Vic Vescere** was delivering on his route when he heard someone yelling. The Charlotte, NC Branch 545 member ran over to the home of Sylvia Reese, who he discovered had fallen down her stairs. Despite having broken her arm and fractured her elbow, she managed to crawl to her front door. Vescere called Reese’s daughter, then called 911 and stayed there until the ambulance arrived.

Santa Fe, NM Branch 989 member **Benjie Vigil**

found one of his customers, Penny McMullen, unresponsive and slumped in her doorway as he delivered his route on May 18, 2012. Vigil knocked on the door of H. M. McKee, a neighbor, who called 911. Vigil waited with McMullen until she was taken to the hospital.

Shawn Baldwin was on his route on June 6, 2012, when he saw a commotion outside a courthouse. The Lexington, KY Branch 361 member secured his truck and headed inside to investigate. He soon found out that assistant commonwealth’s attorney Andy Sims had collapsed in a suspected heart attack while he presented a case to a grand jury. A juror had run out of the courthouse to scream for help, and attracted the attention of passing attorney David Thomas, who rushed to Sims’ side and began CPR. Nurse BJ Preston, who was walking outside, also heard the calls for help and joined the group. Once Baldwin joined the team, they divided duties: Thomas

was giving Sims mouth-to-mouth, Preston was performing the CPR, and Baldwin was counting out the beats. Sims began turning blue and had no pulse, and the group feared he was dead. “If anyone deserves to see the lights at the end of the tunnel, it’s him,” Baldwin told the *Jessamine Journal*. “And I’m sure he was there.”

The group managed to resuscitate Sims before county EMS units arrived with a defibrillator to fully revive him and take him to the hospital to treat him for what turned out to be a heart attack. “I whole-heartedly believe they saved his life,” circuit Clerk Doug Fain told the *Journal*. “The good Lord put the right people in the right place at the right time.”

While delivering his route on July 12, 2012, **Ken Charest** heard a woman yelling for help from nearby. The Hartford, CT Branch 86 member immediately went to the house and found out that the woman’s husband had fallen head-first between the bed and dresser and was stuck. Charest—no

stranger to dangerous situations after serving two tours in Afghanistan—rushed up the stairs to the bedroom. He helped the elderly gentleman to his feet, and then eased the bed out to free the man’s head. The man was noticeably shaken up to go to the hospital. His wife was very grateful for Charest for his help.

On a very hot July 6, 2012, a letter carrier came across a customer who had fallen down outside and had been lying there for a while. The customer suffers from multiple sclerosis and is physically impaired, and combined with the extreme heat, the woman was not in good condition. The carrier aided the customer by getting her something to drink and holding her while getting the attention of fellow carrier **Douglas Brown**, who notified authorities. Brown, an East Lansing, MI Branch 2555 member, was credited for his alertness and quick response in helping out his patron before the situation deteriorated. **PR**

Eye on the elderly



Walter Stevinson

Walter Stevinson was on his route one day last June, and when he got to Joyce Cegelski's house, he noticed that the 92-year-old was not her cheerful self. After some discussion, the Green Bay, WI Branch 619 member suspected that Cegelski had had a stroke and he suggested that Cegelski get checked out. The customer said she didn't want to go to the hospital.

Stevinson stopped at the houses of three neighbors who he knew looked in on Joyce from time to time. Finding nobody home, the carrier called 911. The rescue squad arrived shortly and confirmed Stevinson's suspicion that Cegelski had suffered a stroke. The woman told the post office that Stevinson deserves recognition for making the call that she was afraid to make.

As he was delivering to a nursing home on his route on June 5, 2012, **Billy Irwin** noticed a resident with a walker walking unsteadily and losing her balance, falling backward and striking her head on the concrete floor. Irwin, a Muskogee, OK Branch 1042 member, kept the dazed woman from getting up. He calmed her and waited with her until help arrived. The carrier was commended for his selfless display of civic duty.

Tucson, AZ Branch 704 member **Karen Johnson** was halfway through her route on April 26, 2012, at an apartment row when she noticed that one of her elderly customers, Mrs. Decamp, had not picked up her mail for a couple of days. She thought this was odd, since Decamp always picked up her mail each day. So, Johnson went to the woman's apartment to check on her. After knocking on Decamp's door, the carrier thought she heard Decamp yelling for help, but could not hear clearly through the door. Certain the faint noises were cries for help, Johnson went to knock on neighbors' doors to see if they had access to Decamp's apartment. She found one neighbor, but they had no access to the home, so they called police to report the situation. Responding officers found Decamp lying on the floor of her living room after apparently having fallen

two days earlier and breaking her hip. Johnson was commended for her alertness in helping her patron.

Edward Lavoie was following the course of an ordinary day delivering mail on Aug. 17, 2012, until he noticed the porch door of a house slightly ajar with a foot sticking out of the door. The Worcester, MA Branch 12 member rushed toward the door and found his customer, Genevieve Janiszewski, a 94-year-old woman who lives alone, lying unresponsive on the floor. Lavoie tried to communicate with Janiszewski, but she appeared to be going in and out of consciousness. The carrier immediately called 911 and stayed by Janiszewski's side until the emergency response team arrived. A neighbor later told Lavoie that Janiszewski had suffered a massive stroke. **PR**

In the nick of time

While on his route delivering mail on March 29, Freehold, NJ Branch 924 member **David Tozzolino** was walking along a street when he heard the sound of a car hitting a curb. As he looked up, he noticed a car veering out of control.

Realizing that the driver was in trouble, Tozzolino began running toward the car, which was now swerving across lanes of traffic and then crossing over the median into oncoming traffic. He kept running toward the car, hoping the vehicle would stop. However, the car continued in the direction of a home.

As the vehicle crossed over the di-

vided highway out of control, it struck a parked car in the driveway and then the house. Tozzolino ran to the house and climbed over both cars to get to the driver, which was difficult because the driver's-side door was wedged between the parked car and the homeowner's fence.

The carrier realized that the car had struck the homeowner's natural gas utility meter—causing a serious gas leak. Tozzolino could hear the gas leaking and the smell was overwhelming. Without regard to his own safety, he knew the driver had to get out of the vehicle and be led to safety as

soon as possible.

With his foot, Tozzolino pried open the driver's-side door as far as he could. The driver did not have any visible injuries, so the carrier was able to pull the driver from the car and lead her away from the house through the back yard.

"With the natural gas [emitting] in the air and the possibility of a spark, this could have been devastating," Chief of Police Jerry Vasto wrote to the local postmaster. "David's heroic actions, and with total disregard of his own safety, is commended. He is truly an asset to the community of Atlantic Highlands and to United States Postal Service." **PR**