

# A LEGACY OF DELIVERING MORE THAN JUST THE MAIL



**L**etter carriers have brought mail and packages to communities since our nation was founded, and they still deliver to every door in the country today. But a visit from a letter carrier, then or now, can mean so much more.

Letter carriers have a way of giving more than their job requires. Whether remembering the less fortunate at holiday times, assisting a fallen veteran's family, providing a life-saving donation to help a child or delighting a special teenager who loves to send and receive mail of his own, letter carriers still are giving of themselves as they serve their communities.

This month, *The Postal Record* brings you a few stories about letter carriers who have taken opportunities to deliver joy to the people they serve, and sometimes those they've never met.

## CARRIER PUTS ROOF OVER VET'S FAMILY'S HEADS

**L**etter carrier Terri Reeves didn't just help a family in need, she rallied a community to help the family—and as a result, her actions had a profound impact.

When Reeves heard in September that a man in the northern Indiana town of Elkhart, where she carries mail, had put a “for sale” sign on his cherished classic car so he could pay to replace the leaking roof on his house, she was determined to prevent that.

“He is not selling that car,” Reeves, a member of Branch 547 who is in her 29th year as a letter carrier, told a co-worker. She added, “I don't know how, but we'll do it.”

Blue Shoecraft, the man trying to sell his prized 1956 maroon Chevy Bel Air, had spent many hours working on that car with his son, Justin.

Justin, 28, an Army specialist serving in Afghanistan, was killed by a bomb thrown into his vehicle in August of 2010—a loss that devastated the family.

The car was one of the few things Blue had that connected him with his son. Reeves didn't personally know the family—she'd encountered Blue Shoecraft just once, at a civic plaza ceremony held three years ago to honor Justin's service and sacrifice. But Reeves, who lives across the Michigan border in Union, knew what she had to do.

“He loves cars, and this was all he had left. It's what kept him going. I couldn't let him get rid of it,” she told *The Postal Record*. “He had the memory of going to old car shows with his son. He's lost enough. I just wasn't going to let him lose that.”

So Reeves sprung into action to raise money for a new roof, getting the word out to residents while also seeking help from business owners in town.

Word of mouth proved effective, and things picked up notably when a local



businessman donated a trailer to be raffled off—all the more so when another business owner offered to keep the trailer right outside his company at a well-trafficked location. That guaranteed visibility and provided free advertising.

All 250 raffle tickets were sold within a week; at \$10 apiece, that produced \$2,500. Beyond that, some residents paid for a ticket but didn't accept it.

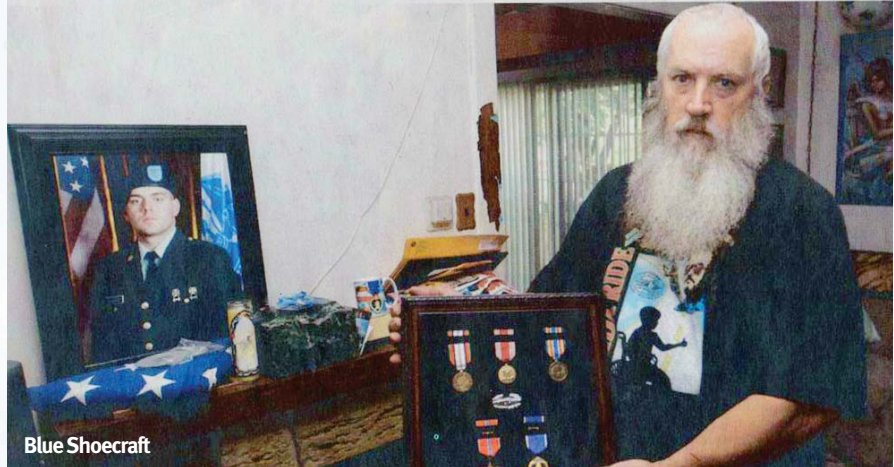
Meanwhile, Reeves approached the owner of a local roofing company, who agreed to do the work at cost—charging only for the cost of supplies but donating time and labor. That shaved off \$4,000, lowering the price for the replacement roof to \$4,600.

Reeves set up an account at a local bank where residents donated sums of \$10 or \$20, along with one \$500 gift. Letter carriers from her station gave about \$500.

“It started snowballing,” she said. A month and a half into the effort, enough had been raised. After two days of work



**Top: The roof on the Shoecraft household  
Above: Justin Shoecraft**



Blue Shoecraft

on the steep roof on the last Monday and Tuesday in October, a brand new roof had replaced the leaky one.

Three days later, on Friday, Nov. 1, the raffle for the trailer was held. It already was a success because the money had been raised.

Donna Shoecraft, who is Justin's mother and Blue's wife, met Terri Reeves for the first time at the raffle—but only after Reeves had finished her route.

"She had a hard time making it. She was still delivering mail," Donna told *The Postal Record*. "But she finally made it. She was so humble. She didn't want any credit for anything.

"And that made me feel humble toward her, because she acted like she didn't do anything—but you know that had to take a lot of heart."

Justin's father, Blue, approached Reeves at the event.

"The drawing was only the second time I've met him in my life," Reeves recounted. "He told me, 'Thank you.' I said, 'Thank you, thank you for letting us do this for you. This is for Justin.'"

The outpouring of support was particularly important to the family, Donna Shoecraft said. In addition to losing their son, she lost her father from a broken heart after his grandson's death, and Blue's mother passed away.

"The last three years have been one bad thing after another, and then the roof started leaking," she said. The community effort sparked by Reeves provided a much-needed emotional lift.

"I give her the credit," Shoecraft said. "She's a great woman."

Reeves prefers to credit those who answered the call to let Blue keep his car.

"I wanted to give people the chance to help him," Reeves said. "You know what; it made him feel good that these people wanted to help him, even people who

didn't know him."

When Blue learned of the effort, he asked if he could help sell raffle tickets. Not only did he end up selling the most, by chance he sold the winning ticket.

"It brought joy to him, to see that people were willing to help him and to be able to talk about his son, because he's been so shy and introverted since his son got killed," Reeves said. "Not only do they not have to worry any more about their roof leaking, it brought him out of his shell. He's coming back to life."

Dave Yoder, who signed on as a letter carrier in 1985 with Reeves, watched his colleague's actions—and impact—from the start.

"She called me and said, 'He is not selling that car. I'm going to put a roof on that house. I'll pay for it if necessary, but he is not selling that car.'"

"This is an amazing story. She spent countless hours on the phone, she went out, she printed up flyers, she had a photo of Justin on that flyer, she contacted a contractor, she got in touch with somebody who has a trailer, she raffled it off, she spent a day at a car show with a bucket taking donations—she did so much for that family.

"She is a girl with a heart of gold."

Yoder already knew that. When his own son, Aaron—who had worked as a temporary employee (TE) before joining the Army—was shot and wounded in Afghanistan 18 months ago, Terri Reeves enlisted people to help with the family's expenses.

"It's just the right thing to do," she says.

For her, it's about helping folks to help others.

"I think if you give people the opportunity," she says, "people will do good things."

It's no coincidence that Donna Shoecraft has reached a similar conclusion: "People are good." **PR**

## TRADITION OF HELPING OTHERS SPREADS

**L**etter carriers are used to serving their customers six days a week. But some branches and individual carriers go way above and beyond delivering for those on their routes and in their communities during the special holiday season.

Carriers from coast to coast take it upon themselves to think of new ways to adopt families, feed patrons, and in general make sure that the underprivileged are not forgotten. The following is only a small sample of how carriers nationwide display their generosity.

Last year, Walterboro, SC Branch 6123 member **Cathy Hiers** set up a “Tree of Hope” at her post office, bringing together city carriers, clerks and managers to provide hope and cheer to those less fortunate.

“Somebody suggested it to me, and I saw other branches in *The Postal Record* do it,” Hiers said. “So I took the initiative to contact the United Way.”

The process begins in November, when Hiers obtains the names and information of individual local children. She then makes up cards with their gender, age, and their Christmas wish lists requesting clothing, toys and other items, and then places them on a tree in the break room at the post office for postal workers to pick up. The employees then deliver their wrapped gifts to the tree.

Once the gifts are collected, Hiers packs up an LLV to bring the gifts to the United Way to be delivered.

Hiers said carriers enjoy having a part in the tree of hope. “It brings them a lot of joy,” she said. “People are already asking me if we’re going to do it again.”

**Reading, PA Branch 458 has been** brightening families’ Christmases for more than a decade.



It started about 10 years ago with a “Dear Santa” letter from a young girl who was originally from Guatemala. All she wanted for Christmas were beds for her brother and sister.

“It kind of broke our hearts,” Branch Vice President **Richie McDonough** said. The carriers worked hard to make sure the family got what they asked for.

The tradition has continued from there. Each year, the branch collects money from about 150 postal workers, carriers, clerks and managers—usually \$3,000 to \$5,000 in total—and sponsors two or three families.

The carriers partner with local church organizations and also use their knowledge of their neighborhood customers to select families they want to help. Sometimes a family includes a veteran of the Iraq or Afghanistan wars; other times, “maybe their house burned down,” McDonough said.

The branch gets a list from the families, and members do their best to fulfill the wish lists. Sometime local businesses, such as a local shoe store, will pitch



Images from the events held in Reading, PA



**Reading, PA Branch 458 makes sure that those in need also get toys, along with useful items.**

in and donate to the effort. “First things first: beds, blankets, stuff like that,” McDonough said, “and always toys.”

Once they have all of their bounty collected, Branch 458 hosts a big party for the families at the union hall. The carriers’ families and others get involved, too. “My son plays Santa Claus,” McDonough said. “Most years, our congressman comes out.”

And it isn’t over once the gifts have been delivered. “What’s nice is that 75 percent of the families keep in contact with us and give us updates on the kids,” McDonough said.

There have been quite a few touching moments over the years, too.

One time, they went to deliver their haul to a home and knocked on the door. “We surprised them and showed up with LLVs, fire trucks and Christmas trees,” McDonough said. When a little girl answered, they saw that there was almost nothing inside. The carriers watched as

she ran to the corner of the empty house and prayed to a Virgin Mary statue expressing her gratitude for the generosity of the carriers.

Another time, when carriers were in line at a toy store, “We were buying stuff and talking to the cashier,” McDonough said. They explained what they were doing for members of the community, and a few of the cashiers took their own holiday bonuses, purchased toys, and came to the Branch 458 union hall for the party.

“It spreads like wildfire,” McDonough said of the group’s endeavor. “Every year, it gets bigger and bigger.”

**Syracuse, NY Branch 134 member Tony Wade** has been helping out his community for more than two and half decades, and has seen the venture grow by leaps and bounds.

Every holiday season for the past 28 years, Wade gathers a small army of carriers and other volunteers to help deliver dinner baskets to families and elderly customers in need on Christmas Eve.

“I love being a mailman and doing what I do in the community,” Wade said.

Wade got his original idea while delivering on the rough streets of the South Side of Syracuse. He decided to test out wearing a Santa suit and passing out candy on his route. It was a big hit.

“I promised myself that if I got laughed off the street, I’d run back to the post office,” he said. “But the response was unbelievable.”

Wade grew up poor as one of 14 siblings in the inner city of Syracuse. “My mom supported us by herself,” he said. “I always said, ‘When I make it in life, I’m going to give back.’”

And give back he has.

After his test round playing Santa, Wade decided to give out a couple of turkey baskets for Christmas dinners the

next year, and the program has snowballed from there.

Wade's effort, along with those of lots of volunteers, including his own children, fellow carriers, friends and local youth groups, has helped to produce about 100 to 150 Christmas dinner baskets each year.

Fundraising is an important part of the process. Wade recruits all the people he can to participate in bow-lathons that raise about \$25 to \$50 per person, as well as donations from people in the community.

Wade also has coached a number of high school sports, and a few of his former football players who have gone on to play in the NFL—including Dorsey Levens of the Green Bay Packers and Tyvon Branch of the Oakland Raiders—have donated their time and/or money along the way.

With the help of others, Wade hand-picks people to receive the baskets. "I can see (the need) out there," Wade said of the people on his route. He also makes sure to try to help the elderly. "A lot of older people don't expect it or look for it," he said. "I try to go to people who really need it."

One year, Wade got a call on Christmas Eve that a family's mother and father had just died in an accident, so he and others quickly gathered a food basket and toys and brought them over.

The food baskets—actually packed in banana boxes—contain about a dozen items, from turkey (or ham upon request) to side dishes to pies and everything in between. "It's everything we would eat ourselves," Wade said.

Wade praises all the volunteers, especially the youngsters, who help out. "The kids are giving up their time and doing a majority of the work," he said.

The packaging of the baskets all takes place at the local post office. The boxes are aligned on the back wall of the break room behind the cases, and the youngsters go to work in an assembly line to fill the boxes.

Once everything is set, Wade—dressed as Santa—and other carriers and children drive around Syracuse in decorated LLVs and rented U-Haul trucks to deliver the baskets on Christmas Eve.

"It's just rewarding and an unreal feeling," Wade said. "Their eyes are going to light up, and you're going to be crying."

**Though planning a community event** of this magnitude sounds daunting, the carriers we interviewed have simple advice.

"There has to be drive and passion inside," Wade said. "Otherwise, why would you do it?"

To get started, "Contact United Way or another charity," suggests Hiers. "Put a tree in the break room."

McDonough agrees. "We check with church charities and shelters in the community," he said.

When it comes to getting people involved, "the more, the merrier," McDonough said.

Hiers cautioned against limiting activities solely to city letter carriers. "It's an officewide effort that brings people together," she said.

Gathering volunteers is very helpful to any community effort. "Try to find family and friends who will back you and support you," Wade said.

And all of the carriers we talked to expressed how overwhelming the energy and effort of their co-workers has been.

"It's amazing, the generosity of our carriers," McDonough said. As NALC's national presidents say, McDonough noted, "We're the eyes and ears of our communities." **PR**



**Above: Walterboro, SC Branch 6123's Cathy Hiers and the Tree of Hope**

**Top: Everyone gets involved to answer the requests from the tree.**



Melissa Titsworth

## GIVING THE GIFT OF LIFE

**L**ike many carriers, **Melissa Titsworth** of Wheeling, IL Branch 4739 frequently had given blood, but she didn't join the national bone marrow registry until a postal manager came to her station and asked employees to join. "Not because I didn't want to, but I just never thought of it," she said. "Boy, am I glad I did."

Titsworth is glad because a few years later she was matched with a sick young girl and had the opportunity to save a life.

Through its "Delivering the Gift of Life" campaign, the Postal Service has helped more than 58,000 postal workers join the national registry of potential donors since 1997. More than 80 of them have been matched with sick people and have become donors like Titsworth. Donations of bone marrow or blood stem cells to a critically ill person can help to treat dozens of diseases, including leukemia and lymphoma.

A patient can accept donations only from a person with similar tissue or their body's immune system will reject the donation, so a registry of potential donors who have provided a tissue sample is essential for matching donors with patients. The more potential donors in the registry, the more likely a match will be found.

Joining the registry back in 2008 was easy—after filling out a questionnaire, swabbing her cheek to collect a tissue sample for testing, and mailing both to the registry, Titsworth was done. She forgot about it until last year, when she learned that she was a possible match with a 5-year-old girl who needed a donation. After she gave permission for further testing and underwent a complete physical to assure she was healthy enough to give, Titsworth learned that the girl and her family had been told that a match had been found.

"This was the first time it really sunk in that I was this family's hope. They

were now made aware that there was somebody out there that could save their little girl," she said. "I couldn't stop thinking about this poor family and how it must have felt to have a child that was sick and how it must have felt to know that her only hope for survival came from a perfect stranger."

"It made me ecstatic that I could possibly save their child," Titsworth added. "I also couldn't help but think of my own children, Jacob, age 6, and Mackenzie, age 12, and how horrible it would be if they were sick."

Last March, Titsworth went to the University of Wisconsin Hospital in Madison and had surgery to remove marrow from her hip bone. While she was under anesthesia, a special needle was used to penetrate the bone and extract marrow. This is one of two ways marrow donors give their life-saving contributions—some undergo a non-surgical procedure in which cells are extracted from the blood using a machine.

"When I woke up in the recovery room, the surgical team literally applauded," she said. "I was thanked multiple times and told over and over how great I was for helping this little girl. That brought tears to my eyes. I was again overwhelmed with emotion. I didn't realize on my own what a big deal this was."

Titsworth was discharged that day. "The next day I was very stiff and in pain but nothing I couldn't tolerate," she said. "The day after, I was still pretty stiff but not in very much pain. I was up walking around and moving about." She took a week to recover at home and another week of light duty on the job.

"When my co-workers found out what I had done, I got some different responses. Some were shocked that I would do this for a stranger and some told me what a great thing I did," she said. "One of

my co-workers still tells me almost daily that I'm his hero just about every time we cross paths in the office," she said. "I didn't expect any responses like that."

Because postal workers come from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, their participation in the bone marrow registry is especially valuable, since patients are more likely to match someone of their own race or ethnic heritage, and there is a tremendous need for more minority donors.

Like Titsworth, most postal workers join the national bone marrow registry at bone marrow drives and other events. If you haven't joined yet, you can get more

information about the bone marrow registry and how to join at [bethematch.org](http://bethematch.org).

"Many of my co-workers are already on the registry," Titsworth said, "but there have been so many new employees since 2008, and it would be great if we could get them on, too."

Titsworth has not met the little girl who received her marrow because the registry's regulations require a waiting period before donors and recipients can make contact, with consent from both. "I would love to meet this precious little girl," Titsworth said. "I feel like she will always be a part of me now—or I will be a part of her." **PR**

## MESSAGES OF FRIENDSHIP

**T**he carriers of Hopkins, MN Branch 2942 are committed to going the extra mile for customer service. Colin Tietz gives them a chance to show just how far their commitment goes.

Sixteen-year-old Colin was born with Lowe Syndrome (LS), a genetic condition that usually brings vision and kidney problems, cognitive delays and autism-like behavior, among other symptoms. In 2008, Colin's family moved to Eden Prairie, MN, a suburb of Minneapolis, from nearby Richfield. Their new home had a curbside mailbox with delivery from a truck, and Colin loves trucks. He began greeting the letter carrier and leaving notes in the mailbox for him, and was thrilled to get a response.

Five years later, Colin still leaves messages in his mailbox nearly every day, and almost without fail, his current carrier, **Steve Scheid**, leaves a response. Sometimes Colin waits at the box, and Steve stops to chat.

"He's a great kid," Scheid said. "He asks me for two jokes a day." Scheid looks up kid-friendly jokes on the Internet and puts them in his responses. "A lot of the time he's waiting for me at the mailbox."

"He is my best friend," Colin said of Scheid.

Scheid is following a tradition upheld by the three other carriers who have worked on the route since Colin moved to Eden Prairie—**John Bradley, John Webb** and **Rick Kittleston**—to take the time to make Colin's day, every day.

Whenever one of them moved on to a new assignment, they made sure the new carrier knew what to expect when they went to Colin's mailbox, Colin's mother, Mary Tietz, said.

"Each time, one or another would stop me and let me know, with a tear in his eye, that he no longer would be able to chat with Colin each day," she said, "but that they had informed the upcoming carrier of the situation and not to worry—





**From l: Steve Scheid, Rick Kittleson, John Bradley and John Webb stand with their friend Colin Tietz.**

the next person would carry on the tradition.”

The Tietz family had moved to the area to be closer to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, where Colin gets treatment, and to other family members. Soon after the move, Colin spotted Bradley delivering the mail to the family’s roadside mailbox in his LLV.

“He came running after the truck, saying he loved my truck,” Bradley said of that first encounter with Colin.

“The first time Colin saw a truck pull up to our mailbox at the curb, he was delighted and intrigued,” Mary Tietz said. Colin began leaving notes for Bradley soon after, and Bradley and Webb, who was a T-6 on the route at the time, before taking it as a regular carrier, answered them. They left the route, and the tradition, to T-6 Kittleson and Schied.

“We all tried to stay connected and keep a rapport with the kid,” Bradley said. “It was a very neat thing.”

Since he took over the route two and a half years ago, Schied’s replies to Colin’s notes in the mailbox have answered Colin’s questions about his

hobbies and interests, provided jokes or riddles, and sometimes fulfilled Colin’s requests for edible treats. “His favorite snack is pizza-flavored Pringles,” Schied said.

Colin writes his notes each morning and puts them in the mailbox, sometimes making him late for school. “He simply can’t leave home until he is sure his note will be placed in that box,” his mother said. When he suffered a kidney infection last winter and was too weak to go to the mailbox, he still wrote the notes every day. “ ‘Don’t forget to put the flag up,’ he’d call as we put our boots on to delivery his important message or riddle,” she said.

Colin often asks Schied what he had for lunch or whether he took the truck through a drive-through window. He brags about his achievements in Special Olympics, where he plays golf and bowls (his father, Mike, helps as a coach). While Colin’s verbal abilities are below average, he’s a good writer and reader, so the conversation by written correspondence works well for him.

Schied downplays the effort he puts into pleasing Colin. “It feels good,” he said, “but I’m not doing anything out of the ordinary, just answering his letters.”

But he has done more than answer Colin’s letters.

When Colin asked Schied for a birthday present—a DVD with episodes of “Big Comfy Couch,” an old TV show he used to watch—Schied learned it was no longer produced. But he searched until he found it.

“Colin jumped up and down at the mailbox when he saw the nicely wrapped gift awaiting him that day,” Mary Tietz said.

Schied has also come to Colin's house for his birthday party and a Halloween celebration. "Steve is always so patient and generous with Colin and we love getting a chance to really talk with him," Mary Tietz said. Before the last party, Colin was so excited he asked over and over when Schied was arriving. "The other guests were chopped liver next to Steve," Tietz said.

By giving Colin their attention, Schied and the other carriers have even helped the Tietz family deal with Colin's challenges when the carriers aren't around.

"One of the other major aspects of LS is behavioral challenges," Mary Tietz said. "Although Colin can have a delightful sense of humor and be quite charming, he is also prone to temper tantrums and physical outbursts both at home and school. His dad and I are very thankful for his relationship with Steve and the mail carriers before him, as it has always been a great motivator for Colin and such a positive reinforcement when he doesn't want to comply with daily expectations."

To satisfy Colin's fascination with trucks, Schied took him on a special tour of his postal station, letting him watch the trucks at work. Then the letter carrier, who is also a retired firefighter, thrilled Colin even more with a visit to a nearby fire station to see the trucks there.

Colin now has his own postal truck—a detailed, child-size replica of an LLV built on a golf cart, complete with working lights, horn, fan and stereo with an iPod connection. Colin's family and friends built it as their version of a "Make a Wish" gift for terminally ill children.

Lowe Syndrome has caused Colin's kidney function to deteriorate, caus-

ing other medical problems, including anemia and weight loss. If the situation gets worse, Colin may need a kidney transplant. Lowe Syndrome is not curable, and people born with LS can face many medical challenges that shorten their life expectancy, but advances in treatment may be making the quality and span of their lives better.

It's difficult to predict Colin's future, but the Tietzes are focusing on today as they ready themselves for changes in his conditions.

"We are very grateful that, at this time, he is feeling good and able to make it through a full day of school and play," Mary Tietz said. "We try hard to pray for the future, but prepare for the changes to come."

Thanks to some special letter carriers at Branch 2942, the Tietz family knows Colin is living his life day to day by enjoying a small, but special, treat, six days a week. **PR**

THIS WEEKEND I'M WORKING AT THE POST OFFICE AND DELIVERING NEWS-PAPERS IN THE EARLY MORNING.

2 - JOKES -

WHAT DID THE PONY SAY WHEN IT HAD A SORE THROAT? (HORSE)  
I'M SORRY I'M A LITTLE HORSE.

HOW DO YOU CATCH A SQUIGREL?  
CLIMB UP A TREE AND ACT LIKE A NUT!

DEAR MAILMAN WHAT ARE YOU DOING THIS WEEKEND?  
THIS WEEKEND I'M GOING TO MY BOWLING PRACTICE AT PARK TAVERN? I HAVE 1 JOKE FOR YOU HERE'S ONE: KNOCK KNOCK! WHO'S THERE? BUTTER. BUTTER WHO? I BUTTER NOT TELL YOU!  
THANKS COLIN !!  
DO YOU GET IT?  
CAN YOU TELL ME 2 JOKES?

A letter Colin left for Rick Kittleson (above) and Rick's response (left)