

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.

Carrier protects the streets

On July 12, 2013, San Diego Branch 70 member **Crisanto De Guzman** was delivering mail into condo mailboxes. "I heard a guy yelling," he said. His customer, Mrs. Vandenberg, had just run across the street and seemed to be frightened.

A man in his early 20s who appeared to be intoxicated was spewing obscenities at top volume and making threatening motions at anyone who passed. "He almost got run over," De Guzman said.

"There was a couple standing to the side warning passers-by to watch out for the guy and they claimed that they were especially worried about solitary females," the woman's husband, Ronald Vandenberg, wrote to *The Postal Record*.

A few passers-by were calling 911. Vandenberg and his wife had proceeded along the street, and the man followed them, continuing to shout obscenities and threats.

The man had then climbed over a fence separating pedestrians from trolleys and, as a trolley passed, "the man ran up to it, pretending to pound on the side of the cars and then did some type of a dance in the middle of the street next to the passing trolley," Vandenberg said. "When the trolley passed to the north he returned, by again climbing over the fence, and continued his

obscurities and threats."

That's when the man spotted De Guzman and Vandenberg's wife. The man then charged across the street and attacked the carrier, hitting Deguzman in the face and head and trying to steal his hat.

De Guzman then wrestled the man to the ground "à la Chuck Norris," the carrier said. He then held the man down until four police cruisers arrived and officers handcuffed the man.

"It is our belief that Carrier De Guzman's actions protected my wife and likely others that this guy would have attacked later had he not been taken down and arrested," Vandenberg said. "When he is not protecting the public, he is a wonderful mail carrier and we are so pleased that he is our mail carrier."

De Guzman brushed off heroics, saying he was just protecting his community. "It's just an instinct," the 24-year postal veteran said.

'If not you, who will?'

One October day in 2012, Palm Springs, CA Branch 4149 member **Frank Frary** was delivering mail on his walking route when he noticed smoke filling up the home of an elderly resident who lives alone. Frary knocked loudly on the doors and windows, and called out to see if the resident was home.

Not hearing any response, he tried to contact a neighbor, but no one was home. Frary grabbed his phone to call the security gate guard to request assistance. The guard on duty contacted the fire department, which responded to the house within minutes.

When firefighters entered the house, they found an unattended pot of food. "The customer had left the stove on," Frary said.

The homeowner expressed her appreciation to Frary the next day; and later, the local city council presented Frary with a City Hero Award. "Frank



Crisanto De Guzman



Palm Springs, CA Branch 4149 member Frank Frary was interviewed by local TV news for his heroic role in helping put out a fire on his route in January.

always brings a calming influence into our neighborhood,” the woman told the Postal Service.

But that’s not all.

On Jan. 28, as Frary was on his way home from work, “I saw this black smoke from far away,” he said.

Smoke was coming from a chimney, but “there was nobody there,” the carrier said. So, he pulled over and found the residents who lived there.

“I asked if everybody was OK, and then I jumped the fence,” Frary said.

A man from the house said that everyone there was OK, and the carrier asked him if 911 had been called. The man said yes.

In the meantime, Frary decided to get to worktake action.

“I went outside and grabbed a hose,” he said.

The fire was coming from a chimney that was next to a barbecue outside connected to a gas line, and wood near it was feeding the flames. “I closed the gas line and started hosing,” Frary said.

Another woman in the house began moving furniture away from the chimney. “There was so much smoke inside the house,” the carrier said. “She was in shock.”

Frary said that the next thing he knew, firefighters were on the scene and were telling him to get out.

No injuries were reported, though Cal Fire officials said after an investigation that the blaze had caused about \$1 million in damage.

Frary, a 26-year postal veteran, said that running to help was his first instinct. “I felt I needed to do something,” he said. “If not you, who will?”

Eye on the elderly



Walterboro, SC Branch 6123 member Mike Savery delivered his customer Sherman Ford’s mail to him while he was recovering.

Walterboro, SC Branch 6123 member **Mike Savery** noticed on Feb. 7, 2013, that his octogenarian customer Sherman Ford had not col-

lected his mail for a few days, which was uncommon. “He’s a very sweet man,” Savery said. “He meets me every day at the mailbox.” Sometimes the man leaves for lunch with a friend or to run errands, so “I thought I was just missing him,” the carrier said. But Savery was concerned, so he knocked on the door, but receiving no response, he placed a call to 911. Responding officers entered the house. They found Ford unconscious after having suffered a stroke and took him to the hospital, where Savery went to visit him. The two-year postal veteran doesn’t think what he did was a big deal, though. “All in a day’s work,” he said. “I’m glad I could help him.”

While delivering an Express Mail item on Jan. 16, 2013, Tampa, FL Branch 599 member **Phillip Harrell** heard

someone’s voice. “I kept thinking I was hearing, ‘Help!’ ” he said. So he turned off his truck and listened, and discovered it was the elderly customer across the street. He called 911 and then went to the home to find his customer, Ms. Truitt, on the floor at the entrance of her residence. The carrier stayed with Truitt to comfort her until the medical team arrived. “I kept telling her, ‘They’re coming,’” the 28-year postal veteran said. Harrell was later informed that Truitt had suffered a stroke and was undergoing rehab. But he doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I did what everybody else would have done,” he said.

On June 20, 2013, Columbus Junction, IA Branch 5026 member **Dan Heyvaert** noticed that the mail was not being picked up from the home of an elderly customer, Laurita Ross, which was not

normal for her. “I started to walk away, but then the wheels started turning in my head,” he said. When he looked inside the home, he also noticed that Ross’ cats did not have food or water. After the second loop of his route, Heyvaert saw a co-worker and mentioned the situation, and they decided to call police. When officers went and checked on Ross, they found her on the floor with a broken hip. She was first taken to the hospital, then later to a nursing home to recover. Heyvaert doesn’t think he’s any sort of hero, though. “I just followed my conscience and did what I hope someone would do for me,” the 20-year postal veteran said. “I was just a concerned citizen and wanted to make sure nothing was wrong with her.” **PR**

Neighborhood watch



Wally Deleon

While delivering mail to an outdoor mail center at an apartment complex on Saturday, July 20, 2013, **Wally Deleon** noticed unfamiliar men mill around, then go into an apartment. The Central Florida Branch 1091 member called 911, saying he was concerned that an apartment was being burglarized. He also saw a woman driving around outside and looking suspicious. “She must have been the getaway driver,” Deleon said. The resident of the apartment in question was outside playing with her two small children. Deleon advised the resident not to return to her apartment until the deputy sheriff arrived. Meanwhile, the suspects fled the area. Once the sheriff’s department officers were on the scene, Deleon gave his statement and a description of the suspects and the vehicle. Officers used Deleon’s information to apprehend the suspects nearby. The carrier was commended for helping to deter a crime, ensuring the safety of the mother and her children, and assisting in the apprehension of the suspects. The stolen items were soon recovered. Deleon, an 18-year postal veteran, downplayed his

role. He said of his customers that he was just “happy to give them closure.”

Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Joe Hansen** was delivering his park-and-loop route on March 14, 2013, a cold and damp day, when he saw a 6-year-old girl get off a school bus. “She was by herself,” Hansen said. She looked confused, and approached the letter carrier. Hansen questioned her, and found out that she had mistakenly taken the wrong bus home, going to her father’s home instead of her mother’s, and the father was not home. She didn’t have any phone numbers memorized. The carrier had the girl walk with him as he delivered mail until he found a neighbor who recognized her and offered to look after her until she could be reunited with her parent. The girl’s father arrived 20 minutes later and was relieved when he found out that Hansen had made sure his daughter was safe. “What if Joe hadn’t been there and she decided to walk somewhere or was picked up by a stranger? I cried because she is my oldest and I was not prepared for this,” he wrote to the local post office. “Thank you, Joe, for going out of your way to make sure my baby girl is safe!” Hansen doesn’t think he’s a hero, but said that he’s glad the people on his route find him approachable. “It’s not really a big deal,”

the 19-year postal veteran said. “Every day, there’s a mailman helping somebody out.”

While making a delivery one day in mid-December 2013, Fall River, MA Branch 51 member **Edie Lamond-Sylvia** was on the porch of a house when she noticed that the elderly resident was sitting in her car in the driveway. “I looked at her and she had a young boy, about 9 or 10, in the car with her, but she pointed to the mailbox motioning for me to put it in the box,” she said. “The boy was trying to take his seat belt off and as I left, he ran over to get the mail from the box. He gave her the mail when he got back in the car.” Seeing that everything seemed OK, Lamond-Sylvia went on to deliver to the neighbor. From her rear-view mirror, the carrier could see the woman back down the driveway, park in front of her home, and then hurry to bring her mail into the house. “I noticed her reverse lights were on and could see the young boy sitting in the passenger seat by himself,” the carrier said. “I jumped out of my truck, ran over to the driver’s side of the vehicle, opened it and jumped in, and yes, the car was in reverse. I then put it in park.” The



Edie Lamond-Sylvia

woman was coming back out from the house, so the carrier told her she had left her car in reverse and it might have rolled backward. She said, “Oh, I’m getting so forgetful.” Once Lamond-Sylvia saw that the child was OK, she continued on with her

route. She brushed off any superlatives, though. “I didn’t save anyone’s life. I probably just prevented an accident from happening,” the 27-year postal veteran said. “I just happened to be in the right place at the right time.”

On Feb. 6, 2013, as South-east Pennsylvania Merged Branch 725 member **Nicholas Palasch** delivered a package to a customer’s front door, he smelled something peculiar at the front porch. “I detected the odor of natural gas,” he said. “No one was home,” Palasch said. “I knocked.” So, the carrier called the customer, Thomas Palmer, to notify him of the odor, but he didn’t answer. Later, the carrier called him again. In following up, Palmer contacted the gas company, which sent out an agent to investigate. They declared an emergency because of what turned out to be a major gas leak and sent six workers, numerous trucks and a backhoe to fix the gas line that ran through the house’s foundation. Palasch, a 17-year-postal veteran, said that it was “a rather simple story,” and brushed off any claims of heroics. “The fact that a crisis was averted seems like it makes me undeserving of being called a hero,” he said. But his customer disagrees. “I am writing to recommend my postman, Nick Palasch, for an appropriate award/reward or official commendation for his dedication and diligence in potentially averting a major catastrophe,” Palmer wrote to both the postmaster general and Sen. Robert Casey Jr. (D-PA). “We are indebted to Nick Palasch for his concerns in calling this hazard to our attention.”

Pulling double duty

South Florida Branch 1071 member **Linda Evans** was on the route she's had for more than a decade one day in the fall of 2012 when she noticed that a nonagenarian patron, Bill Coward, had not picked up his mail or newspapers for two days.

"I know my people," Evans said. "I know what's unusual and what's not."

Evans told herself, "He must be sleeping in late today," and continued on her route, making a mental note to check in later. But when Evans saw two newspapers the next day, she knew something was wrong. "I peeked in through his front window, and there he was," she said. "I freaked."

Evans called 911, and the operator asked the carrier if she was able to get inside. So, she went up to the door and used some force on it. "My adrenaline was going so fast," she said. "I yanked on that door so hard."

She found Coward lying on the floor. He was dehydrated and had trouble breathing. The operator walked Evans through CPR until EMTs came. A paramedic told Evans he wouldn't have given Coward another three hours to live had she not found him when she did.

Evans went to see Coward in the hospital, and she was also able to track down his nephew, who was his

only living relative.

The carrier said it was only natural to help. "On your route, you know what's right and what's wrong," the 28-year postal veteran said.

But that's not all.

A few months later, on Jan. 8, 2013, Evans noticed a 5-year-old boy get off a school bus and start to walk by himself. Evans recognized the child as one of her customers, and knew that he was usually with his older brother.

She thought that maybe she just didn't see the brother, but when she looked closer, the younger child was indeed by himself and was attempting to cross a very busy street.

"I can't tell you how many bad, gross things I've seen on this road while delivering mail," Evans said. "I couldn't get out of my truck fast enough."

She ran over to the boy to help guard him as he crossed the street to his target location: a 7-Eleven.

The boy knew the carrier, and so Evans asked him what he was doing, and he said he wanted candy and that he didn't know where his brother was. The carrier told the shop clerk that she knew where this boy belonged and asked him to watch him while she drove over to the child's house.

No one was home.

The carrier called authorities for help, who in turn contacted the boy's parents to pick him up. Upon arriving, the parents thanked Evans profusely for watching out for their son. "The mother was freaking out," Evans said.

The boy's mother had apparently called the school to hold back both the boys from getting on the school bus because she had a flat tire and wasn't going to be able to meet them at the bus stop. Due to miscommunication, the younger of the boys got onto the bus.

"I couldn't have been happier in my heart to see him back in the arms of his mom and dad," Evans said of her young customer.

Neighbors have recognized Evans for going above and beyond her assigned duties. "Mrs. Evans should be commended for her honesty and dedication not only to her position but for the people she so graciously serves," customer Carol Gerena wrote to the postmaster general. "I'm happy to have her as my mail carrier."

Evans doesn't think she's a hero, though. "I care about my people," she said. "When you see someone in need of help, it's the natural thing to do."

Fire and rescue

Columbus, OH Branch 78 member **Jim Rurik** was delivering mail along his route on March 21, 2013, when he noticed smoke pouring from an apartment. "I shut off my vehicle and ran across the parking lot," he said. As he rushed over, he saw one neighbor on the phone, so he made sure that the neighbor was calling 911. Rurik noted that the smoke was coming from the first floor of the building. Then he saw a resident run out of the burning apart-

ment with his pant leg on fire. "He was screaming," the carrier said. Rurik commanded the man to stop, drop and roll, then he took off his postal jacket to smother the remaining flames on the customer. "It's just one of those things. You react," he told the local ABC TV news affiliate. Once he felt the customer was going to be OK, Rurik ran into the building and knocked on doors to notify residents and try to get people out. "When I came back out,

the fire department had arrived," Rurik said. Firefighters say the burn victim, who had just moved in that day, had tried to start a fire in his fireplace with lighter fluid. He suffered burns to his leg, but no one else was hurt and no other apartment units were damaged. Rurik maintains that he's not a hero. "I really didn't think I did that much," the 29-year postal veteran said. "Other people would have done the same thing. I was just the first one there." **PR**

Checking up on a bad feeling



Robin Spezia

In mid-December 2012, Oak Brook, IL Branch 825 member **Robin Spezia** was delivering mail when she noticed newspapers, parcels and mail accumulating on the porch of elderly customer Mr. Miller's house. Since it was close to the weekend and also Christmas-

time, the carrier suspected that he may have gone out of town.

But by Monday, she became really concerned when there was still no sign of him. "I went and knocked on the door and called his name," Spezia

said. She could hear noises coming from inside, but they were unintelligible.

"I walked around the house to see if I could see in," she said. She was unable to get a glimpse inside, so she walked back around to the front. During this time, she again heard noises that she couldn't quite make out.

Spezia called her supervisors at the post office and said, "I have a bad feeling," and asked them to call police for a wellness check.

When EMTs came, they discovered that Miller had suffered a stroke and was severely dehydrated. The man was taken to the hospital and was expected to recover.

Miller's daughter lives out of town and later came by the post office to thank Spezia.

But the 10-year postal veteran said she's not a hero; it's just her job as a carrier to be kind, thoughtful and aware of your surroundings. "I con-

sider him more of a hero for surviving," she said.

Spezia's heroics don't end there. Just a few weeks later, the carrier had another opportunity to help a customer in medical need.

She was delivering mail in the same neighborhood and saw an elderly man walking across a yard toward her. Spezia noted that the man's behavior was odd, and called over to him asking if he was all right. The man asked her to call 911.

She asked him what was wrong, and he replied that he was having a seizure. The man began gasping for air, and his eyes rolled back. Spezia grabbed him and he slumped against her, so she helped him to his knees as the seizures continued, and laid him on the ground while monitoring his breathing until the ambulance arrived.

Spezia takes her actions in stride. "I care about people here," she said. "I'm just glad I was there to do something." **PR**

Neighborhood watch

Rutland, VT Branch 495 member **Chris Greeno** was delivering his route on Feb. 3 when he heard what sounded like a woman's voice. "I heard screaming and calls for help," he said. The carrier couldn't see the woman, but he knew the calls were coming from up the street about 50 yards, so he headed there. To his horror, he saw that a large, aggressive dog had pinned a woman up against a stone wall near the sidewalk and close to a river. The dog was growling, barking and lunging toward the customer. The carrier saw that the woman had a cane, and he soon realized

that the woman was visually impaired and it was a guide cane. She was attempting to use it to beat the animal away. As Greeno headed over to her, he reached for his dog mace in his bag, but quickly realized that he didn't have it. The woman's small dog had wrapped its own leash around the woman's leg as it cowered in fear of the bigger dog. That dog continued its aggressive behavior, so Gree-



Chris Greeno

no had to use his satchel to fend off the dog. "I got the dog's attention on me and away from her," he said. Almost five minutes passed with the dog continuing to lunge forward and then back

off. The dog's owner heard the commotion and appeared, but this only seemed to enrage the dog further. Greeno asked the owner to back off momentarily. Eventually the owner had to dive

onto the dog in the middle of the road to tackle it into submission. No one suffered any injuries, but "she was pretty traumatized," Greeno said. Once the woman was back on her feet and steady, she told Greeno that she had lost track of her location. "Being blind, she could hear the river but didn't know where she was in proximity," he said. The carrier walked the woman safely to her destination. The 23-year postal veteran doesn't think he's a hero, though. "I was lucky to have been delivering mail at the time," Greeno said. "I'm glad that I was there." **PR**

Help on the way

On June 4, 2013, Worcester, MA Branch 12 member **Robert George** was pulling out of a church parking lot after making a delivery when “I heard this thunderous boom,” he said. About 50 yards up the street, he saw that a large gravel truck had hit an embankment and then plowed through a wall in the front yard of a house. “It so happened that my son was coming by at the same time,” George said. The son had been traveling in the opposite direction and witnessed the accident; he also ran across the street toward the scene. George looked inside the vehicle and saw a man inside. “He kind

til an ambulance arrived and took him to a local hospital. The house’s facade was melted by the flames, but no one was inside the home at the time. But George doesn’t claim any heroics. “It was just the right place at the right time,” the 21-year postal veteran said.

Westchester Merged, NY Branch 693 member James DeToma was on his route delivering mail one day this winter when he saw his customer Faith Sparks run out of her house.

“I noticed she was upset,” DeToma said. He watched as Sparks frantically knocked on the neighbor’s door. DeToma asked the woman if he could be of assistance. Sparks replied that her husband, Chris, was choking. She had called 911 and was awaiting the first responders but did not know what else to do. DeToma, a volunteer firefighter with CPR training, rushed over to Chris Sparks. “I set my mail on the floor and proceeded to do the Heimlich maneuver.” But the food didn’t dislodge, and the carrier could see that Sparks was unable to breathe. DeToma tried again. After this second attempt, the obstruction was cleared, and the man was able to breathe. Paramedics soon arrived to help. “I picked up the mail, made sure he was OK, and resumed my route,” the carrier said. Faith Sparks called the post office the next day to



Postal customer Chris Sparks (second from r), along with his family, thanked Westchester Merged, NY Branch 693 member James DeToma for saving his life when he was choking.

of rolled out of the truck,” he said. “Then the truck started to be engulfed in flames.” George and his son quickly pulled the man away from his vehicle to safety and called 911. Within minutes, the truck was completely overtaken by flames. “He could walk, but I think he was in shock,” George said. They stayed with the driver un-



Worcester, MA Branch 12 member Robert George (inset) helped save a driver whose truck crashed through a wall in front of a house and became engulfed in flames. The scene is pictured above.

express her gratitude, saying that DeToma had saved the life of her husband. Though the eight-year postal veteran called the incident “an out-of-body experience,” he maintains that he was just in the right place at the right time. “I just happened to be walking out when he needed help,” he said. “I did it because I have the training.”

Mobile, AL Branch 469 member Alecia McCall was carrying her route as usual in early February when an elderly customer, whom she normally talked to every day, came out of his house a bit more animated than usual. “He was speaking in a manner in which I could tell something was wrong, but I wasn’t sure what,” McCall said. She tried to talk to him for a few minutes to figure out what was going on. After their conversation, he proceeded to go back into the house. “He just wasn’t himself. It wasn’t his normal behavior,” she said. “He was stumbling and staggering and almost fell off the porch.” The carrier knew she couldn’t leave him that way. So, she stopped at the neighbors’ house across the street and asked them to

check on the man, because something just didn’t seem right. After she knew the man was going to be taken care of, McCall continued on her route. The customer’s daughter called the post office soon after to say that McCall was a lifesaver. The man had to be rushed to the hospital by ambulance due to a low blood-sugar level, and he was on the verge of slipping into a diabetic coma. “I saw his daughter later that week and she said, ‘You know you’re a hero, right?’” McCall, a four-year postal veteran, said she wasn’t a hero. “I wouldn’t say that; I just know I would want someone to do the same for me.” **PR**

