

## 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](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, like the mail, comes in many packages—think of police officers or firefighters. But for some citizens in need of assistance, their heroes come in the form of concerned letter carriers.

Letter carriers are members of nearly every community in this nation and know when something is wrong. Spotting fires and injuries, they 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

On June 17, Gainesville, FL Branch 1025 member **Alan Symonette** was delivering a parcel on his route when, he said, "I heard a smash." He then heard another crash, after the squealing of tires. He stepped out of the hallway of the complex and realized that an SUV had hit multiple vehicles and then driven over a curb at high speed and into a retention pond. The carrier immediately went to the bank of the pond and removed his shoes.

"I swam out to the car," he said.

Symonette and an apartment maintenance man, Marcus Lady, checked on the driver, Gerald Bacoats, and saw that the car's airbags had deployed. "He was awake and sitting in the car, but he wasn't 'with it,'" the carrier said.

The momentum of the SUV had carried it out to the middle of the pond. The men at first tried to pull the SUV back toward the embankment and into shallow water, but they were treading water and couldn't find their footing.

Symonette and Lady searched for a way to get inside the vehicle, but weren't successful. Lady went to get a rope while the carrier treaded water and tried to free Bacoats from the sink-



Gainesville, FL Branch 1025 member Alan Symonette (inset) helped out when a driver's car crashed into a local pond.

ing vehicle. At this point, a bystander, Russell Gault, also entered the water. The SUV was flooding and sinking even deeper.

Finally, Symonette, Lady and Gault found their way in through the driver's open window. Symonette held the unconscious man's head up and out of the water while trying to dislodge his legs, which seemed to be stuck under the gas pedal.

"There was nothing to lose," Symonette said. "I got in the car and started yanking him by the seat of his pants."

Lady was pulling on the driver's arms and chest trying to wrangle him from the driver's seat. Just as the car was almost completely filled with water, together they pulled Bacoats out of his vehicle and onto the shore.

Bacoats was alert and responsive by the time they reached shore. He was taken to the hospital and treated for minor injuries. Police said Bacoats had lost consciousness after apparently having some sort of medical episode, which caused him to hit two vehicles and then crash into the pond.

When Symonette saw that the driver would be fine, he put his shoes back on and resumed delivery on his route.

"I thought it could have been the worst day of my life, watching this happen," the 28-year postal veteran said. "I feel fortunate that I was able to do what I did."

## Carrier jumps in during dangerous dog fight

As Syracuse, NY Branch 134 member **Rich Blasland** was going about his route on May 22, he heard someone screaming. He looked closer to see what looked like a pit bull being aggressive toward his customer, Nicole, and her dog, Toby.

"She tried to get the dog off and got bit. There was blood everywhere," Blasland said. "I was scared of this dog. It latched on to this other dog's neck."

He began kicking the dog and spray-

ing it with his dog spray to get it away from the customer while he called 911. "No one was coming outside. I was screaming at the top of my lungs," the carrier said.

Eventually, the owner of the larger dog came outside. "It was a long time, it felt like," Blasland said. The owner tried to grab the dog by the collar, but the collar came off and the dog was free to roam once more and to attack the smaller dog again. Blasland tried to block the dog and keep him away from the woman and her dog until the police arrived.

The larger dog apparently had jumped through a window when it saw Nicole and Toby walk by. Nicole ended up getting 20 stitches due to the dog bite, and Toby had injuries as well.

"Thanks to Rich's unselfish actions, they were able to get the attack dog away," Nicole's mother, Diane Raterman, wrote to the editor of a local newspaper. "Our family has a few



**Rich Blasland**

former postal clerks and carriers in it, and we are all thankful for Rich's actions."

But Blasland said that anybody would have done it. "I'm glad I was there to help Nicole," the 12-year postal veteran said, adding that, "I'm a big animal lover, so I just wanted to make sure the dog didn't get hurt again." **PR**

## Fire and rescue

On the morning of April 5, a postal transportation truck arrived at the Franklin, MA post office to unload working mail. With the truck parked, the driver turned the vehicle off and got out—and then the engine compartment caught fire. Southeast Massachusetts Merged Branch 18 member **Thomas Rockwell** immediately sprang into action. He grabbed the facility's fire extinguisher and doused the fire as best he could. "It was an oily, greasy type of fire," the carrier said. Rockwell informed his fellow employees of the situation and called 911. The carrier then helped remove cages of mail off the truck and secure them in the building. Just when all seemed under control, the engine fire flared up again. "It kept popping back up," he said. "It

would go out and come back up again." In a calm manner, Rockwell instructed all employees to get away from the truck and he reached for a second fire extinguisher to try to contain the fire until the fire department arrived. The USPS recognized Rockwell's heroic act, saying that he saved the mail, the post office and, most importantly, the lives of his colleagues and customers. Rockwell didn't think his actions were particularly heroic. "You just react," the eight-year postal veteran said. "It's one of those things; you just do your job."

On Oct. 2, 2013, Cedar Rapids, IA Branch 373 member **Mark Behrens** was stopped at a park point on his route when he saw flames coming from an upstairs deck of a house. "It was like

little firecrackers going off," he said. The resident had been grilling outside and forgotten about his lunch, and the latticework of the porch had caught fire. The carrier tried to notify the resident, but he couldn't reach anyone. Behrens notified the neighbors and had them call 911. The neighbors then grabbed a hose and began spraying water to try to put out the flames until firefighters arrived a few minutes later. Behrens was commended for his prompt actions. Fortunately, the damage to the house was only superficial. Behrens said his actions were no big deal. "We just happen to be in the neighborhood every day. I'd rather be known more as alert than being a hero," the 19-year postal veteran said. "Anybody walking along would have done the same thing." **PR**

## Eye on the elderly

One morning in April, Santa Ana, CA Branch 737 member **Eddie Meneses** rang the doorbell to notify his elderly customer, Maria Camarillo, that she had a parcel, and then he left it on her porch. The woman usually leaves packages for her daughter to pick up, but this time she went to get it herself. Instead of taking a step to reach the parcel, Camarillo bent over and tumbled onto the porch. Since she knew that Meneses would be coming back around the bend in the street just a few minutes later, she waited patiently, even while her arm was bleeding profusely. When she caught a glimpse of the carrier, she yelled, “Eddie!” Meneses heard his name called and ran back to Camarillo’s house. “I picked her up and walked her back into her house,” the carrier said. Once Meneses had

helped her to her chair, he moistened some napkins and applied pressure to the woman’s bleeding arm, and then called her daughter, Christy Hance, who was nearby running

some errands. Meneses waited with Camarillo until Hance returned home, and then the patron was taken to the hospital for treatment. Meneses checked in on Camarillo the next day. Camarillo told the carrier, “Eddie, you saved my life. You were so calm and you really cared about me. I will forever be grateful.” In

return, Meneses told her, “Mary, I was just doing my job and delivering the mail. I was glad that I could help you and I would do it again in a heartbeat.” But the 20-year postal veteran doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I was just doing what anyone else should have done,” he said.

**R**ochester, NY Branch 210 member **Spencer Heeler** was driv-



**Santa Ana, CA Branch 737 member Eddie Meneses was credited with helping to save the life of his customer, Maria Camarillo.**

ing along his route on Nov. 7, 2013, when he heard a woman cry out. “It was a nice fall day,” he said. “I was in my vehicle, and the window was open.” He looked closer to where he

had heard the sound. He approached his elderly customer’s back yard, and saw a hand raised out of a pile of leaves. Heeler got closer when the woman said, “Don’t come near me.” In addition to having fallen and not being able to get up, she also had dropped her glasses outside and didn’t want them stepped on. He quickly found the woman’s glasses, and then asked what she wanted him to do. “She was coherent; she just couldn’t get up,” Heeler said. The woman said she just wanted him to help her up so she could keep working in the yard. The carrier, who has experience as part of an ambulance crew, assessed her for any possible injuries and helped her stand up, but told her he was going to escort her into her home to rest. “She’s a sweetheart, but she’s stubborn,” Heeler said of his regular customer, who leaves lemonade for him on warm days. When

Heeler looped back around the street, he checked on her to make sure she was doing OK. The 28-year postal veteran said that he was embarrassed at being called a hero. “I probably helped her, but I wouldn’t call myself a hero,” Heeler said. “It’s the kind of stuff we do all the time.”

**O**n June 20, Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member **Timothy Wood** was approached by residents on his route who said they had not seen their neighbor, Mr. Rogers, in two days and were concerned. When Wood got to Rogers’ house, he saw the previous day’s mail in the man’s mailbox. Rogers usually greeted Wood every day and always got his mail, so Wood was worried as well. The carrier knocked on the door, and then “I hollered through the window,” he said. “I could hear him moaning real faint.” Wood called his supervisor, who in turn called 911. Responding officers performed a wellness check and found that Rogers, who was on the floor, had suffered a stroke. Rogers was taken to the hospital to recover and was later transferred to a nursing home. “He’s a good old guy,” Wood said of his customer. The six-year postal veteran said that anyone would have done what he did. “The neighbors were obviously concerned,” he said. “It wasn’t that big of a deal.” **PR**



**Rochester, NY Branch 210 member Spencer Heeler was recently recognized for his heroic actions. Pictured (l to r) are Branch 210 President Kenny Montgomery, Heeler and Region 11 National Business Agent Dan Toth.**

## Help on the way



Central Florida Branch 1091 member **Rena McVey** recently received recognition for her heroic actions. Pictured (l to r) are Orlando Postmaster **Gary Vaccarella**, Lee Vista Manager of Customer Services **Javier Delcastillo**, **McVey**, Region 9 National Business Agent **Judy Willoughby** and Branch 1091 President **Dan Tegreeny**.

Central Florida Branch 1091 member **Rena McVey** had just finished delivering her route one day in April and was on her way back to the post office when she noticed something in the street and a woman going up to it. “I saw what I thought was a dog crumpled up,” she said. Then she realized that there had been a two-vehicle accident, a 7-year-old boy, **Ryland**, was lying on his back and was in pain, and his mother was attempting to pick him up. “Give me your baby,” the carrier said to the woman. **McVey**, a former nurse who now is a primary responder and trainer for the USPS, convinced the mother not to move the child because that could cause more harm. **McVey** put the boy down and assessed his injuries. “I kept him talking,” **McVey** said, trying to keep him conscious until she was relieved by EMS responders.

**McVey** then told EMTs that she thought **Ryland** had internal injuries, a broken collarbone and broken vertebrae—all injuries that the medics confirmed. A woman who was driving one of the cars involved apparently had run into her parents’ car in front of her. **Ryland**’s mother later called and thanked **McVey** for her assistance. She told the carrier that **Ryland** had been released from intensive care and would have a complete recovery. “He’s back to playing baseball,” **McVey**

said. The 27-year postal veteran is no stranger to being in the spotlight for her heroics. She was featured in the May 2012 *Postal Record* for helping out a customer who was choking. But she brushed off any accolades for her latest action. “It’s a matter of, I was there when I needed to be,” **McVey** said.

While driving to his route on the morning of Saturday, May 24, Pocatello, ID Branch 927 member **Mike Rice** was a block away when he saw a man lying awkwardly next to a lawnmower, face up. “He looked like he was already gone,” he said. The carrier pulled over and heard one short gasp from the man. **Rice** immediately called 911 and started CPR with instructions over the phone from the emergency dispatcher. Soon after, a nurse who was driving by stopped and took over until paramedics

arrived. The man worked for a management company and had been mowing the lawn of a rental property when he had had a heart attack. A few hours later, a police officer at the scene found **Rice** on his route to tell him the hospital had been able to restart the man’s heart. He commended the carrier for his actions, and told him that he might have saved his customer’s life. But **Rice** doesn’t think he’s a hero. “Basically I was the first one to pull over,” the 18-year postal veteran said. “It just proves that I’m a human being.”



On Aug. 29, 2013, Gastonia, NC Branch 1512 member **Edgar Goodwin Jr.** was

making a delivery at a local restaurant when he noticed one employee cleaning a table in the back, while the other employees were out front eating prior to opening for business that day. After picking up the mail, **Goodwin** was getting a cup of tea when the employee from the back walked up to him, gasping for breath and pointing to his throat. **Goodwin** asked the man if he was choking and the man nodded. The man had tears streaming down his face and he was sweating profusely, close to passing out. Having had nine years of experience as an EMT, the carrier knew exactly what to do. “I turned

him around and did the Heimlich,” the carrier said. “He went limp in my arms.” After the third attempt, the man coughed up a piece of the food. **Goodwin** asked another employee to get the man some water. Before leaving, the man thanked **Goodwin** for saving his life. But the 31-year postal veteran said he doesn’t feel like a hero. “I just did what felt natural to me,” he said.

While making a delivery on her regular route in the Woolworth Building on Oct. 26, 2013, New York, NY Branch 36 member **Evelyn Clark** didn’t expect to see any customers because it was a Saturday. But as she got off the elevator on the 22nd floor, she came across **Nancy**, a law firm employee whom she knew, semi-conscious in the hallway. **Clark** immediately went back downstairs to the lobby. She told one guard to call 911, and told the other to come back up with her. “**Evelyn**, is that you?” **Nancy** asked. The woman was incoherent but seemed to recognize the carrier. **Nancy** was taken to the hospital and had surgery for a brain aneurysm, and eventually returned to work. **Clark** called and visited her customer during her recovery. “She was very appreciative,” **Clark** said. But the 17-year postal veteran doesn’t think she did anything major; she just considers herself a public servant. “I love helping people,” she said. “I’m here to serve the public.” **PR**