



NALC Heroes Of The Year Luncheon



2014



OF THE YEAR AWARDS

“The men and women who deliver mail throughout this vast country truly are part of the communities they serve,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said as he welcomed the large audience to the 2014 NALC Heroes of the Year Awards luncheon. “Somewhere, every day, a letter carrier—or two, or maybe three—saves a life.

“They do these things not because they’re supermen—or superwomen. They do them because they’re in the neighborhoods six or even seven days a week and they know when something’s wrong,” Rolando said. “They act because they’re often first on the scene. And because they know the families, having watched the children grow and the parents age, and they really care about the well-being of the residents and the safety of the community.”

The Heroes event was held on Sept. 10 in the nation’s capital, with attendees including the union’s resident national officers, top U.S. Postal Service executives, several members of Congress and some reporters. The annual ceremony highlighted the special acts of courage and compassion performed by eight individual NALC members and one entire branch. Rolando called these NALC members “some of the most dedicated carriers to wear the uniform.”

Before presenting the awards, Rolando thanked the panel of independent judges who had reviewed the stories about heroic and humanitarian acts published in *The Postal Record* between July 2013 and June 2014. The judges were: Richard Bowers, chief of the Fairfax County, VA,

Department of Fire and Rescue; Richard Daschbach, retired chairman and chief judge of the Employees’ Compensation Appeals Board at the U.S. Department of Labor; and Ana Avendano, AFL-CIO Community Services liaison at the United Way of America and vice president of Department of Labor participation.

Rolando also recognized a number of special guests who were on hand, including Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA), Reps. Eliot Engel (D-NY) and José Serrano (D-NY), Postal Regulatory Commission Chairman Ruth Goldway, and National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association President Jeanette Dwyer.

He then introduced AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Elizabeth Shuler, who congratulated the heroes for their “unbelievable courage.”

Rolando next called on USPS Vice President of Labor Relations Doug Tulino, who commended the honorees. “As the recognition today proves, America’s letter carriers deliver much more than simply the mail. They are public servants, they’re trusted friends of the community, and they have a special spirit of service,” he said. “They exemplify what customer service is. They are our brand. They are the Postal Service.”

Rolando explained why the USPS, and especially carriers as the face of the agency, are so trusted by the public. “The nation’s 180,000 city letter carriers crisscross the country, delivering to all of the neighborhoods that make up the American community,” he said. “They provide hand-delivered, personal service to every home, every business, every American. They do it when storms or floods or other natural disasters hit, when



Above: NALC President Fredric Rolando welcomes attendees to the 2014 NALC Heroes of the Year Awards luncheon.

Opposite page: The 2014 Heroes of the Year
Below: The scene at the National Press Club in Washington, DC





Distinguished guests Massachusetts Sen. Ed Markey (top) and New York Rep. Eliot Engel (above) took the opportunity to thank the heroes and to voice their praise for the work letter carriers do six, and sometimes seven, days a week.

letter carriers often are the only sign of normalcy for many residents. They also carry on when man-made problems arise—such as a government shutdown.”

He highlighted all that letter carriers do in addition to delivering the mail, from performing the country’s largest annual one-day food drive, to leading the fight against muscular dystrophy, to preparing and training to deliver medicines

and vaccines quickly in case of biological attack.

“And, of course, letter carriers sometimes save lives on the mail route,” President Rolando said.

“I am pretty sure, based on experience, that each will downplay what he or she did, and tell you that any letter carrier would have done the same,” he said. “In fact, after doing something extraordinary, letter carriers typically brush themselves off and go back on the route, delivering the mail. For so many letter carriers, looking out for the families and the community simply comes with the uniform.”

Rolando then recounted each Hero’s story to the audience. Their stories are found in the following pages of this issue of *The Postal Record*.

Each of the congressmen present congratulated and thanked the heroes and humanitarians from his state or district and extolled the virtues of letter carriers.

“Today, in every city and town in Massachusetts and across America, letter carriers will serve every home and business,” Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) said. “They will perform an important public service to our nation, and help our economy grow and prosper.”

“Letter carriers...don’t just carry mail, they’re there, and they interact with the community, and they can be relied on when they see something going on that might be suspicious,” Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY) added. “It’s so much more than just carrying the mail. It’s really being a watchdog in the community, protecting the community, being part of the community.”

Rep. José Serrano (D-NY) echoed that sentiment, and told the NALC humani-

tarian from his district that “everything indicates that you are a true American hero, that you care for your community, that you care for your work, that you care for your service.”

President Rolando presented each Hero with an award certificate and a special lapel pin that the carrier can wear to highlight the distinction.

In an effort to do more to recognize the heroic actions of carriers who look out for their communities, NALC began last year awarding smaller “Hero” pins to each carrier whose story of a heroic act appears in the monthly Proud to Serve section of *The Postal Record*, along with a letter of commendation from President Rolando.

This year’s honorees were selected from among nearly 150 nominees, whose stories of heroism and community service were published over the course of a year in the NALC’s magazine. Those stories were collected into a booklet, *A Year’s Worth of Heroes*, which was distributed to the luncheon’s guests.

“As dramatic or even moving as their individual actions were, perhaps the most important takeaway is that what they did reflects something larger—it symbolizes what is special about our craft and about how letter carriers view their jobs,” Rolando said. “The men and women who deliver mail throughout this vast country truly are part of the communities they serve.”

Heroes in the media

Reports on the heroes were run in various media outlets in the days following the event.

Articles appeared in *USA Today*; *The Washington Post*; the *Afro-American Newspaper*; *The Connecticut Post*; the Worcester, MA, *Telegram & Gazette*; *The Columbus Dispatch*; Bend, OR’s *The Bulletin*; the Peoria, IL, *Journal Star*; the *East Peoria Times-Courier*; the *St. Louis Labor Tribune*; and the *Reading Eagle*, among other outlets.

You can read all of the coverage, as well as watch videos of the heroes telling their stories, on the NALC website at nalc.org/community-service/carrier-heroes.

READING, PA BRANCH 258



Letter carriers are accustomed to serving their customers six days a week. But Branch 258 members go above and beyond delivering for those in their community. The Reading, PA, branch has been brightening families' Christmases for more than a decade.

It all started in 2001 with a "Dear Santa" letter from a young local girl. All she wanted for Christmas were beds for her brother and sister, and underclothing and socks.

"It kind of broke our hearts," Branch Vice President **Richie McDonough** said.

"President **George Cook** called me and we decided we had to help this family out because it was so different from the usual wish list," current Branch President **Fred Ranalli Jr.** said. (The event was officially named the George Cook Memorial Christmas Family Adoption Program following the longtime branch president's death last year.)

The carriers worked hard to make sure that family members got what they asked for. They talked to the carrier who delivered to that address to find out more information about the family.

They went to deliver their haul to the 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.

"That moment touched us all to tears," Ranalli said. "That was the start."

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

The carriers partner with local church organizations and also use their knowledge of their neighborhood customers.

"We have adopted working families who struggle to make ends meet, one-parent families, families with medical struggles, families where tragedy has struck, elderly couples, veterans, and even some of our own co-workers' families serving in wars," Ranalli said. "It's people who need a hand up, not a handout."

The branch gets a wish list from the families, and members do their best to fulfill the wishes. Sometimes local businesses, such as a local shoe store, will pitch 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 258 hosts a big party for the families at the union hall. The carriers' families and others get involved, too. McDonough's son has played Santa Claus, Ranalli's son is an artist who has done sketches for the children, and most years their local congressman, Rep. Jim Gerlach (R-PA), shows up.

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.

One woman whose family the branch had helped in the past got back on her feet financially and came to donate money to another family. Talk about paying it forward.

"It spreads like wildfire," McDonough said of the group's endeavor. "Every year, it gets bigger and bigger."

"I have the best branch. It's such a group effort and everyone chips in," Ranalli said. "It makes the Christmas season for many of us and never fails to touch all our hearts."

In selecting Branch 258 for the Branch Service Award, the judges said, "It's impressive that this is a continual program, not just a one-time event. They've made a deep commitment."

"We don't feel worthy," Ranalli said about the honor. "We see all the need that's out there and we try to help."

"Carriers are the eyes and ears of the neighborhood. They experience and see their customers live through the best and worst that life has to offer," Ranalli said upon receiving the honor. "We feel the real heroes are the families that we adopt, because they have to make hard choices every day."

"We hope through this recognition of our branch that other branches across the country will start similar programs and they might experience the rewards of brotherhood that my branch has found through this program."



Above: Images from Branch 258's holiday parties

Branch President Fred Ranalli Jr. (c) and Branch Vice President Richie McDonough (r) accept the Branch Service award from President Rolando.





STEVE FILSON

CENTRAL OREGON BRANCH 1937

On Jan. 17, 2012, Central Oregon Branch 1937 letter carrier **Steve Filson**, a 15-year veteran of the Postal Service, was on the workroom floor at his post office in Bend when he noticed that it seemed vacant. When he saw a co-worker running from the parking garage, he knew something serious was happening. He walked to the garage and saw a crowd of people. They were gathered around fellow Branch 1937 member—and his good friend—**Jim Lascurin**, who was lying on the ground with blood around his head.

Filson leaped into action. Relying on his training as a Navy corpsman—he served from 1984 to 1988—and as a lifeguard, Fil-

son checked the stricken carrier and found no breathing or pulse.

“I knew right away it wasn’t good,” he said.

Filson performed CPR while speaking to his friend, hoping to get a response, until emergency responders arrived and took Lascurin to a trauma center. Filson and his co-workers then went back to work to get the mail delivered.

“Despite the agony of waiting for news of his close friend’s fate, Steve got his job done that day,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “That makes his life-saving heroism even more impressive.”

“That was a long day,” Filson said about waiting to hear Lascurin’s fate

while on his route. “Later, I received a phone call from the pastor whom I had spoken to prior to leaving the office for mail delivery. He told me, in a happy voice, that Jim was going to make it.

“That made it a good day,” he said.

A doctor at the hospital where Lascurin was treated later said that he had experienced a form of heart failure that only one in 20 victims survive, and that Filson’s actions had saved his life.

“Steve Filson reacted to the situation and took quick action, relying on his life-saving skill to save a co-worker against the odds,” the judges said. “His actions were truly heroic.”

“I’m just glad I was there,” Filson said. “I would have hated it if the outcome was different.” Lascurin, who has retired from the Postal Service, is doing well, Filson added. “Every time I see him, he’s smiling.

“For me, it was just a friend in need,” Filson said. “It’s joyous just to see his face because he’s always smiling.”



Steve Filson accepts the award naming him 2014 Western Region Hero of the Year.



JIM RURIK

COLUMBUS, OH BRANCH 78



2014 CENTRAL REGION
HERO OF THE YEAR



Smoke pouring from an apartment building and a man's yell grabbed the attention of Columbus, OH Branch 78 member **Jim Rurik** as he was delivering mail along his route on March 21, 2013.

"I shut off my vehicle and ran across the parking lot," he said. As he rushed over, he saw a resident outside on the phone, so he made sure that the resident was calling 911. Rurik noted that the smoke was coming from the first floor of the building. Then he saw the source of the scream: a resident running out of the burning apartment.

"His pant leg was on fire, his boot was on fire. He was struggling," the carrier said. "He had sat down to try to remove his shoe, but was unsuccessful because of the flames spreading."

Rurik told the man to stop, drop and roll, and then he took off his postal jacket to smother the remaining flames on the customer.

"It's just one of those things. It was a situation and I reacted to it," he said.

Once he felt the customer was going to be OK, Rurik ran into the building. "I knew someone was still on the third floor, because I saw their vehicle was outside," he said. The carrier knocked

on doors to notify residents and try to get people out.

"When I came back out, the fire department had arrived," Rurik said. "It happened so fast."

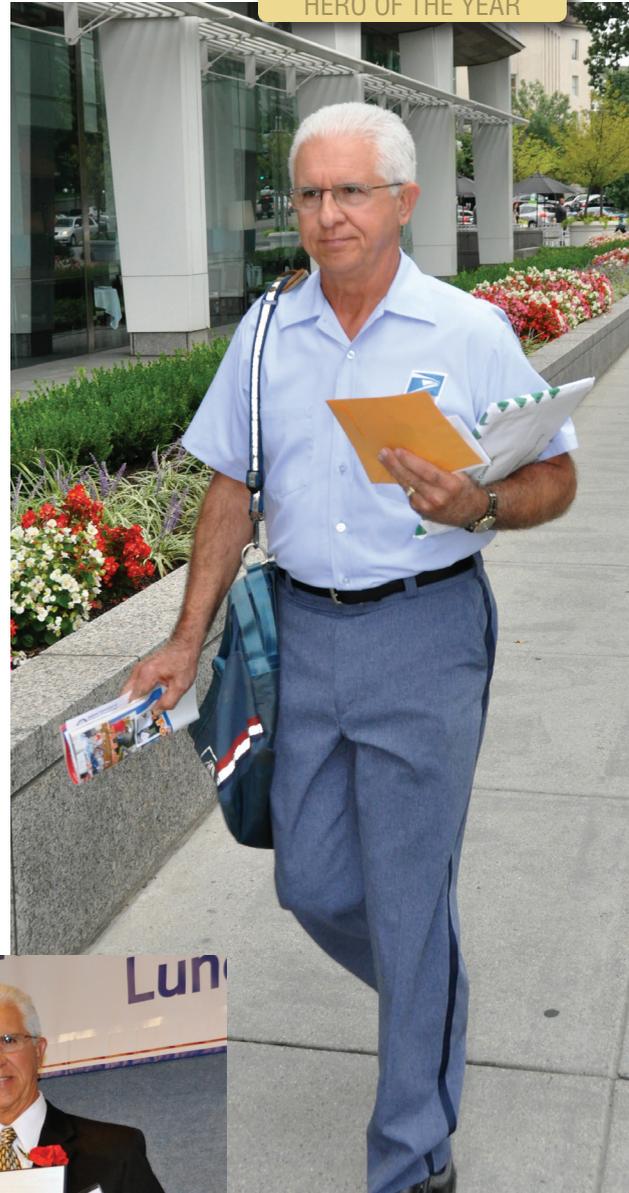
Once he saw that the situation was under control, Rurik returned to his LLV and completed his appointed rounds.

Firefighters said that the burn victim, who had just moved in that day, had tried to start a fire in his fireplace using lighter fluid. He suffered burns to his leg, but no one else was hurt and no other apartment units were damaged.

Rurik said that being named a hero is a great honor, but he doesn't think he did that much. "I still don't feel like I'm a hero in any way. There are people who do this every single day," the 30-year postal veteran said. "Other people would have done the same thing. I was just the first one there."

The judges disagreed. "He took immediate action, risking life and limb, and the result was a positive outcome," they said in choosing Rurik as the Central Region Hero.

Rurik said that as a letter carrier, you react when the situation calls for it. "I just did what I felt I had an obligation to do," he said.



Jim Rurik told the audience that he expected that others would have done what he did, after receiving the award for Central Region Hero of the Year.



2014 EASTERN REGION
HERO OF THE YEAR

ROBERT GEORGE

WORCESTER, MA BRANCH 12

“I heard a huge explosion,” Branch 12 member **Robert George** said. He had been pulling out of a church parking lot in Leicester, MA, after making a delivery on June 4, 2013. When he looked about 50 yards up the street, he saw that a large steel hauling truck had jumped a curb and plowed through a stone wall in the front yard of a house.

“It so happened that my son was coming by at the same time,” George said. The grown son, Tim, 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 was stunned, dazed inside the cab of the truck,” he said.

The carrier and his son wanted to get the man out. “He kind of rolled out of the truck,” George said. But then the driver wanted to sit near the vehicle. “We looked up and started to see flames and we thought, ‘No way,’ ” the carrier, an Air Force veteran, said.

George and his son pulled the man to safety far away from his vehicle and called 911. “He could walk, but I think he was in shock,” George said. Because the truck was carrying a welding unit with oxygen, it became engulfed in flames within minutes.

The letter carrier stayed with the driver until EMTs, police and firefighters arrived. An ambulance soon took the man to a local hospital, where he was treated and released. Investigators believed the cause of the accident was a mechanical failure in the truck.

“There was nothing left of the truck,” George said. “It



President Rolando presents the award honoring Robert George as NALC’s Eastern Region Hero of the Year.

all happened so fast.” Meanwhile, the house’s façade had been melted by the flames, but no one was inside the home at the time.

If George and his son hadn’t been at the scene at the time, the driver might not have gotten far enough away from the burning vehicle. “Making sure of his safety was first,” George said.

Because of this, judges had an easy time naming George the Eastern Region Hero. “The significant damage that resulted shows how much danger he was in,” they said. “Without regard for his own life and against all instinct, he saved the lives of others.”

Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) told the crowd at the Heroes of the Year ceremony, “Bob George knew just what to do.”

The 21-year postal veteran said that being called a hero is humbling, but added that “there was not much thought about going and doing it. It was just the right place at the right time,” he said. “We are out in public every day and you never know what could happen.”

“That’s true, but Robert George’s customers can rest easier knowing that he is on the route,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said.



CRISTY PERFETTI & STEVE PLUNKETT

PEORIA, IL BRANCH 31

Peoria, IL Branch 31 letter carrier **Cristy Perfetti**, who has carried mail for 22 years, was returning from her route one day in May of 2013. As she parked her truck at the post office loading dock, she saw a disturbing scene. A man was walking with a 10-year-old boy through the post office parking lot, and the boy looked frightened and kept looking in her direction.

"It seemed to me he was trying to get my attention. The look on his face was indescribable," Perfetti said. "I knew something was not right."

The man took the boy behind the post office shed, and that's when Perfetti ran inside the post office and alerted supervisor Stacie Pence-Bailey about the situation. The supervisor went outside with Perfetti. Fellow Branch 31 member **Steve Plunkett**, a letter carrier for 26 years, noticed that something serious was happening and went outside with Perfetti and the supervisor.

Perfetti and Pence-Bailey confronted the man. He said that everything was fine, but the boy, who was crying and clearly frightened, said "No, you're not my father." Pence-Bailey asked the boy if he wanted to go inside the station, and he said yes. She took the boy inside the post office to safety and told co-workers to call the police. The boy later said the man had abducted him at knife-point.

Meanwhile, the man hurried away on foot, so Pence-Bailey asked Perfetti and Plunkett to follow him. The two letter carriers kept track of his movements, with Plunkett taking photos, until police arrived and arrested the man. "We were able to tell police exactly where he went," Plunkett said.

The boy's father came to the station and took him home.

Perfetti and Plunkett's actions, and the photos Plunkett took and gave to authorities, helped imprison the man—a repeat sex offender—with a life sentence.

"It's kind of overwhelming and unexpected," Plunkett said about the Unit Citation award. "It was just a case of doing the right thing." He said he knew anyone in his station would have done the same. "I think every carrier has got that in him or her."

"These two caring letter carriers noticed a problem and immediately worked as a team with their supervisor to respond," the judges said. "Their quick action as a coordinated group saved a child from harm and put a dangerous criminal in prison, and we felt it deserved a special 'Unit Citation' award." This is the first time the judges have presented a Unit Citation award.

"I'm just thankful that when it was all said and done, it had a happy ending," Plunkett said, "and that man will never ever bother another kid again."

Perfetti urged anyone who sees something suspicious like she did to act.

"Please don't be afraid to step up to the plate and help," she said. "Not many people want to do this because they don't want to get involved."





VICTOR GREEN

BERGEN CO. MERGED, NJ BRANCH 425

The 1930s through 1960s are remembered as a time of racial discrimination throughout the country. Laws and practices were designed to keep African-Americans from voting or even patronizing businesses, including many restaurants and hotels. For many, traveling was less an adventure to be filled with awe and pleasure, and more a risky undertaking involving embarrassment and fear.

Victor H. Green, an entrepreneurial letter carrier from Harlem, New York, saw a need and created *The Negro Motorist Green Book*—commonly referred to as the “Green Book”—a travel guide listing black- and white-owned hotels, inns and even private residences that would accept African-American travelers.

In 1913, at the age of 21, Green was living in Hackensack, NJ, and went to work at the local post office as a letter carrier. Green joined NALC’s Hackensack Branch 425, now known as Bergen County Merged. By 1933, he had moved to Harlem but continued his route in New Jersey.

Green was described as a man of “tremendous drive and energy” by Novera Dashiell, an assistant editor, in the 1956 guide: “Tall, well-built, always impeccably groomed, with an easy affable manner.”

The idea for the guide crystalized in Green’s mind in 1932 and would lead to the first edition being printed in 1936, covering just New York City. The demand was so great that the following year it became a national guide, and eventually expanded to contain international listings.

“It didn’t matter where you went, Jim Crow was everywhere then, and black travelers needed this badly,” Julian Bond said in a 2010 interview while he was president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Bond spoke from personal experience. “My family had a Green Book when I was young, and used it to travel in the South to find out where we could stop to eat, where we could spend the night in a hotel or someone’s home,” he said.

Green set up extensive contacts to get his information, including using his NALC connections. “There are postal workers everywhere,” Bond said. “And he used them as guides to tell him: ‘Well, here’s a good place here, a good place there.’”

The Green Book was especially popular with African-Americans who traveled frequently for work, such as jazz musicians and ballplayers in the Negro leagues. People in Harlem and the broader African-American community also knew the importance of what Green had created. Author

Langston Hughes took out an ad to support the 1947 edition.

Victor Green believed that the entrepreneurial spirit that propelled his guide could be a driving force for advancing the African-American community, especially through the expanding use of advertising that marked the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Assistant Editor Dashiell quoted him, in the 1956 edition, as saying, “If Negro-owned business is good, it can be better with advertising.” She explained, “His philosophy is that we can create our OWN name brands.”

Green worked on the annual guides while continuing to deliver the mail. By 1942, he had a route in Leonia, NJ, where he worked until 1952, when after 39 years of carrying the mail, he retired at age 60. With help, he continued publishing some 15,000 guides annually until his death in 1960. The guide remained in publication, with the 1959 guide listing his wife, Alma, as the editor and publisher; the 1966 edition lists two publishers who weren’t related to Green. The guides stopped thereabouts, after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act had made discrimination by businesses illegal.

The NALC judges noted the timeliness of recognizing Green with the Legacy Award during the same year that the United States is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act. “We must never forget the racial inequalities of our past, but by recognizing the important work that Victor Green did, and continuing to honor his spirit and his dedication, we can all get closer to seeing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream come true,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said.

Green would likely not be too upset about his guide being relegated to history books. He often said that he looked forward to the time when the Green Book no longer would be necessary.

“There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published,” he wrote in 1949. “That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please.”



Above: Victor Green and his “Green Book”

Above right: Accepting the award for Green was Calvin Ramsey, who has written a play and a children’s book about the Green Book, and who has done the most to promote and preserve Green’s legacy.

ORLANDO GONZALEZ

NEW YORK CITY BRANCH 36

With the help of fellow carriers in the New York City area who volunteered their time, Branch 36 letter carrier **Orlando Gonzalez**, a 21-year veteran of the Postal Service, organized the first Vinny's Walk, an annual fundraiser for NALC's official charity, the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA). The event was named for NALC President Emeritus and Branch 36 member Vincent R. Sombrotto, who died last year.

On June 23, 2013, letter carriers from throughout New York and New Jersey gathered in Battery Park in Manhattan for the fundraising walk along the Hudson River. Like MDA Muscle Walks sponsored by branches across the country, Vinny's Walk helped raise money to fund research on muscular dystrophy and provide aid to families affected by neuromuscular diseases. After walking, participants, including members of Sombrotto's family, were treated to music and booths filled with food, games and memorabilia for sale.

"We found a way to walk for the cure, honor the great Vinny R. Sombrotto and have a great time doing it," Gonzalez said. "I have to share credit for this remarkable achievement with the entire Region 15. They believed in it and brought it to fruition." NALC Region 15 covers the greater metropolitan New York City area.

Vinny's Walk raised more than \$20,000 for MDA. Letter carriers across the country have raised millions of dollars for the organization. Community service is an important part of an NALC member's responsibilities, Gonzalez said: "Take care of those we serve and they will take care of you."

"This effort was a great example of making the world a little better for everyone," the judges said, "and we commend Mr. Gonzalez for leading it and his fellow carriers for making it happen."

"Orlando, everything indicates that you are a true American hero," said Rep. José Serrano (D-NY) at the award ceremony. "You make me proud."

Sombrotto emerged as a leader during the Great Postal Strike of 1970, which began with a walkout by New York carriers. He went on to lead the national union as president from 1979 to 2002.

"Combining our union's commitment to community service with the memory of Vincent Sombrotto—a regular letter carrier who stood up and led when his leadership was needed—strengthened our commitment to MDA and to finding creative new ways to improve the lives of those we serve," NALC President Fredric Rolando said.

A second walk was held in July of this year, and NALC is looking forward to many more Vinny's Walks.

"For letter carriers, who work so hard, this is a great time for us to get together, to work for a cause, to honor a great man and to have a great time doing it," Gonzalez added. "And that's pretty much the idea of Vinny's Walk."



Above: The first annual Vinny's Walk in New York City
Right: Orlando Gonzalez (c) receives the Humanitarian of the Year award from President Rolando and Rep. José Serrano (D-NY).





JERMAINE SHIRLEY

GREENWICH, CT BRANCH 759

“I smelled something burning,” Greenwich, CT Branch 759 member **Jermaine Shirley** recounted. He had been on his way to work around 7 a.m. on Dec. 19, 2013, and the smoke was coming from the city carrier assistant’s own apartment building in the Bronx.

Shirley went to see if his wife had left a curling iron on, but he found nothing. He then checked the stove—nothing again.

York *Daily News*, referring to his 11-month-old twin boys, Israel and Ishmael.

The carrier quickly climbed on top of a single-story shed located below the building’s fire escape. “I told him, ‘Drop the baby,’” Shirley said.

Codner complied, dropping them one at a time into Shirley’s waiting arms below. Once the twins were safe, Codner jumped from the third-floor fire escape to the shed’s roof, followed by his wife.

By that time, firefighters were on the scene to tackle the blaze, and paramedics checked everyone’s condition. There was severe fire, smoke and water damage to every apartment in the building, but fortunately, Shirley had managed to safely get everyone out of the building without serious injury, including the twins.

“It really is a miracle,” the twins’ mother, Nikalia Codner, told the *Daily News*.

“We’re here today because of our neighbor’s quick response,” Everdean Codner said. “It’s the best holiday gift you could ever ask for.”

Shirley said that people had started to call him “Hero” instead of “Jermaine.” And the judges agreed. In selecting Shirley as the National Hero of the Year, they said that “by making multiple attempts to warn several families of the danger, his actions had a significant, life-saving impact.”

Shirley downplayed his actions, however. “It was just instincts. They just kicked in right away,” he said. “I have a family, too. I would want somebody to do the same for me.”

“Well—instincts, alertness, bravery—call it what you will, but it’s an honor to introduce our 2014 National Hero of the Year, Jermaine Shirley,” NALC President Fredric Rolando told the crowd at the National Hero of the Year Awards.

“I’m proud to be a mailman. There are post offices all over the world, so I don’t just represent Greenwich, CT, or New York, I represent all the postmen of the world,” the native of Jamaica said in accepting the honor. “Back where I come from, we always said, ‘Birds of a feather flock together,’ and when I put my shirt on or the jacket on with the eagle, I wear it with pride.” **PR**



City Carrier Assistant Jermaine Shirley told the attendees that he represents the good work postal workers do all over the world.



As Shirley headed downstairs, the smell of smoke got stronger. He followed the scent to a second-floor apartment.

He then ran through the building, knocking on all six doors to alert residents to the potential danger. “I started calling their names and calling 911 at the same time,” he said.

While the letter carrier was helping his own wife and baby to safety, he heard his neighbor, Everdean Codner, calling for help from a third-floor apartment. Shirley knew the man and his wife, and he was concerned for them.

Shirley tried to kick in the Codners’ front door, but “I could feel the smoke pushing me back out,” the carrier said. When Shirley finally got inside, he saw that the apartment was clear, so he started to move on.

Then he spotted Codner holding one of his sons.

“I wanted to get my babies out and I ran to the fire escape,” Codner told the New