

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.

Going the extra mile

Binghamton, NY Branch 333 member **Earl Walker** was on his regular route on Saturday, Sept. 20, 2014, when he noticed that a couple days' worth of mail had built up in customer Bill Langhorst's mailbox.

The carrier had become worried about Langhorst because the customer lived alone and was in declining health. "I live on my route," Walker said, "so I gave him my number in case he needed anything."

Noticing both the mail and the owner's van in the driveway, Walker knocked on the doors and windows of the house, but got no response. "I was concerned and had a bad feeling, so I called police," he said.

The responding officer entered the home and discovered evidence of hoarding. Police found Langhorst lying on the floor upstairs. Some items had fallen on him and he did not have the strength to get up. Langhorst was taken to the hospital.

Walker later received a Facebook message from the assistant to the police chief, who also lived on his route, notifying the letter carrier that Langhorst was alive, but nothing further.

Walker doesn't think he's a hero for his actions, though. He said he was just doing his job as a letter carrier.

"Nobody else has this type of relationship with people. We're up on porches every day," the 10-year carrier said. "I was genuinely worried about the guy. I just did what I was compelled to do."

But that's not the end of the story.

Walker found a woman who was a family friend, and explained Langhorst's situation to her. The woman found out that he was recovering in a nursing home about an hour away.

Walker spread the word to the people in the neighborhood, which helped Langhorst get a lot of visitors.

Walker said, "I hope he's not mad at me. I feel good about the situation now that he's got visitors, and I feel good about connecting people that otherwise wouldn't be connected."

Friends in need are friends indeed

In late October 2014, Cape Atlantic, NJ Branch 903 member **Greg White** was delivering his route when he saw that his elderly customer, Marvin Leonard, had fallen on his front steps and hit his head on a railing after returning home from the grocery store. Leonard had injuries, and his groceries were scattered. "There was blood all over the place," the carrier said.

White secured his mail truck and rushed to help Leonard into his house. The letter carrier reached out to Leonard's neighbor, who was trained in first aid, for medical assistance. He also offered to call 911, but Leonard said it wasn't necessary.

Once he helped the customer inside the house, White put away the groceries before returning to his rounds, coming back at the end of his route as well as the next day to check on him.

Leonard called the post office to notify the postmaster about White's actions. Soon after, the carrier was



Earl Walker

presented with a certificate of appreciation by Avalon, NJ Mayor Martin Pagliughi and Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ) for his efforts. LoBiondo told the *Press of Atlantic City* that Leonard's actions said a lot about the carrier's character. "Nowadays people are just too busy and ignore these particular

things, so I deeply appreciate you paying attention to someone in need," the representative said.

White said he was grateful for the award, but thought he was just doing his job. "I just did what I'm supposed to do," the 22-year postal veteran said. "Most of my customers are my



Greg White

friends. You help your friends and neighbors."

Help on the way



Darriel Smith

When Grandview, MO Branch 5267 member **Darriel Smith** was going about his route on June 26, 2014, he found a message on the mailbox of a customer (who used to be a letter carrier) to call police. It also mentioned that house keys could be retrieved from the next-door neighbor, who was also the landlord. Smith called 911, and responding police officers found the customer in the tub after trying to commit suicide. "I guess he was just going through some stuff," Smith said. Police said that if the carrier had not acted when he did, the customer would have been dead. The customer's family members told Smith they are very grateful for his actions. But the nine-year let-

ter carrier said that he doesn't think he's a hero. "I was just doing my job," he said. "I was happy I could get the police there in time."

On the morning of Aug. 18, 2014, Madison, WI Branch 507 member **Garry Hanson** was walking a swing route when he saw a woman in her 20s lying just outside a home, with two people standing over her, so he went over. Hanson, a longtime EMT, introduced himself, and the woman's mother gave him a medical history. The carrier looked the unconscious woman over. "I knew from the assessment that she needed medical attention," he said. He stayed with the family and monitored the woman's vital signs until EMS personnel arrived, and then helped the EMS crew load her into the ambulance. The woman's mother wrote a thank-you letter to the local postmaster. "When a diagnosis was ultimately made, it became apparent that without Mr. Hanson's willingness to render aid and his knowledge of emergency medical procedures, she could very well have died," she wrote. "We are forever indebted to Mr. Hanson. I have sent him a personal note, but it is a

woefully inadequate way to offer our thanks in light of how serious this incident was. It is my hope, however, that you will honor Mr. Hanson's role in saving my daughter's life and what must be indicative of his value to you as an employee." But the 22-year postal veteran and 25-year EMT said he just had the proper training and then was in the right place at the right time. "I had the knowledge of what should be done," he said. "Any letter carrier would have done the same thing."

On June 2, 2014, St. Paul, MN Branch 28 member **Joseph Hartman** was attempting to deliver a certified letter in a small apartment building when he heard something unusual. "I heard kind of a groaning noise," he said. Hartman noticed that it was coming from upstairs, so he went there. "I knocked on the door, and the person on the other side said, 'Help me!'" Hartman said. The carrier told her that he was the letter carrier, and

said, "If you open the door, we can figure out what's wrong." He then heard a thump on the wall; the woman had passed out and hit the doorknob. This caused the door to open, so Hartman went inside. "What's wrong, ma'am?" he asked her. She replied that she was weak and needed help. He lifted her up, took her to her bed and made sure that she was comfortable. The woman had apparently been weak for several days due to dehydration from the flu. The carrier called 911, gave paramedics a listing of the medications that the woman had, and stayed with her until they arrived. Later that day, the responding police officer found Hartman on his route to commend him for his actions. Though he

received multiple accolades, the second-year letter carrier brushed off any heroics. "It was something that needs to be done," Hartman said. "I figure, it's part of the job. We know a lot about what's going on in these neighborhoods."



Joseph Hartman



David Douglas

Carrier instinct proves right yet again

Dallas, TX Branch 132 member **David Douglas** was driving on his route on Sept. 17, 2014, when he noticed that a truck up ahead was not moving. "I was behind him a few cars," he said.

Although the truck was at a stop sign, the carrier was familiar with the traffic flow on the street and felt that something wasn't right. "Cars were just going around him like nothing was wrong," Douglas said.

The carrier secured his vehicle

in a parking lot and ran to help. He knocked on the window, but the customer was not responding, and Douglas noticed that the man was drooling. "He was out of it," he said.

The doors on the truck were locked, but the passenger's side window was cracked open. The carrier tried to get his hand into the truck to unlock the door, but there wasn't enough room.

Another motorist had stopped and provided a coat hanger, and the two managed to unlock the truck door.

Douglas got inside the truck while the other motorist called 911.

The carrier could not get the man to respond, but he saw that the man had a diabetic kit in his lap and judged that the man was having a diabetic seizure. The 19-year postal veteran stayed with the man until emergency services arrived, and then returned to his route.

He doesn't think he's a hero, though. "You kind of get a feel for what's going on in the neighborhood," Douglas said. "It's just part of the job." **PR**

Help on the way



Jeff Pawlak

On July 2, 2014, Buffalo-Western NY Branch 3 member **Jeff Pawlak** was going about his route when he heard a woman screaming, "Help me! Help me!" When the carrier looked over and made eye contact with the woman, she yelled to him for help. "I hurried over there," Pawlak said. The woman's 5-year-old son was choking on a marble, and after a failed attempt at the Heimlich maneuver, the mother started to panic. "She was standing up, trying to lift him off his legs," Pawlak said. The carrier told the woman to

call 911. Knowing how sensitive children's ribs are, "I got down on one knee, and I gently gave enough pressure," he said. By the time the mother came back outside, the marble that was blocking the boy's air passage had been dislodged. "Everything happened so fast," he said. Once he made sure everyone was fine, he continued his deliveries. Pawlak, who received a thank-you card from the child, saw the youngster playing in the yard the next day. The six-year postal veteran didn't claim any heroics; he just said he had been in the right place at the right time. "I just tried to help out and I got lucky and fortunate that things went our way," Pawlak said.

Fargo-West Fargo, ND Branch 205 member **Dawn Mark** was delivering mail on Oct. 16, 2014, when a woman with her child ran up to her. When the carrier stopped, the woman explained that a man was seated in his running car in the middle of an intersection and that she was already on the phone with emergency

responders. "I ran over there," Mark said. "I assumed that the guy was having a seizure." The carrier shut off his vehicle and did her best to calm the man. She also called 911 herself. When the paramedics arrived, Mark explained what had happened and gave them the man's keys. He apparently was diabetic and had suffered multiple seizures. Mark, in her first year as a letter carrier, didn't think her actions were that big of a deal. "I just did what everyone else would do," she said.

On June 23, 2014, Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member **Bill Lindsay Jr.** met up with his fiancée on his break. They were sitting in her car facing the road when "a semi truck came to a stop all of a sudden," he said. The truck had run into a smaller car when it had turned from a side street, leaving broken glass everywhere. Lindsay and his fiancée quickly ran over to the scene to see if anyone needed assistance. A bystander already had gone to the police station across the

street to summon help. "There was confusion at the scene because the driver of the car was crying while the other front female passenger was talking on her cell phone," Lindsay said. There also were four panicked children in the back seat of the car, trapped there because the doors had jammed from the impact. Others had already attempted to open the back doors without success. "The combination of excited children among shards of broken glass was a situation in need of immediate remedy," the carrier said. "I went over and gave a heave on the door and it came open." After being checked out by paramedics, all of the passengers were determined to be OK, although Lindsay said, "they were kind of shook up." This is not the first time Lindsay has been recognized for his heroic actions. He was also featured in the January 2013 and December 2013 editions of *The Postal Record*. Despite praise for his repeated heroic efforts, the 24-year postal veteran said, "It's really just helping out." **PR**

Eye on the elderly



Tamara Dwinell

On May 29, 2014, West Palm Beach, FL Branch 1690 member **Tamara Dwinell** was delivering to a retirement center on her route but did not see one of her regular customers, Mr. Strunk. “He always comes out to the clusterbox to talk to me. It happened to be the day after a holiday and I thought perhaps he was with family,” she said. She didn’t see him the next day either, and his mail was still in his box from the day before. Strunk also picks up mail for other residents living at the center, and their mail had been picked up. “My children always tell me I overreact, so with a heavy heart, I decided to go on with the route,” she said. When mail was still there the next day, Dwinell knew something was wrong. She went to the center’s office and told them, “It is probably none of my business, but I have not seen Mr. Strunk all week and that is not normal, and I think something is wrong.” The owner asked staff members if anyone had heard from him, and they said no. “Within seven to eight minutes, I saw an ambulance

speed toward his home and my heart sank,” Dwinell said. “I knew it was him, or his wife, and that something had happened.” The next day, she discovered that Mrs. Strunk had fallen, and as he was trying to get to her, he fell as well and was unable to get up. They had been on the floor of their home for at least three days. They were both taken to the hospital and were treated for hypothermia and severe dehydration. The Strunks’ son, Henry, met Dwinell the following week and told her how grateful he was that she had saved his parents’ lives. Both of the Strunks later were released from the hospital, where Dwinell had visited them, and then they went to rehab for recovery. Dwinell, a seven-year postal veteran, denied any major heroic actions, saying instead that, as a carrier, you get to know people on your route. “I just did what other people would have done in my shoes,” she said.

On Aug. 20, 2014, Mt. Clemens, MI Branch 654 member **James Langolf** attempted to deliver a package to his 86-year-old customer, Patricia Kanaan. She wasn’t home, so the carrier assumed that the woman’s child had picked her up that day. As he started walking away, however, he could hear the woman. “She was calling out for help,” he said. Kanaan had fallen that morning, hitting her head, and was unable to get up. The woman spent four hours crawling from the bathroom to her bed and then used a backscratcher to get the phone to the floor. She had just called her daughter to help when she heard Langolf outside with a parcel. On the porch, the carrier talked with the woman

for about an hour through her open bedroom window, which was at the front of the house. He asked his customer if she wanted him to call 911, but she said no. While waiting for her family, Langolf continued chatting with her to make sure that she did not lose consciousness. When Kanaan’s daughter and son-in-law arrived, they said they did not have a key. Langolf helped them get into the house to get to Kanaan. “I helped take the screen off the window,” the carrier said, and the daughter-in-law was able to climb through to get to the woman. “She had a pretty good-sized goose egg on her head and abrasions on her arms and legs,” said Langolf, who served as a combat medic in the Army, including during the Gulf War. Kanaan wanted to drive herself to the hospital, but was able to be convinced that the group should call 911. Doctors at the hospital said the woman had suffered a subdural hemorrhage, and she was released after three days. Kanaan sent a thank-you letter to the postmaster soon after. “I will forever be grateful to James for his kindness and concern for me,” she wrote. The 20-year letter carrier said that he’s not a hero. “It was dumb luck that I happened to hear her through the window,” Langolf said. “I did what I had to do.”

On a very hot June 7, 2014, Port Huron, MI Branch 529 member **Kristine Waite** was on her route on a cul-de-sac when she heard her elderly

customer, Mary Hatton, shouting for help. “She was waving her arms and hollering for me,” Waite said. The carrier rushed over to Hatton, and discovered that the woman had injured her arm and had been yelling for help for 20 minutes. Waite contacted a neighbor, who took Hatton to the hospital to be treated. Though Hatton calls Waite her hero, the 35-year postal veteran takes her actions in stride. “I like my customers,” she said. “I take care of them, and they take care of me.”

Akron, OH Branch 148 member **Michael Shell** was delivering mail to clusterboxes on a private drive on Sept. 15, 2014, when he saw his elderly customer trying to flag him down. “The lady was standing in the middle of the street,” he said. She explained that she had been attempting to help up her husband, who was also in his 80s, who had fallen in their garage. The carrier followed the woman back to her home. “We were able to get him up and into his house,” Shell said. They then called 911 so paramedics could check on the man’s injuries. The man’s wife came to the post office to thank Shell, saying that had he not been there, she doesn’t know what she would

have done. The 30-year postal veteran said that he was happy he was there to help. “I happened by at the right time,” Shell said. “We all like to look after our customers. I’m glad she felt comfortable to ask me.” **PR**



Kristine Waite