

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.

“His head exploded and he was in bad shape.”

—Branch 204 member William Searuggs speaking about the customer he helped

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 hero helps in time of need



On an icy Jan. 14, Colorado Springs, CO Branch 204 member **William Searuggs** was on his route when he noticed something disturbing by the mailbox on the porch of his 86-year-old customer, Max Patterson.

“I noticed that blood was in the concrete and on the handrail,” he said. As he proceeded to put mail in the box, he heard someone scream, “Help, help! Come in, come in!”

Opening the door to the home and

entering, Searuggs first noticed blood on the wall, and then found Patterson lying on the floor, unable to get up.

Patterson had fallen outside on ice. After picking himself up and entering the house, Patterson again fell, this time due to dizziness from loss of blood. “As he made his way in the house, he was trying to get into his chair and he missed,” Searuggs said. “His head exploded and he was in bad shape.”

To reduce the flow of blood, Searuggs got the man into a chair and used a kitchen towel to help stop the bleeding. He called 911 and remained on the phone with paramedics while providing aid and keeping his customer calm until emergency personnel arrived to take over and take Patterson to the hospital. The carrier answered paramedics' questions before continuing on with his route.

Patterson had in fact crushed the back of his skull and suffered broken ribs as well.

Though he has received a lot of media attention following the incident, Searuggs said he takes his “hero” title with a grain of salt. “Not so much a hero, just me getting him the help he needed,” the 16-year letter carrier said. **PR**

Fire and rescue

It was approaching lunchtime on May 1 when Bux-Mont, PA Branch 920 member **James McMullen** was going about his route at an apartment complex. “As I was dropping off a package, I heard a smoke detector going off,” he said. He followed the sound and rang the bell on the apartment door, but he got no re-

sponse. He went to another door and rang the bell as well, but no response there, either. The carrier gained access to the apartment and noticed shooting flames on the stove. He went from room to room, searching for the residents or any pets. McMullen went out to the hallway to catch his breath because of the heavy smoke

and notified a neighbor to call 911, then returned to the apartment and turned off the stove. McMullen took a break and then returned to his route. Several fire companies responded to the call. Chief Thomas Tryon from the Croydon Fire Company commended the carrier, saying, “Carrier McMullen did the right thing.

He checked for people and pets and turned off the stove and got to safety. This fire, if unattended, could have ignited the cabinets and could have spread throughout the complex.” But the 18-year letter carrier brushed off any heroics. “I don't think I'm a hero—I saved an apartment's life,” he said. “I'm glad no one was displaced. **PR**

Eye on the elderly



Ann Arbor, MI Branch 434 member Lynn Knieper recently was interviewed by his local ABC-TV station for his role in helping a longtime customer who was injured inside his home.

On May 9, Ann Arbor, MI Branch 434 member **Lynn Knieper** was delivering the route he's had for the last nine years when he noticed an elderly customer's mail accumulating in the mailbox. "His mail was piling up for at least two days," Knieper said. He knew that the man was a frequent traveler and would have asked to have his mail held if he had gone out of town. "It just didn't add up right," he told the *Ann Arbor News*. So, Knieper tried the door. "I checked the front doorknob; that was locked," Knieper told the local ABC-TV news station. "I went to the back door and that was locked too. And I was going to head to my truck, but I still thought something was wrong." He tried to check with a neighbor, but no one was home. So he knocked a third time and finally heard a faint reply. "And eventu-

ally I asked him, 'Yes or no, are you okay?' and he said, 'No.'" Knieper called 911, then he found another neighbor to come help. Police and EMS units broke in and found the man barely conscious in his hallway, where he had been for more than a day. When Knieper saw that the situation was

in good hands, the 21-year postal veteran went back to delivering the mail. The man spent a few days in intensive care, and doctors said they expected the man to make a full recovery. But the carrier doesn't think he's a hero. "The word 'hero' for me is someone who puts their life on the line," Knieper said. "That's not what I did. I just did what I hope anyone would do."

On April 7, Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 member **Leah Gray** noticed the condition of one of her elderly customers, Mary, deteriorating. "I could just tell she wasn't feeling well," Gray said. At first, Gray asked Mary if she was all right, then continued by suggesting she go to the doctor. When Gray visited the next day to deliver Mary's mail, she noticed that the woman's con-

dition had worsened. Gray persisted, encouraging Mary to go to the emergency room. The carrier asked, "Do you want me to call 911?" The woman wanted to wait until the doctor's office opened on Monday, but eventually relented. "She said, 'I'm going to get dressed and go,'" Gray recounted. "I made her promise me." Mary was soon after admitted to the hospital and spent five days in the intensive care unit before recovering at home. The woman had apparently suffered mini-strokes. "She went way above and beyond what I would ever expect a mail carrier to do," Mary's daughter, Maria Alent, wrote to the local postmaster. "My mother would probably not be here today had Leah not cared. I cannot believe there are still strangers out in this world today like her. Thank you to Leah and her wonderful compassion for people." But the 22-year postal veteran thinks being called a hero is over the top. "I was just looking out for her," Gray said. "My customers watch out for me. It's just the right thing to do."

On Aug. 26, 2014, Minneapolis, MN Branch 9 member **David Ketter** was delivering his park-and-loop route. When he looped back around, "I

noticed someone lying down by the curb," Ketter said. "Three cars passed her." He saw that it was an elderly customer whom he spoke to every day. "I dropped my mail and rushed over," he said. "She was shaking like a leaf." Ketter asked if she was OK and offered to call 911. The customer refused, but asked him to call her son, who lived a few blocks away instead. Ketter stayed with the woman until her son was able to come and take her to the hospital to get help for what turned out to be a broken hip. "I cannot say enough good things about Mr. Ketter," the woman wrote to the local postmaster. "He was very helpful in getting me the emergency treatment I needed. Without him, I may have laid in the street until someone noticed." Ketter brushed off any major heroics. "She's just a sweet lady," the 16-year postal veteran said. "Carriers are the eyes of the neighborhood. I was just grateful that I was there at the time." **PR**



Leah Gray

Help on the way



Kevin Diamond

On Saturday, April 18, Buxmont, PA Branch 920 member **Kevin Diamond** was at a local diner on his lunch break. While at the register, he noticed an elderly man across from him experiencing some sort of distress. “The gentleman had started coughing,” he said. The man stood up, and some of the diner staff noticed the commotion. Diamond went over to the man and asked, “Are you choking?” The man nodded. The carrier asked the man twice, “Do you want me to help you?” Diamond knew if the man could speak or dislodge the food by himself, this was a better option. The

man could not speak, so he nodded yes. The carrier explained the steps he would take to help so that the man would not be alarmed, and then performed the Heimlich maneuver twice until the man’s airway cleared. The man and his family at the table were appreciative of Diamond’s heroic response. The carrier, a 26-year postal veteran, is also a licensed practical nurse on his way to becoming a registered nurse. He doesn’t think of himself as a hero, though. “I like helping people,” he said.

On March 2, Sheboygan, WI Branch 102 member **Paul Werth** was going about his route when he saw his customer, Gina Mohr, walking up a flight of stairs. Then, “she tripped on some steps, fell down and cracked her head open,” he said. Werth knew the woman well, as their children participated on a sports team together. The carrier rushed to her aid and noticed a gash over her eye. Werth tried to control

the bleeding using some napkins that Mohr had in her pocket. “I told her to put pressure on the wound,” he said. The carrier then helped the woman up and ushered her into a nearby business, where more people could help keep Mohr calm as they called 911. Mohr was taken to the hospital, where she received stitches. His service did not end there, though—the carrier and his family cooked and delivered an evening meal to Mohr’s home that night. Werth disagreed with being called a hero, though, saying the title was “overkill.”

On March 23, Buffalo-Western NY Branch 3 member **Zakary Darlak** heard a call for help from a customer who lived in the complex he was delivering to. The customer

had suddenly become ill, with inflamed face, throat and eyes. After he came to, he said he thought he was possibly having a stroke. Darlak went to the man’s apartment. “He was just completely out of it,” the second-year letter carrier said. “I just kept him calm and called 911 for him.” Darlak, a 12-year volunteer firefighter who currently serves as an EMS lieutenant, said that, from his training, it seemed that the man’s signs and symptoms indeed indicated a stroke. Darlak waited with the man until paramedics arrived, then went back the next day



Zakary Darlak

to check on the man. As for being called a hero, he said that helping out was second nature. “I volunteer, so I pretty much do this on a daily basis in the community,” he said. **PR**

Neighborhood watch

On a rainy May 21, Central Florida Branch 1091 member **Heidy Ovalle** was on her route when she came across her customer Denis Roy, who had gotten caught in a sudden heavy rainstorm while in his power wheelchair. He was able to proceed for some distance, but was having trouble seeing the sidewalk ahead, and then

his chair just stopped. “All of a sudden, someone came up from behind and threw their jacket over me to try and protect me from the pounding rain,” Roy wrote to the postmaster. “Ms. Heidy was just in her short-sleeves postal uniform getting completely drenched from the pounding rain.” Ovalle asked, “Where are you going?” Roy said to

the library, and so she asked what she could do to help, and he told her that his chair kept stopping and starting, so she would have to put his chair into what’s called “free wheel” mode. The carrier did this, then proceeded to manually push Roy, in a rainstorm, to the library, about a quarter-mile away. From there, he called his wife to

pick him up. “I therefore wish to publicly thank Ms. Heidy for seeing the dangers of my situation and without regard for her own safety, saved me from what could have been a disastrous situation,” Roy wrote.” Ovalle said being called a hero was an “overstatement.” The second-year letter carrier said, “It was just helping someone out.” **PR**