



*Spreading the warmth of the season  
to the communities we serve*



**A**cross the country, letter carriers are often the ties that bind communities together to help those less fortunate. They accomplish this in a myriad of creative ways.

After prior attempts to collect money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association ran into complications, retired Austin, TX Branch 181 member and current NALC Auxiliary 111 member **Frank Arldt** spearheaded a fundraising effort for MDA through a 50/50 raffle for a quilt made from NALC and Auxiliary convention bags from years past.

The effort began two years ago, when a branch member's wife volunteered to make the bags into the quilt, and a year later, the Auxiliary took over the coordination of the project and made a second quilt. In addition to the annual quilt, Arldt also makes a wooden postal bank to be raffled off. (NALC Director of Insurance Myra Warren won a postal bank at the 2013 Texas state convention held in Waco.)

The effort was also a family affair—Arltd has recruited his daughter, son-in-law and a few other members of his family members to assist with the operation alongside the Auxiliary in selling raffle tickets.

Once the quilt was completed, Arldt made a display using plastic piping so that it could be showcased. The auxiliary also made posters advertising its fundraising efforts. "Wherever we were at events, we put up signage," Arldt said.

Over the course of six months, the quilt was shown at a variety of events to garner interest, including at branch meetings, district letter carrier training, the Texas state convention and at the union hall.

The second drawing happened at the 2014 state convention in San Antonio, and the raffle raised \$880. A check for \$440 was presented to the local MDA office.

The fundraiser created goodwill within the state. "We visit people and let them know they have an opportunity to help MDA," Arldt said. "Everybody gets involved, passing the word around."

Tampa, FL Branch 599 has spent its holiday season over the past two decades gathering collections for the local Toys for Tots drive.

Retired carrier and Toys for Tots coordinator **Alan Peacock**, along with Branch President **Tony Diaz**, leads the

The MDA quilt raffled off by Austin, TX Auxilliary 111



Letter carriers and volunteers in Milwaukee, WI, get the gifts ready for a giving tree event.



annual campaign. “They needed more help from us, and we’ve been helping ever since,” Peacock said of the branch’s commitment.

The mission of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve’s Toys for Tots Program is to collect new, unwrapped toys during the holiday season each year, and to distribute those toys as Christmas gifts to less fortunate children in communities. “Being a former Marine, I’ve been involved with Toys for Tots since boot camp,” Peacock said.

The branch takes the mission seriously and begins early in the year, holding a meeting about logistics and information and about splitting interested volunteers into committees to tackle the many tasks.

“We’ve always fashioned our toy drive on how we do our food drive,” Peacock said. That means that patrons in the community leave contributions by their mailboxes. There are also collection boxes throughout neighborhoods in Tampa, including at post offices and grocery stores.

“It’s had its peaks and valleys over the years,” depending on the economy, Peacock said. Other recent challenges have included a change in the mailing permit, hindering them from sending out notices directly to the community.

So carriers also get word out through the branch website, Facebook page, radio and TV ads, occasional Valpak inserts, flyers distributed by local Boy Scouts, and support from other local unions. They also try to contact the same companies and co-sponsors that help

out for the Letter Carriers’ Food Drive.

In many years, the branch has received a proclamation from the mayor naming a “Toys for Tots Day” each December. “We’ve always had the support of our city government,” Peacock said. And one year, a regional organization, Network of Promise, donated thousands of Disney movies on DVD.

Once toys are collected in a ware-

house, Toys for Tots picks everything up and delivers toys to disadvantaged children. At last count, 45,000 children in the Tampa area were registered to be recipients this year. “We’re giving them a better Christmas—that’s the important

thing,” Peacock said.

Peacock said it is the “joy of helping others” that pushes members to continue the effort. Carriers enjoy picking up the toys and sometimes even recruit family members to join in at the union hall.

One highlight for Peacock over the years was when he brought his two grandsons shopping for kids who are less fortunate. “It’s fun letting them learn and pay it forward,” he said.

It doesn’t seem like Branch 599 will stop its involvement with Toys for Tots anytime soon. “As letter carriers, we’re very community-oriented anyway,” Peacock said. “We try to make it an effort that everybody can be a part of.”

**Ruth Ann Klotz** of Milwaukee, WI Branch 2 also looks out for the kids in her community. For 24 years, she has been a champion of the Giving Tree program. Each year, the retired carrier organizes the gift-giving program for

hundreds of local youngsters in the community who are involved with two Boys and Girls Clubs, on the north and south sides of Milwaukee.

“It takes a retired person, because there’s a lot of phone-calling,” she said. “We’ve provided gifts for at least 10,000 children over the years.”

Klotz gets the names and wish lists for the children, who fall anywhere between the ages of 5 and 18 years old. She then makes “giving trees” that hold the gift tags for carriers to select, and she distributes the trees to each of Branch 2’s nearly 40 stations and offices.

Committees are needed to make sure this project continually succeeds. “It’s a combined effort,” Klotz said. “It takes a community to make it work. There’s always help if you need it.”

Stewards help support the endeavor at stand-up talks at their stations, and Klotz also goes to post offices to present stand-up talks to promote giving trees wherever she’s requested.

Once tags are selected by carriers, everyone shops for and wraps presents, and Klotz follows up to ensure that all the tags are accounted for. One year, Klotz and her husband shopped for 65 people, and sometimes local groups provide gift cards and bags to pack the gifts in.

Each gift costs usually around \$20 to \$25. “It might be the only gift they get at Christmastime,” Klotz said. “And these kids don’t ask for much. A few years ago, one child asked for a smoke alarm for his home.”

Gifts are then brought to a branch meeting in December, a party with the recipients from the Boys and Girls Clubs and their parents. “To put a smile on their face is heart-warming and just makes you want to do better,” Klotz said.



# Penalty Overtime Exclusion

**Penalty Overtime Exclusion**  
As referenced in Article 8, sections 4 and 5, of the USPS-NALC and USPS-APWU national agreements, the December period (during which penalty overtime regulations are not applicable) consists of four consecutive service weeks. This year, the December period begins Pay Period 26-15, Week 2 (Dec. 5, 2015) and ends Pay Period 01-16, Week 1 (Jan. 1, 2016). **PR**

This program is close to Klotz's heart because she herself was an orphan. "The need is out there, and I'm just trying to meet the need," she said.

Klotz has been spreading her knowledge about coordinating this event by training someone to take over. "It's always nice to get the younger carriers involved," she said.

But Klotz doesn't stop there. She's also participated in efforts to raise money for MDA, including golf outings, bowlathons, Fill the Satchel events and providing meals and entertainment for participants at MDA camps.

"It's such a rewarding experience to

make the community better than you found it," she said.

However carriers across the country decide to stitch their marks on their local communities, you can bet that they will do it by doing more than just delivering the mail.

"The holiday season comes as a reminder for us to give back to the communities we serve, and letter carriers often find unique ways to serve our patrons and to expand upon existing programs," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Just as we deliver mail and packages at least six days a week, so too must we deliver for those in need in our communities." **PR**

## Hunger never takes a holiday



"New Mexico somehow ends up at the top of the list of states for hunger," Albuquerque, NM Branch 504 President **David Pratt** said. "That's not the place we want to be."

Responding to the need, Branch 506 doesn't wait for the national NALC food drive held each spring—the branch holds its own food drive every November to help replenish food banks before the holidays.

"We have such a great need for food" in New Mexico, Pratt said. "Some families out here have one person supporting three generations." The 500 or so carriers of Branch 504 collected 184,000 pounds of food in November 2014 for the Roadrunner Food Bank in Albuquerque, the largest food bank in



**A successful drive in Albuquerque**

the state. It serves the needs of 70,000 hungry people in the state every week.

"The members really step up," Pratt added. "They take a personal interest in their patrons on their routes."

The haul for the November 2014 food drive was close to the

209,964 pounds Branch 504 collected for the national food drive last spring. (The tally for the branch's food drive this November were not available at press time.)

More than 360,000 New Mexicans—17 percent—are at risk of hunger. The state ranked first in hunger among children last year, with almost a third of its children going to bed hungry. Thanks to the efforts of Branch 504, that number is falling. **PR**

# The gift of life, all year long

**S**ometimes when branches find that their community events are successful, they double—or triple—their efforts going forward.

That's the case with Flushing, NY Branch 294's blood drives. The first was started in 2001 by then-Vice President Brian Keelen. Having served in Vietnam as a combat medic, Keelen knew the importance of donating blood. When local unionized workers at a Domino sugar plant went on strike, Branch 294 decided to raise money for them and have a blood drive.

When Keelen retired, **Andrew Fontanetta** took over as the branch blood drive coordinator and led the effort along with Branch President **Tony Paolillo**.

Over the years, the event grew to two blood drives per year, in winter and spring. These biannual drives produced approximately 55 pints a year.

In 2014, the branch decided to add a third blood drive in the summer, which collected 82 pints. "The numbers just kept going up and up," Fontanetta said.

The drives are held during union meetings at the local Knights of Columbus hall. "I always tell people, this meeting is different—you're saving a life," Fontanetta

said. And he says that if people can't give blood for medical reasons, "Come anyway. Volunteer, help out."

In addition, the three blood drives are held in memory of a deceased letter carrier. The most recent drive in August was named for Joseph Cierzniwski, who died last year.

In 2009, the branch added a Heroes Night, when members honor a letter carrier who has made a contribution to the community. Rep. Grace Meng (NY-6th) and Region 15 National Business Agent Larry Cirelli are usually in attendance to present the award, honoring "a particular carrier who did something heroic on their route or something notable in their community," Paolillo said.

"There's a lot of stuff going on besides the meeting," Fontanetta added.

A long preparation checklist includes coordination with the New York blood services team and setting up food for participants. The branch also has a raffle for various prizes, such as gift baskets, union T-shirts and coolers. "It's really a group effort," Fontanetta said.

This year, after completing three blood drives, Branch 294 surpassed what it thought of as a lofty goal. "We made a pledge to have 100 donors," Paolillo said. "We blew that out of the water." They collected 114 pints.

Branch 294 gets the word out in a variety of ways. Shop stewards make announcements at their stations; it's advertised on



the branch website, branch newsletter calendar and in the local newspaper; and posters given to them by New York blood services are put up in the post office, libraries and other public spaces.

The fact that the drives are scheduled, consistent events also helps. "It's been going on for years, so people usually know," Fontanetta said. The branch also lists donors in its branch newsletter as an incentive.

For any branches considering starting a blood drive, Paolillo said, "I highly recommend that branches go for it. Please try to get something started. Make a difference."

Fontanetta cautions: "Be patient. It's going to start out a little slow," he said. "If you keep doing it, numbers keep going up."

But what the carriers get from helping with the effort is immeasurable. "It feels great. It's something you can't put a price tag on," Paolillo said. "It speaks volumes about what the NALC is all about."

Branch 294 already has its blood drive dates set for 2016 and is determined to top this year's numbers. "We always try to raise the bar," Paolillo said. "Hopefully in the future, we can go quarterly." **PR**



Flushing, NY Branch 294 President Tony Paolillo and Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY)



Branch 294 Blood Drive Coordinator Andrew Fontanetta



Region 15 National Business Agent Larry Cirelli

# The gift that keeps on giving



Mathew Flores shows off some of the many packages he has received.



**O**ut on his route in Sandy, UT, last summer, **Ron Lynch** taught a child the meaning of “be careful what you ask for, you just might get it.”

Lynch, a city carrier assistant and Salt Lake City Branch 111 member, noticed a boy reading mail advertisements as he filled mailboxes at an apartment building. “He was reading, ‘Watermelon, \$4.99,’ and stuff like that,” Lynch said. “I thought, ‘What the heck is a kid reading that for?’ ”

So he asked the boy, 12-year-old Mathew Flores, why, and Flores told him he loved to read but his family couldn’t afford books or bus fare for trips to the library. They didn’t own any children’s books. Flores asked Lynch if he could have more ads to read.

Impressed by the boy’s drive to read and learn—especially in an era when many kids his age gravitate toward electronic diversions instead—Lynch offered to help. Having older kids at home, Lynch had a few spare children’s books, so he told Flores he would bring some. Then he decided to collect a few more books for the boy. With his mother’s permission, Lynch put Flores’ photo on his Facebook page with a simple appeal for people to send him books, and he included the family’s mailing address.

“The very next day, there were people at his door with books,” Lynch said, local people who had seen the plea for donations.

The message spread fast, and books began arriving. Flores soon had a shelf full of books in both English and Spanish (he is bilingual). Local news outlets caught wind of the story, and then national

media, and that’s when the bookshelf started to sag under the weight of all the books that kept coming in the mail.

“The most I delivered in one day was 370 packages,” Lynch said, most with more than one book inside. While

books continue to arrive even now, the outpouring of goodwill for one boy who just wanted to read has finally slowed, but not before supplying Flores with so many books that he now has enough to give away to other children.

“By the time it was said and done, I delivered well over 2,000 packages to him,” Lynch said. The books, along with some cash donations, school supplies and other gifts, came

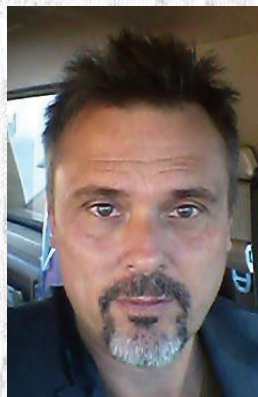
from all over the world.

“He got books from southern Africa, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Japan and China,” Lynch said. “This brought the world together for a good cause.” Lynch still delivers about four or five packages a day to Flores. At last count, the boy had received more than 12,000 books.

The books quickly piled up in the family’s small apartment, so Flores now donates most of them to his old elementary school, to kids at a skating rink, to the local police department to give to children they encounter on the job, to a shelter and to a local jail. “He’s donated thousands and he has more to go,” Lynch said. “He’s a great kid, and he’s loving the attention.”

Lynch marveled at how an act as simple as posting to Facebook generated such a strong response. “I did what we do every day,” he said. “We were all a little shocked.”

Oh, and which book is Flores’ favorite so far? *Captain Underpants*. **PR**



Ron Lynch

# Putting the 'giving' in Thanksgiving

**S**eventeen years ago, Columbia, SC Branch 233 member **Herbert Garvin Jr.** surprised an elderly patron he had befriended on his route with a Thanksgiving dinner. That simple act of kindness has blossomed into a much larger annual tradition. On his day off and often using his own money, Garvin personally brings a Thanksgiving turkey with a side dish to every apartment—all 120 or so—in an apartment complex on his route filled with needy residents.

It's an ambitious effort, but Garvin talks as if it is just another day of making deliveries. "I realized it was really easy for me, on my day off, to deliver to the whole neighborhood," he said. "It takes about a whole day."

Every fall, Garvin goes to a local supermarket and arranges to buy the hundred-plus turkeys and side items to feed the residents. Working with the manager of the apartment complex, he delivers them to each door using his pickup truck.

Donors to the effort, including other Branch 233 members, sometimes help Garvin pay for the food.

"Everyone gives something," Garvin said. "It may not be a turkey but they give something, whether it's a prayer, or a handshake, or they just help out where they can help out. And that's the most important thing."

In South Carolina, 17 percent of residents—and nearly one in every four children—live below the poverty line.

South Carolina isn't the only state where the people are lucky enough to have a caring letter carrier bringing holiday cheer at Thanksgiving.

Inspired by a radio station's efforts in a neighboring town, Burlington VT Branch 521 carrier **Tony Cote** teamed with a postal patron to collect and donate turkeys and cash to

the food bank in his hometown of Waterbury to help assure that everyone in his town had something to give thanks for on Thanksgiving Day.

Over the last six years, Cote and Kia Commo, a local radio station personality at WDEV in Waterbury and a patron on his route, have held "Tony the Mailman and Kia's Turkey Drive."

"I collect frozen turkeys in my pickup truck," Cote said. "Last year, we got 130 turkeys and \$2,000 in cash." The donated turkeys and money go to the Waterbury Food Shelf to help provide Thanksgiving dinners for hungry residents of this town of 5,000.

"I kind of got the idea from the letter carrier food drive in May," Cote added.



Tony Cote and Kia Commo



"I thought, if we can do it then, we can do it for Thanksgiving."

Cote spends almost no money to promote the turkey drive. Aside from hanging a few posters, the drive relies on free radio announcements arranged by Commo.

The approach paid off again this November: The campaign yielded 229 turkeys and \$2,193 for the food bank. "That's all in about three hours' time," Cote said.

An estimated 153,000 people in Vermont, including nearly 34,000 children, turn to food shelves and meal service programs to feed themselves and their families.

Letter carriers such as Garvin and Cote help assure that some of the most needy don't feel poor on Thanksgiving. **PR**



Herbert Garvin Jr. with his truck full of turkeys