

## 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.

## Brave carrier assists gunshot-wounded patron amid live fire

On April 27, Carmichael, CA Branch 4494 member **Scott Gallegos**, a CCA, had just started delivering his assigned route. It was his fourth week on the job. As he was looking for a place to park to dismount and deliver to some houses, a small car came up on his left very quickly, made a quick right and stopped just in front of his van, almost hitting him.

While the carrier was watching the car, a woman started knocking at his passenger-side window, begging for help. "She was just drenched from the neck down with blood," Gallegos said. "She had been shot, she started to fade out, I sat her down." He quickly opened the passenger door while calling 911 to report the shooting.

After shooting the woman in the neck, the gunman had taken off. Gallegos applied pressure to her injuries, and though the woman was fading in and out of consciousness, the carrier asked where the shooter went. She pointed to a duplex nearby.

A sheriff's patrol arrived

and got right in front of the postal van. Then more shots were fired in the direction of the police car and the van, though there were no reports of further injuries. From there, a search and a standoff ensued as police tried to locate, and then talk with, the suspected shooter.

"When I heard gunshots coming at us, I knew it was pretty real," Gallegos said. "Police said, 'We've got to get her to safety.'"

Meanwhile, a resident from down the street also came to help. The sheriff's deputy ordered them to get the woman into the van and take her to the hospital. But the door wouldn't open.

The Army combat veteran thought quickly. "I looked around and I saw some tall bushes," he said. Gallegos picked up the woman and carried her through a split in the trees to get her some cover before continuing to put pressure on her wounds. "When you see something like that, instinct takes over," he told the local Fox TV station. "You just do what you have to do." Eventually, the carrier was directed to retreat across the street to a restaurant for safety.

The woman had suffered injuries to the neck and abdomen from the bullets. She was taken to the hospital with life-threatening injuries. The next day, she was upgraded to stable condition.

The alleged shooter, Jeremiah Hankins, held up officers in a five-hour standoff, taking shots out of the windows of the house he had holed up in. Between the police department, the sheriff's department, a negotiation team, and SWAT officers, there were about 50 to 60 officers at the scene. A nearby elementary school and several businesses were locked down during that time.

The suspect eventually surrendered and was taken into custody, and faced charges of suspicion of attempted murder, assault with a deadly weapon causing great bodily injury, assault with a deadly weapon on a peace officer, possession of a firearm by a felon, and



Carmichael, CA Branch 4494 member **Scott Gallegos** (pictured here with his wife Tracy) recently was interviewed by a local TV station for his role in helping his injured customer after she was shot.



The newspaper article about Steve Shipman

domestic violence.

A neighbor said that the victim and the alleged gunman lived at a duplex with a teenage son, though their relationship was unclear. She was expected to make a full recovery.

Gallegos brushed off any major praise for his heroics. "I was brave for about 25 minutes. Those police officers who handled that, those are the guys who are the real heroes," he said.

But the carrier was glad he was there at the right time. "I thank God I was there," he said. "It was pretty amazing that I was there at that exact time."

## Carrier runs into burning home to save child

When Tulsa, OK Branch 1358 mem-

ber **Steve Shipman** was on his route on the morning on Feb. 4, "I heard a small explosion," he said.

He looked up and saw smoke emanating from a house nearby. Shipman and a neighbor, Sherman Alberly, called 911 at the same time.

"I ran up, tried to kick the door down," Shipman said.

The neighbor said that no one was inside, but then they heard a young girl screaming. An 11-year-old girl was home alone and trapped in her bedroom at the back part of the house.

"We knocked out the windows with a board," Alberly told the *Vinita (OK) Daily Journal*, "then we cleaned out the glass and pulled her out the window."

Alberly knew the family had pets, and as firefighters were working on the blaze, one of the two small puppies came running out of the house, blackened with soot.

The cause of the fire had not yet been determined, though firefighters were able to extinguish the fire.

Shipman said he doesn't consider himself a hero. "We were fortunate because we heard her holler. Everything fell into place," the 25-year letter carrier said. "It's something anyone would do in that situation."

## Eye on the elderly



John Little

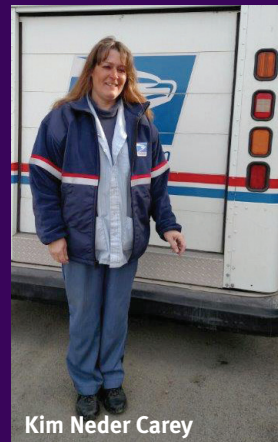
While driving on his route on a very cold Nov. 19, 2014, Florence, SC Branch 1416 member **John Little** saw a dog walking around loose in the neighborhood dragging his leash behind him. He recognized the dog and began looking for its owner, Jo Linda Creech. The carrier found that Creech had fallen in her neighbor's driveway, had injured her hip, and couldn't get up. "She said she was in pain, so I tried to pick her up," the carrier said. Creech told Little she did not want him to pick her up, so he called her husband, and then called 911 to get help. "I

gave her my jacket and put it over her," he said. He talked with her until her husband arrived, but wanted to also stay until EMTs arrived, since the operator had asked him a lot of questions. He then returned the woman's dog to her home. Creech wrote a letter of appreciation to the local postmaster for Little's help. "It is a blessing to have a postman who is aware of his surroundings and recognized right away that something was not right," Creech wrote. "I am recovering nicely after surgery, and I can truthfully say John Little had a big hand in how things turned out that day. I think John should be recognized for his quick response in an emergency situation." Little, a 21-year letter carrier and former state trooper, brushed off any major heroics. "The

Lord put me in the right place at the right time, is how I see it," he said. "You have to look out for everyone."

Honeoye Falls, NY Branch 4747 member **Kim Neder Carey** always waves to one of her elderly customers as she drops off mail, and the customer always waves back. "She always has the screen door open," the carrier said. On Nov. 10, though, the carrier noticed through the door that her customer was on the floor inside her home. Neder Carey went in and asked the woman if she needed help. She responded that she wasn't in pain, but didn't want to get up in case she was injured. But, she couldn't reach her phone, and wanted Neder Carey to call her son. He arrived a few minutes later and took the

woman to the emergency room, where she was determined to have bruises but no broken bones. The family sent a letter of appreciation to the post office thanking Neder Carey for her quick actions and care. The 19-year postal veteran doesn't think her actions required any attention, though. "She's a sweet lady," Neder Carey said. "I think it's something anyone would have done."



Kim Neder Carey

## Carriers team up to thwart repeat criminal

On the morning of June 12, 2014, a college-aged customer approached Eugene, OR Branch 916 member **Bryce McLean** and told him that she had had a package stolen from her that contained a \$425 dress she had just bought, as well as some expensive shoes. The woman showed McLean a grainy still image of the suspect she had obtained from video surveillance.

Two days later, McLean encountered a man matching the description several

throughout the neighborhood for a day or two,” Graves said, adding that the man had a lengthy criminal record.

The officer was able to solve several cases and return valuable property to multiple victims in the area, as well as jail the suspect for his crimes. “Due to Mr. McLean’s care for the community, his attention to detail, and his alert nature, the Eugene Police Department was able to solve several cases,” police officer Branden Esch said. “Mr. McLean is, without a doubt, a benefit to this community and an asset to the United States Postal Service. I would like to extend my personal gratitude for his diligence and assistance. This community is a better place because of him.”

Graves said that co-workers at the post office have started calling him and McLean “Starsky and Hutch.” The 22-year postal veteran said that the appellation is funny, but that their actions are “not a big deal.”

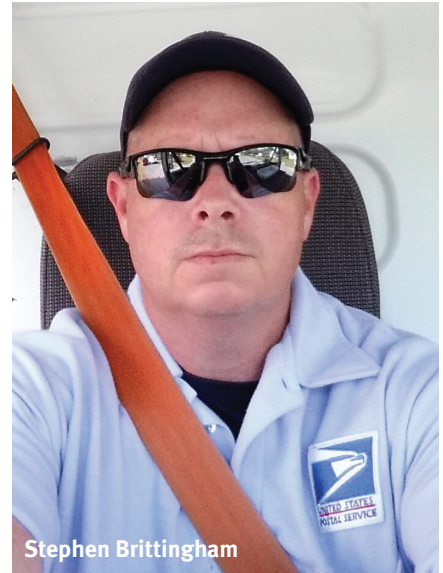
## The right training can make all the difference

On May 23, 2014, Southern Delaware Branch 906 member **Stephen Brittingham** was driving his LLV on his route when he heard about an unconscious man at a truck stop. “It was adjacent to where I was on the highway,” Brittingham said, so he went to the scene.

Brittingham, a certified EMT and assistant chief with the local fire department, found Christopher Tomczyk lying on the ground near fuel tanks. The man had suffered an apparent heart attack while washing his windshield.

The carrier immediately motioned to another local volunteer firefighter who arrived on the scene, and the duo proceeded to administer CPR to the man, who was not responding.

Brittingham remained on the scene performing CPR on Tomczyk until medics arrived. He assisted the medics



Stephen Brittingham

and after two defibrillations, the patient became responsive.

EMS personnel later advised Brittingham that Tomczyk was talking and doing well.

Brittingham doesn’t think he’s a hero, though. “I just happened to be there,” the 14-year postal veteran said. “I was just glad I was trained to assist him.”

## Right place, right time, save a life

On a very cold Feb. 9, Sheboygan, WI Branch 102 member **Lorri Trossen** was delivering mail when she heard a cry for help from her customer, Pat Zitzer. “Can you help me get in the house?” she asked Trossen.

The woman had injured herself after falling on ice near her garage and was too injured to get up. Zitzer had crawled from the garage and made it to the side of her house 20 feet away, where the carrier spotted her.

“She was in pain,” Trossen said. The carrier helped the woman up from the ground, and walked her into her house before calling 911 and the woman’s daughter.

Zitzer was taken to the hospital and was expected to recover from her broken back. “She had it pretty rough there, but we got her taken care of,” Trossen said.

Zitzer’s son, Mike, went to the post office to commend Trossen’s actions.

But the 17-year letter carrier brushed off any accolades. “I was just in the right spot at the right time,” she said. “I was very fortunate to be there.” **PR**



Eugene, OR Branch 916 members **Terrence Graves (l)** and **Bryce McLean** pose with the local police officer for whom they helped detain a thief.

blocks away at a 7-Eleven. The carrier notified the police and then called on fellow Branch 916 member **Terrence Graves** to help him stall the suspect until the responding officer arrived.

Graves told the man, “You need to wait for the police, and you can run if you’d like, but I was a track star in high school, so you wouldn’t make it 20 yards.”

When police arrived 20 minutes later, they found that the suspect was still in possession of the woman’s dress, as well as hundreds of dollars’ worth of various stolen property from multiple people—cell phones, laptops, even an expensive cat collar—and was armed with a knife. “They had been stealing

## Eye on the elderly



Connie Wray

As High Point, NC Branch 936 member **Connie Wray** was delivering her route on Jan. 29, she heard an elderly customer call for help. “I could just barely hear her hollering,” she

said. When the carrier pulled into the woman’s driveway, she found her lying on the ground. The woman told Wray that she had fallen off the back of her truck. Even though she was too injured to stand, she had been able to crawl to the side of the house. “She had a big knot on her head,” the carrier said. Fearing it was a concussion, she helped her customer up and back into the house and called a family member, who came and was able to get medical attention for the woman. The 27-year postal veteran said she just tries to keep an eye out on her route. “I think anybody would have done the same thing,” Wray said.

On Jan. 10, High Point, NC Branch 936 member **Stephen Hancock** noticed his elderly customer, Peggy Horne, out in her front yard walking her dog. The customer’s dog pulled away from Horne, causing her to fall. The carrier immediately rushed over. The woman was coherent, but could not get up. “I asked her if she was OK and needed help getting up,” he said. Hancock helped Horne as she made an attempt to stand. “She couldn’t put pressure on her left leg,” the carrier said.

So, he lifted her up from the ground, retrieved her dog and escorted them both back into her home and into a comfortable position. Hancock then asked whether he could do anything further, and Horne asked if he could contact her son. Hancock later went to check on his customer and found that Horne was being taken to the hospital by ambulance, accompanied by her son. The woman apparently had broken her leg, as well as suffered a broken hip. After surgery and rehab, the woman returned home. Neighbors were grateful for Hancock’s actions. “Everyone is thrilled with the care you gave Peggy Horne! You are our hero!” a resident wrote to the carrier. But Hancock doesn’t think he’s worthy of the hero treatment. “I felt like I did what anyone would do,” the nine-year postal veteran said.

Charlotte, NC Branch 545 member **Ryan Cruz** was substituting another carrier’s route in a condominium



**Branch 936, High Point, NC member Stephen Hancock recently was recognized for his actions by Region 9 National Business Agent Kenneth Gibbs Jr.**

complex on Dec. 12 when “I noticed there were a lot of packages on the floor for an older customer,” he said. Two days later, the carrier was on that route again and still saw the pile of mail. “It put up all kinds of alarms for me,” Cruz said. “It was just a really uneasy feeling I had.” He rang the bell and knocked on the door, but didn’t get a response. When he looped back around, he tried again. Cruz asked some neighbors if they knew whether the customer, Jim Neely, was out of town, but they said he was not. Because of his concern, Cruz called the police, and in turn, a locksmith also was called. Neely was found lying on the floor after suffering a stroke two days earlier. “They didn’t think he was alive,” Cruz said. “They worked on him and he came round.” Paramedics rushed the man to the hospital, and upon being released, the man was moved to a rehab facility. Neely’s neighbor, Sandra Niven, wrote to the post office to commend the carrier. “If Ryan had not been concerned, Mr. Neely would have died. He is now recovering in rehab facility,” she said. “I am so grateful to know that your mail carriers are looking out for customers. Please recognize Ryan Cruz for saving Jim Neely’s life.” But Cruz said his actions were just the right thing to do. “I felt like, I’m just looking out for him like I would my own grandfather,” the 19-year postal veteran said. “We should be thinking about our customers. With all that’s going on with the post office, customer service should be first and foremost.”



Ryan Cruz

Plainfield, NJ Branch 396 member **Denice Howard** was delivering her route on Feb. 11 when she came upon the car of her elderly customer, Steven Gordon, by his mailbox at the top of a hill. “He never leaves his car like that,” the carrier said. “I thought, let me give him his mail. He must have come to meet me.” Howard then saw the man lying on the ground with his back to her. “He wasn’t moving,” How-



Denice Howard

ard said. She went over to him, and found him coherent. He said he had slipped and fallen on ice. “I’m OK; I just can’t get up,” Gordon told Howard. The carrier called 911, then took off her jacket and other extra clothing to keep the man warm until medical personnel arrived to take Gordon to the hospital. “As of now, the injuries are healing and life is becoming normal,” Gordon wrote in a thank-you letter to the local postmaster. “Thank you for your concern and for having Denice as our mail carrier.” But Howard doesn’t see herself as a hero. “I’m just glad I was there, for him or for anyone else,” the 30-year carrier said. “That’s a part of life—we don’t want anyone to be hurt.” **PR**