

## 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.

## Carrier performs 'good Samaritan act'

On a 90-degree July 17, Columbus, NE Branch 1043 member **Aaron Muller** filled in on another carrier's route. The carrier noticed his 85-year-old customer, Marvin Skarda, doing yard work as he passed by.

When Muller looped back around the opposite side of the street a few hours later, something caught his attention. "I heard this sound but dismissed it as children playing," he told the *Fremont Tribune*. He continued his route and slowly walked to the next house, but he kept hearing the sound.

He stopped, then followed the sound to Skarda's fence in the back yard. "That's when I saw his hand come up," Muller said.

After Skarda had finished mowing, he picked some weeds in the yard when pain that he had in his ribs from an accident a few weeks earlier overcame him. Skarda told *The Columbus Telegram* that he had reached for the mower to stop his fall but lost his balance, falling backward and hitting his head on the concrete. The brick border of the sidewalk pierced the man's back. He had an alert button that will signal an ambulance, but it had been inside the house charging.

"All that was going through my mind was that I was going to die. I

really thought I was going to cash it in," Skarda told the newspaper. "I just started praying because I knew I had no chance." Soon, the man found the energy to yell, "Please help me, help me, someone please help me!"

Muller rushed to Skarda's side. "I asked him if he needed help. He was really out of it," the carrier said. "I helped him and propped him up on his lawnmower."

Muller noticed that the man was sweaty and a little bloody. He sat with Skarda for about 10 minutes, unsuccessfully attempting to call the man's daughter and health care worker, and tried to convince him to head back into the house. Skarda thanked Muller for his help, and told him he was fine enough for the carrier to continue on his route.

Muller said OK, but he told Skarda he would come back around after his next loop and would continue trying to get through to the man's emergency contacts.

When the carrier came back, he found Skarda struggling to get off his mower after he had pulled it into the garage, because he was dizzy. Muller helped the man into the house and then sat in the kitchen with him, again making attempts to reach Skarda's family and doctor.

The man again thanked Muller, telling him, "You've saved my life," but insisted that he continue on. So the carrier did, and after another 30-minute loop, he returned again.

Muller called 911 to have officers check on him. The person he talked to knew the man's daughter and was able to contact her.

Despite media attention, Muller brushed off the idea of being called a hero. "If someone needs help, you just help them, it's not a question," the two-year letter carrier told the Associated Press. "I didn't do anything exceptional. I was just helping him. Good Samaritan maybe, but not a hero."

Skarda disagreed. "He might not think he's a hero, but he's my hero," he told the AP.



Aaron Muller

Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Anne Valla/*The Columbus Telegram*

## Postal ‘superhero’ revives customer

On March 4, 2014, Colorado Springs, CO Branch 204 member **Freddy Kinhofer** was delivering his route as usual. He passed by a customer who greeted him every morning. “He’s always waiting for his mail,” he said.

When the carrier looped around to deliver at the man’s house a little while later, he didn’t see him. Kinhofer became concerned.

Pulling away from the box, he looked back. “I noticed two feet protruding from shrubs in the front of the house,” Kinhofer said, so he ran up to the house to investigate. He began pulling the man into a seated position.

The carrier, a 26-year Army veteran who served in Vietnam, used his medical training to assess the man. He was shaking. “I checked for a pulse and opened up his mouth to make sure he wasn’t choking,” Kinhofer said. He then called

out to the customer’s wife to call 911.

The man had apparently collapsed on the front porch. Kinhofer performed chest compressions for about five minutes until first responders arrived to take over and to reconnect the man’s oxygen tank. EMTs said that the carrier’s quick thinking and calm actions likely saved the man’s life. Kinhofer was recognized by the USPS on its 2014 Superhero Day.

The carrier checked back a few days later with the man’s wife, who said her husband had had a “neurological shutdown,” but had returned home from the hospital.

Kinhofer doesn’t think he should be called a hero, though. “I just happened to be in the right place at the right time,” the 15-year postal veteran said. “If someone had been in my shoes, they would have done something.”

## Dog is no match for carrier

On July 15, South Suburban Merged, IL Branch 4016 member **Rene Bazile** was

sorting through his DPS mail when he heard a scream for help, followed by a loud “Get away—no!”

When the carrier looked up, he saw a dog pulling a 3-year-old girl out of a stroller by her shoulder. Bazile ran down the street to help. The girl’s grandmother had been trying to fight the pit bull off and had fallen.

“I was standing between the dog and the grandma, spraying mace,” Bazile said. “The grandma was hysterical.”

The dog let the girl go and ran, and Bazile called 911. Once the dog was across the street, it started to charge another man who had come to help. This man started swinging his arms at the dog, and the dog came back toward Bazile and the child. Again, the carrier sprayed mace on the dog, and it took off running down the block.

Once the pit bull was gone, Bazile picked up the girl to calm her and to make sure she had no injuries. “She had a little blood on her shoulder,” he said.

## Neighborhood watch

**B**ronson, MI Branch 3477 member **Jody Beck** was delivering her route on Oct. 21, 2013, when she smelled a strong odor of gas near a home. Concerned for her elderly customer, she knocked on the front door but the man did not answer. Not wanting to take any chances, Beck called police to check on the odor and on the customer. Beck finished her relay and later that afternoon, “Our local EMT stopped me,” she said. He told her they had found the man inside the house, and his stove had been on. Dead cats were also found. A neighbor found the

carrier on her route to thank her, as the gas company had told the neighbor that if the odor hadn’t been reported within the next 24 hours, there might have been an explosion. “His gas line went right by her house and it could have blown,” Beck said. The carrier was happy to find out the man was fine and that he returned home shortly after everything was checked out. But Beck doesn’t think she should be called a hero—she just wanted to help. “It’s human nature,” the 23-year postal veteran said. “These things are what carriers do on a daily basis.”

**W**hile carrying his route on a Saturday in May, Louisville, KY Branch 14 member **Steve Young** noticed a suspicious young man. “He seemed very curious about the neighborhood,” he said. The carrier started joking around with the man, but all he got in return was a dirty look. “He had a mean look on his face,” Young said. “Something just didn’t seem right.” A neighbor was on the porch and agreed with Young that something was off. The man appeared to be scoping out homes, eventually jumping a fence to get to the next street over. The carrier called his friend who

lived on the next street, and he told Young that there had recently been three break-ins on the street. Young asked the neighbor to contact the police. They were able to catch up with and arrest with the man who had allegedly broken into five homes. Young, a 15-year letter carrier as well as a four-year Navy veteran, said, “You know what to look for. We’re the eyes and ears of the neighborhood while we’re out there.” But being called a hero? Young doesn’t see himself as one. “I’m just a mailman trying to do the right thing,” he said. “I’ve always taken pleasure in helping people.” **PR**

## Proud to Serve



Glenda Mix

Once everything seemed to be settled, Bazile walked the girl and her grandmother to their house before he returned to his route.

The first-year letter carrier doesn't consider himself a hero, though—just a “concerned citizen” and “helpful neighbor.” “I have a son that age,” he said. “I was just happy to be there.”

### Carrier helps customer in trouble

Garden State Merged, NJ Branch 444 member **Glenda Mix** was just beginning her route on April 23, 2014, when she saw a car idling nearby.

When she looked closer, “I thought I saw a body slumped over the steering

wheel,” she said. The carrier thought she recognized the car as belonging to her customer, Marion Boyce.

“I tapped on the window to make sure she was OK, and she didn't answer,” Mix told local newspaper *The Breeze*. “I went to the driver side and tapped on the window, then opened the door and tapped her to see if she would respond. She never did, so I panicked.”

She could see that Boyce was turning blue, so she called 911 and her supervisor, then waited with her until EMTs arrived to take her to the hospital. When Mix saw that her customer was in good hands, she continued on her route.

Boyce, who has emphysema and

COPD, had been on her way to see her doctor. Paramedics told Mix that if she hadn't called when she did, Boyce might not have survived, as she wasn't getting a supply of sufficient oxygen to her brain.

“I want to thank her; my family and I are just ever so grateful to her for saving my life,” Boyce told *The Breeze*.

Mix, an 11-year postal veteran, visited her customer at home later to check in.

She told the paper that when she sees something that looks wrong, she tries to help. “I was happy to find her and get her the help she needed,” she said. “Most of us can do this if we see someone in trouble.” **PR**

## 🔥 Fire and rescue



Jerry Bolding

Gastonia, NC Branch 1512 member **Jerry Bolding** was delivering his route on Sept. 16, 2013, to some townhomes. “I was knocking on the door for a certified letter when I heard some popping noises,” he said. He looked two houses down and noticed that the front of the home was on fire. Bolding knew that there was a family with two kids who lived there, so he

went to the front door. “I was beating on the door, saying, ‘Your house is on fire!’ ” he said. He asked a bystander to call 911. Flames were about 12 to 14 feet high when the customer opened the door. The man ran back inside to get the remainder of the family. Meanwhile, the carrier ran and got the neighbor's water hose as the family threw pots of water to try to quell the blaze until the firefighters arrived. Just the front of the house had been damaged. Bolding came by later to check on his customers, and they told him, “You're our guardian angel. We never would have known,” he said. “I was thankful I was in that area, because there aren't usually people around there during the day.” But the 22-year letter carrier, who has been on the same route for his whole career, doesn't consider

himself a hero. “The people on my route are like family,” he said. “I just wanted to make sure they got out OK. God put us here to take care of each other.”

Seeing flames coming from a home while delivering mail on March 19, 2014, Southeast Massachusetts Merged Branch 18 member **Dennis Fisher** took quick action. “I noticed what looked like a burning brush—a little fire,” he said. When he got closer, he saw shooting flames from the other side of the house. Fisher saw a neighbor nearby, and

he asked him to call 911. The carrier ran to the front of the house and banged on the door loudly to alert the residents inside, and a man and his wife, child, and a grandmother soon streamed out. Fisher then went to the side of the house to grab a hose, but it was frozen. Firefighters arrived soon after and were able to contain the fire to the side of the house and the basement. “They thank me every time I go by,” Fisher said. But the second-year letter carrier doesn't think he should be called a hero. “I was glad to help,” he said. “I was just doing something anyone would do.” **PR**



Dennis Fisher



## Help on the way

On May 14, Springfield, MO Branch 203 member **Sheri Kennicott** noticed that the padlock on the outside of her wheelchair-bound customer's patio door was locked, the curtain was closed, and the cat was peering out from behind the closed curtain. The woman, Dorothy, had lived on the carrier's route for 17 years. "I knew her habits," Kennicott said. Dorothy lives on the ground floor, and the carrier walks by her sliding glass door each day on her way to the wall boxes to deliver the mail for the apartments. She opens the door and hands Dorothy her mail on the way by. Kennicott was worried, so she looked in the second bedroom window but could not see Dorothy. The woman's bedroom curtains were closed as well. "I knew something was wrong," Kennicott said. The carrier knocked repeatedly on the door and windows, but got no response, so she contacted a neighbor who called 911. Knowing that help was on the way, Kennicott finished delivering the rest of her mail route. When she returned to Dorothy's apartment at the end of the day, EMTs were still there. They had to break in through the window, and they found Dorothy on the floor between the bed and the wall where she had fallen after having a stroke. She had cuts and bruises, and could not talk. They told Kennicott that they probably would not have been able to save her had much more time elapsed. Dorothy's only memory of the event had been of seeing the clock on the wall at about 7 a.m., so she had most likely been on the floor most of the day. After the hospital, Dorothy entered a rehabilitation center. Kennicott brushed off

any attention for her actions. "It's something we should all do," the 21-year postal veteran said. "We know when something's wrong."

Austin, TX Branch 181 member **Michael Robinson** had just finished delivering his route at an apartment complex on Nov. 18, 2014, and was standing at the back of his truck. "I was cleaning up my mail when I heard screaming," he said. He looked up and noticed that a maintenance man's attention seemed to be piqued as well. He heard continued screaming and pinpointed its location to an apartment across the way. "I just took off running up the stairs," the carrier said. It was a grandmother, mother and baby, and Robinson found that the child was choking. Robinson, a former medic in the Army, quickly took action. He did a mouth sweep and said, "Someone call 911." There was still no noise from the child, so he continued the necessary steps until he heard the child crying. Suddenly, the crying stopped, so Robinson continued trying to dislodge the object in the child's throat until paramedics arrived to take over. Robinson said that his military training has been put to good use on the job, and he's stopped to



help out at accidents and other situations where people are in trouble.

"It's very instinctual, especially when it's within your reach," the 17-year postal veteran said.

On Saturday, Jan. 31, St. Paul, MN Branch 28 member **David Forstad** was on his route when he had just rounded a corner and saw that a woman on the street was having trouble. Andy Twedt had been crossing a street when she stepped into a drainage hole, tumbled backward onto a sidewalk and felt a snap. "As I lay on the sidewalk, staring at a leg that refused to obey, a kindly male voice said, 'Need some help?'" Twedt wrote in a recent *Lillie News* column. Forstad, a former EMT, knelt down to talk to the woman and asked if she was OK. Assessing her injuries, he thought that Twedt probably had a broken hip. Twedt asked the carrier to call an ambulance, so he did. "Cars were whipping by," he said, so he thought quickly and gathered some nearby construction signs to help protect the woman from pedestrians and vehicles whizzing by. "We're going to build a little fortress around you," Forstad said he told her. "She was in good spirits." Emergency responders soon arrived and took Twedt to the hospital, where she was indeed treated for a broken hip. Twedt credited Forstad with rescuing her, writing that the incident reminded her that "a hero sometimes appears in the midst of a calamity...dressed not in superhero briefs and snug leggings,



Sheri Kennicott

but in something as ordinary as a mailman's uniform." But Forstad said he was "flabbergasted" to be called a hero. "I was happy to see she was OK," the 10-year postal veteran said. "I'm sure any other carrier has plenty of stories like that of helping someone at some point."

Following a heavy snow storm on Feb. 14, 2014, New Castle, PA Branch 22 member **Ryan Becker** placed mail in his customer's mailbox. The man was outside snowblowing, they exchanged hellos, and the carrier kept on with his deliveries. Becker soon heard, "Hey! Help! Help!" He turned his attention back toward the man's house, and saw that customer Eric Schmidt was on the ground holding his chest. "He was turning blue," Becker said. He felt it would take him too long to get a cell phone out of his pocket with his winter postal gear on, and he remembered seeing two police officers nearby on the street. Becker ran to get them, and then assisted them in giving Schmidt medical attention until an ambulance arrived just a few minutes later. The man had had a heart attack, but recovered in the hospital and soon returned home. Becker laughed at the idea of being called a hero, though. "If you're out in the neighborhood, you know your customers," the 13-year postal veteran said. "I was just in the right place at the right time." **PR**