

A surprise postal parade for New York boy

Bringing a little bit of daily joy to a young man with a debilitating disease who loves the Postal Service would be good enough on its own. But as we often do, letter carriers in the Syracuse, NY, area went far beyond that to give one teenager a truly special day.

Mathew Watkins, age 17, always greeted the letter carriers who came to his house. He even liked to go to his local post office and watch LLVs arrive at the end of the day, counting them to assure himself that all carriers had arrived safely from their routes. Carriers even nicknamed him “Mathew the Mailman” because he told them he wanted to be a postal employee someday.

“He just loves mailmen,” **Colleen Maiorano** of Syracuse Branch 134 said. Maiorano is the regular carrier on Watkins’ route. The youth sometimes greets letter carriers at the door to accept the mail, and has told them he was a mailman, too. “He’s quite sweet,” Maiorano said.

Then one day, Watkins stopped appearing at the door, and a postal employee who knew his family got wind that he was in the hospital. The teen had acute lymphomatic leukemia, or cancer of the blood—the most common childhood cancer.

The treatment lasted several months, and eventually Watkins came home, in a wheelchair, to continue his recovery. To give him a special welcome home, postal employees from the Bayberry office in nearby Liverpool, NY, joined with local firefighters and police officers in February to launch a parade of vehicles past Watkins’ house. But it was the LLVs that really thrilled him.



“He was looking past the fire trucks,” Branch 134 President **Jim Lostumbo** said. “He just wanted to see the postal trucks; that’s all he cared about.”

The local postmaster gave Watkins his own letter carrier uniform, and Lostumbo and Maiorano presented him with gifts, including an NALC T-shirt. Lostumbo also declared Watkins an honorary Branch 134 member. The young man and his family were thrilled by the show of support.

The parade brought out the whole neighborhood, including other children, to watch and show their support for Watkins, Maiorano said: “It not only brought joy to Mathew; it brought joy to many people in the neighborhood.”

A story about the parade that was posted on Facebook generated thousands of positive responses. “God bless all those special mail women and men who brought the joy not only to Mathew, but his entire family at such a hard time,” wrote one reader. **PR**



Top: Letter carrier Colleen Maiorano presents a gift to 17-year-old Mathew Watkins.

Above: The parade of LLVs