

## 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 helps fellow deliverer

On the morning of Sept. 25, 2015, Chicago Branch 11 member **Gary Reategui** was going about his route when he came upon a disturbing scene: a pit bull terrier attacking a UPS driver, Jesus Toledo. "I heard some yelling and crying for help," Reategui said.

The UPS employee had pulled up at an address where he'd been delivering packages for years. He heard a dog inside and asked the resident to keep the door closed. "She said, 'Don't worry. It's a nice dog. I can handle it,'" Toledo told the local CBS TV station.

Before he could make it down the steps, the dog went for his feet, its teeth sinking into Toledo's work boots. Then the animal went for his face. Toledo held the dog with both arms but then heard the horrible sound of a portion of his thumb that had been ripped off hitting the ground. Dazed, Toledo fell backward.

Reategui jumped in. "I launched my body and landed on top of the dog, pinning him down," the carrier said. He stayed there for 15 or 20 minutes until help arrived for the injured Toledo, who was able to crawl out. "The dog was very angry," he said. "But I had control of the situation."

Bystanders had begun gathering

around, and Reategui instructed one to call 911. "Everything happened so fast," the carrier said.

Toledo suffered injuries to an ear, his head, forearm, hands and an ankle and underwent four hours of surgery to keep his right hand intact. The animal underwent a 10-day rabies observation; the city's animal control department told Toledo the dog would be put down.

"I'll always remember the day you risked your life, to save my life. Thank you," Toledo said in praise of the carrier on CBS. "It meant a lot to me."

Reategui, a 21-year letter carrier, brushed off any major praise, simply saying, "It was a blessing he was able to go home to his family."

## Another case of 'right place, right time'

Matamoras, PA Branch 5931 member **Joseph Biss** was returning to the post office at the end of his route on July 18, 2015, when he noticed that flames and smoke were shooting out from the bottom of a vehicle traveling on the wrong side of the road by a nearby bridge.

"The car hopped the curb," he said. It then came to a stop after it crashed into a tree in a bank's parking lot.

Biss immediately ran over but didn't see anyone because of the heavy smoke. The female driver then jumped out of the car, yelling, leaving behind another woman in the passenger seat.

The carrier managed to get the passenger's door open, and she fell out. Biss found out that the woman had multiple sclerosis and needed a cane to walk. "The flames were right by us. Thank God the car didn't blow up," he said. "I got on all fours and said, 'Use me as your cane.'"

The chief of the fire department happened to be inside the bank and saw what was happening, so he called the incident into his unit. Emergency units



Chicago Branch 11 member Gary Reategui (top and above) was interviewed by a local TV news station for his role in helping a UPS driver during a dog attack.

**Matamoras, PA Branch 5931 member Joseph Biss was honored for his actions in helping with a fiery incident. Pictured (l to r) are Central Pennsylvania District Safety Manager Richard Gentile, Biss and Postmaster David Torres.**



pulled up shortly thereafter, and Biss safely helped them to the ambulance.

There had been no one else on the road at that time, and “she couldn’t see where she was going because the car

was filled with smoke already,” Biss said. The women suffered bumps and bruises and some smoke inhalation, but were expected to be fine.

“Everything was so slow and surreal.

There was no panic,” Biss said. But the 27-year postal veteran doesn’t think he’s a hero. “Thank God I was just at the right place at the right time,” he said.

## Help on the way



Terrell Brown

On Nov. 6, 2015, Tampa, FL Branch 599 member **Terrell Brown** was driving his route when “I heard a faint noise,” he said. The carrier thought it was the car’s brakes

wailing, so he slowed down and listened closer. Then he heard a man calling out. When he looked over, he saw an elderly customer lying in the front yard behind a large pot. He appeared hurt and was trying to get the carrier’s attention. “I jumped out of the truck,” Brown said. “He did not speak English but gestured that he hit the back of his head and wanted me to get someone from inside.” He had apparently fallen from a ladder and staggered to the front yard, and no one else was home. “There was a trail of blood leading from the back to the front,” the carrier said. “He was covered in blood and appeared to have been out there for some time.” He also noticed that the man was disoriented. The man was able to give Brown a family friend’s phone number, so he called

and let him speak to her to let her translate. They agreed that the carrier would call 911 and that she would come as quickly as possible. Brown gave the EMTs all the information he could, and then called the man’s family friend back to let them know which hospital to go to. Once Brown saw that his customer was in good hands, he continued on his route. But the first-year letter carrier brushed off any accolades; he said he tries to be the eyes and ears on his route: “I just want the neighborhood to know that the uniform is there for them.”

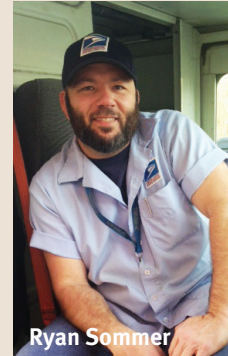
On Sept. 29, 2015, Maine Merged Branch 92 member **Jeff Pellerin** was going about his route “when I heard an elderly man yell out,” he said. “He was on his hands and knees on the ground.” The city carrier assistant yelled out, “Are you OK?” The man yelled back that he was injured. The customer, Mr. Foran, had fallen, hit his head and subsequently passed out. Pellerin was a former lifeguard



Jeff Pellerin

and had first-aid skills, so he first asked questions to rule out a stroke and heart attack. He called 911 and Foran’s wife and continued to care for the man until an ambulance arrived, getting him into a chair and giving him some water. When Pellerin saw that the man was in good hands with paramedics, he continued on his route. The carrier knocked on the door later to check in on Foran, who said that he had been dealing with low blood sugar. “All seemed to be right with the world,” the first-year letter carrier said. “It’s nice to help people out.”

On Sept. 28, 2015, Mon-Yough, PA Branch 332 member **Ryan Sommer** was starting a collection run after finishing his route when he passed his elderly customer’s house. “I was driving and I just saw her fall off her porch,” he said. Sommer pulled over and ran up the steps to find the woman unresponsive.



Ryan Sommer

He called 911 and reported the incident and location. The woman started to wake up and tried to sit up, though she was still confused and slurring her words. Sommer spoke to her, told her help was on the way and asked her to stay still. “When

she picked up her head, I saw blood,” he said. It appeared that the bleeding was coming from cuts on her head, as well as from her ears. Sommer called a nearby business, informed them of the situation and requested clean towels to start basic first aid until medics arrived. While waiting, the woman started vomiting and began bleeding from the mouth. She was taken to a nearby trauma center. A few days later, the woman’s son, who lives at the house but was at work at the time, thanked Sommer for what he did. He told Sommer that his mother was on the porch smoking and fell, and that she was recovering in the hospital with a fractured skull. “I’m just glad that I saw her fall,” the 10-year letter carrier said. “If she didn’t get help, she might not have made it.” **PR**

## Right in the nick of time

On Feb. 13, 2015, South Jersey Branch 908 member **Vance Shepherd** was delivering the mail on his route when he saw flames shoot out of one of the homes on the street.

He then heard his octogenarian customer, Mary Mead, yell for help. "There was smoke coming out the window," he said.

Mead began to come out of her home but re-entered to rescue her three dogs and several cats.

Shepherd and a neighbor, Michael Clinton, went into the house after her. When they found her inside, she was coughing, her kitchen engulfed in flames.



**South Jersey Branch 908 member Vance Shepherd (front, r) was honored by Deptford Township Mayor Paul Medany (front, l) and the city council for his role in helping a customer safely out of her burning house.**

"The fire was spreading quickly and the smoke was so thick it was hard to see," Shepherd said. When they saw Mead, she was clinging to one of her dogs and could not get back out of her home without assistance.

"We safely got her out with one of the dogs," the carrier said. "She was very upset and crying, so we sat her down away from the house."

The other neighbors came to be by Mead's side and called for emergency

assistance. When Shepherd saw that his customer was in good hands, he continued on his route.

The woman was taken to the hospital by ambulance and was released a short while later. The dogs all made it out, though one of the cats did not. Mead said later that she had been doing her laundry when she heard a loud pop from her dryer right before it went up in flames; she was unable to return home due to extensive fire damage.

"I just reacted in the moment," Shepherd, a 30-year carrier, said. "I was just doing what I think anyone would have done."

## Carrier saves customer from vicious dog attack

Lima, OH Branch 105 member **Scott Eversole** was delivering mail on Oct. 19, 2015, when he noticed two pit bulls playing in a yard. He continued walking, but said later, "There was some movement to my right." He noticed out of the corner of his eye that an off-duty police officer, Mark Link, was leaving his house and going to his car.

"They made a beeline toward him," Eversole said. The dogs knocked Link to the ground and began biting his face.

The carrier yelled at the dogs, and the animals stopped long enough for Link to stand up, but then the pit bulls knocked the man down again.

"I saw that they hit him and were going after him as hard as they could, and he was struggling to get back on his feet," Eversole told *The Lima News*. "It was then I went over with my bag, the best weapon I had, and I took it off my shoulder and began to swing it as hard as I could and knocked them off him enough for him to be able to jump in the car."

The 14-year carrier had a can of dog spray, but he knew in this case



**Scott Eversole**

that it was not an option. "The spray wouldn't have helped me in this situation because he was underneath the dogs," he told *The News*. "If I had sprayed them, I could have possibly sprayed him, blinding him. If I would have needed help, we both would have been hurt, then."

Eversole continued to swing until the dogs lost interest and moved away, and that's when he said people began to call 911 for help. "I don't know why they didn't bite me, but they didn't," the carrier said.

Link was taken to a local hospital, where he was treated and released. He had been on his way to physical therapy for a shoulder injury and told Eversole when he was knocked down he had all but given up.

The dogs were shot by responding police officers and were later euthanized, while the owner was cited for not having licenses for them.

Allen County Dog Warden Julie Shellhammer praised Eversole for his actions. "Not everyone would have done what you did," she told the newspaper. "I'm sure you saved that man's life."

Eversole maintains that he just did what needed to be done. "I think anyone in my situation would have done the same thing," the 12-year postal veteran said. "If I was being eaten alive by dogs, I'd expect people to help me." **PR**