

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 202-756-7403 or at postalrecord@nalc.org. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

Honoring heroic carriers

Heroism, 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.

Quick-thinking carrier saves the day

On Jan. 19, Philadelphia Branch 157 city carrier assistant **Adam Savage** was substituting on a route. "I was looking for a package to deliver to this house," he said. As he began to walk away after delivering it, he saw a huge plume of smoke that seemed to come from behind the house next door.

"I was running with my bag," he said. Savage went to bang on the door there, but realized it was in fact the house that he just delivered to that was on fire.

The carrier called 911, hurried back over to the back of the house and saw flames coming out of the top of the sid-

ing and roof. Savage quickly ran to the front of the house and banged on the door until the woman inside answered. "I was so panicked—I didn't want the lady to get hurt," he said.

Once the carrier helped the woman to safety at the street, he notified neighbors of the situation and then stayed with the woman until the fire department came to take over the situation. "I continued on my route once I knew she was OK," he said.

The second-year letter carrier was praised for his actions, but Savage doesn't think it was a big deal. "I'm just glad that I could get a person out to see another day," he said.

Training comes in handy for prepared letter carrier

On Feb. 16, Southeast PA Merged Branch 725 member **Paul Graf** was delivering his route to an apartment building when he heard that "a fire alarm was going off," he said.

He noticed smoke coming from an apartment nearby. He thought it was in a basement unit, but it was on the first floor. He went closer and heard a dog barking and the TV on.

He opened the apartment's mail slot on the door. "When I looked in, I could barely see the TV from the smoke," Graf said. Then the dog jumped at him because he saw the carrier looking in.

The carrier, also a lifelong volunteer firefighter, used his fire radio to call in the situation and then went back toward the apartment. "I broke the window open," he said. Graf then went inside to make sure no one was inside; it was only the dog.

Graf was commended for averting a possible life-threatening situation and for preventing a potentially large loss of property, and was thanked by the resident for saving her dog. Rep. Patrick Meehan (PA-7) told the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in session, "I rise today to applaud Paul A. Graf Jr. for his swift and courageous

action to protect a family and their pets from an apartment fire."

But the 22-year letter carrier doesn't think he deserved any special accolades. "I was just doing what I was trained to do all those years as a volunteer firefighter," he said.

Dangerous fire can't stop this carrier from helping



On Dec. 10, 2015, Streator, IL Branch 287 member **John Barickman** was delivering a package when he saw smoke billowing from a house next door. The carrier knew

his octogenarian customer, Don Darm, lived there, and so he grew concerned.

"Of course when I looked, I saw the fire was in the basement," Barickman told *My Web Times*. "A window was already out and I saw a fireball. It was burning good."

"I ran around the corner and when I got to Don, Don pushed the door open," he added. "When he came through the kitchen, he had trouble getting out. There was smoke in the kitchen."

There were two others inside the home—Darm's daughter and son-in-law—so Barickman decided to go down into the basement from the outside door, where the family's living area was. "I got down to the third step," he said. "There was so much smoke, I couldn't breathe." Barickman initially thought he could hold his breath to enter, but decided the fire had gone too far, so he left the house and called 911.

Two other neighbors who were passing by tried to enter the burning home as well, but also were turned back by smoke. The three stayed with Darm until the police and fire personnel arrived.

The two others inside the house, along with a family dog, were pro-



Philadelphia Branch 157 member **Adam Savage** was recognized for his role in saving a customer from her burning home.

Wilmette, IL Branch 1107 member Christina Catalano recently received local media attention for her role in saving her longtime customer.



nounced dead at the scene.

Barickman told the publication that Darm remembered having a hard time leaving the home, as the smoke was thick. “He got out himself, he didn’t even know I was there,” Barickman told the *Times*.

The fire chief said the fire was considered “not suspicious” in its origin. Darm’s house is being rebuilt, and Barickman has checked in with his customer.

But he doesn’t think he is a hero. “I probably needed to be there 20 minutes earlier,” the 34-year postal veteran said. “There wasn’t anything more I could do. I think you just do what you’re supposed to do. You try if you can.”

Carrier sticks with gut instinct, saves patron’s life

On March 2, Wilmette, IL Branch 1107 member **Christina Catalano** grew worried when she saw mail pile up at longtime customer Kathleen Kerrigan’s house.

“When I came to deliver the mail, there was a little snow on the stairs, which was the first red flag because Kathleen always keeps her stairs really clean,” Catalano told *The Wilmette Beacon*. “But it was just a dusting of snow, and it was still early that day, so I thought, ‘No big deal.’”

But the next day, the snow was still

there and so was the mail—including the weekly newspaper from the day before. “She loves this paper,” Catalano said. “I knew her routines, which set off the red flags.”

The carrier knew that Kerrigan would have told her if she was going to be away, or would have put a hold on her mail. Catalano looked through the window and rang the doorbell, but there was no response. “So I finished the block and I was sitting in my truck, and I thought, ‘Something just doesn’t feel right,’” the carrier told the *Beacon*.

Catalano knew that Kerrigan’s family owned a nearby business, so she did a quick web search for it and gave them a call. She got a hold of one of Kerrigan’s nephews and asked him if someone could come check on their aunt. Both nephews stopped by the house shortly after and found Kerrigan lying on the floor upstairs, where she had been for more than 24 hours, and called for an ambulance.

The carrier said Kerrigan told her that she had fallen and just couldn’t get up. “She said, ‘I heard you ringing the doorbell and I couldn’t even shout loud enough for you to hear me,’” Catalano said. The customer returned home from the hospital soon after and now has a life alert necklace in case of future emergencies.

“If Christina hadn’t contacted my

family, I’d probably still be on the floor,” Kerrigan told the

Beacon. Her nephew, Mike, added, “We are just so grateful there’s such a good person out there. We really want to thank her, the whole family does.”

“I’m just happy it all worked out well,” the 20-year postal veteran said.

But Catalano doesn’t think she’s a hero. “Mail carriers are part of the community,” she told the paper. “You get to know the neighbors, you see the children growing up, you know all the dogs’ names and you get to know their routines. So you always stick with your gut instinct and I’m glad I did.”

Burning blaze no match for this carrier

On March 23, Jackson, MS Branch 217 member **Antuain Morris** had just finished delivering mail to an apartment complex. “I was about to drive off when I heard a beeping noise,” he said. “I looked in my mirror and saw smoke.”

The carrier secured his vehicle, went up to the apartment and knocked, but no one answered at first. “I was about to knock it down when someone responded,” Morris said. By that point,



Eye on the elderly

On March 4, Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 member **Barbara Mauser** noticed a pile of mail outside her customer’s home after she had been off of work for a few days. “She’s normally there every day,” the carrier said. “But the shades were pulled and there was no activity.” Mauser became concerned. “Something just told me to react,” she said. So,

she knocked on the door—but didn’t get a response, so she next called her supervisor, who in turn called police and asked them to check on the customer. Responding officers came to the house soon after. “They found her slumped over,” the carrier said; she had been there for up to six days. An ambulance was called, and EMTs resuscitated

her and sent her to a hospital. From there, the woman was sent to a medical center for rehab. “We probably gave that woman some more time on this earth,” Mauser said. But the 29-year postal veteran doesn’t think she deserves any praise for her actions. “I don’t consider myself a hero,” she said. “You just help people out.” **PR**



smoke was emanating from under the door and the man opened the door “in a daze,” Morris said.

The carrier, also a volunteer firefighter and Marine Corps veteran, jumped into action. He asked the resident to find his fire extinguisher and tried several times to put out the stove fire, but to no avail.

“I told the guy, ‘get behind me,’” Morris said. “I tried to contain it.” But the fire began to spread quickly. “We couldn’t see in front of us,” the carrier added. Someone had called the fire department, so Morris decided to tell his customer, “Let’s go ahead and get out.”

Morris made sure the man got to safety before checking on others. “I began running, knocking on doors and doing perimeter checks,” he said. Firefighters soon arrived to take over and put out the blaze.

The third-year letter carrier was thanked by the residents for his actions, but he brushed off any superlatives. “I took some action that needed taking,” Morris said simply. “My Marine instincts kicked in. I couldn’t do nothing.”

Letter carrier jumps into action for drowning girl

On July 22, 2015, Griffin, GA Branch 1230 member **Lorenzo Belga** was delivering mail in an apartment complex when he heard a commotion. “I noticed a lot of people were gathered around outside,” he said.

He went to his next delivery and asked a neighbor, “What’s going on?”



Griffin, GA Branch 1230 member Lorenzo Belga points out where he helped a girl who had sunk to the bottom of an apartment pool.

The carrier was told that someone had almost drowned, and he got concerned. “I drove my postal vehicle to where the swimming pool is,” Belga said. He then saw an 11-year-old girl lying on the ground.

Belga was told that the girl, along with a 10-year-old and a 4-year-old, had climbed over a locked gate at the apartment complex’s pool. The 11-year-old went into the pool at the deep end and sank to the bottom. The 10-year-old ran for help; a maintenance man was able to get the girl out of the pool, but he did not know CPR.

Belga, a Navy veteran now in the Air Force Reserves, jumped into action. He asked if anyone had called 911; they had. “I kneeled and started checking the pulse,” he said. Belga then started administering chest compressions. “I kept doing it, checking the pulse,” he said. “I could hear emergency sirens in the distance. I was starting to get tired.”

EMTs soon arrived to take over, and Belga then started clearing a patch through the crowd so that they would be able to get to the girl. They were able to find a faint pulse before taking the girl to the hospital. The carrier went to the police department to give a statement and then continued his route. Belga later learned that the girl had initially improved her condition while on life support but died a week later while in the hospital.

Belga said he hoped the CPR training he received during his 27 years in the military would have produced a different outcome. “I became a little emotional when I heard the news because I have three daughters myself,” he said.

The 20-year postal veteran was assured that his actions gave the family longer to see their child. But Belga didn’t think his actions were all that heroic. “It’s no big deal,” he said.

Veteran carrier knows when something’s up

On March 11, San Diego Branch 70 member **Maryanne Gogue** was



Maryanne Gogue

delivering her route that she’s had for 29 years when she noticed that her 87-year-old customer John Mazza’s mail was piling up.

“I’m used to his mail piling up every couple of days,” she said. Two or three days’ worth of mail was not unusual for the man, but this was the fourth day and his newspapers were also piling up in front of the house. Gogue knew something was wrong.

“I pounded on the door, on the windows,” Gogue said. “I yelled ‘John!’ through the window.” No answer. So the carrier walked around to the back of the house and knocked on the kitchen window. Again, no answer. She then knocked on his bedroom window and called out his name. She heard a faint response: “Help. Help me.”

Gogue called 911 and explained the situation, and told them she was entering the house. “I popped the screen on the kitchen window and went in,” Gogue said.

She found Mazza on the bedroom floor, where he had tripped and fallen getting out of bed and could not get up or get to a phone. He had been on the floor for four days and was dehydrated and weak. “His left arm was purple because he lost circulation,” the carrier said. He also had rug burns on his legs and elbows from trying to crawl.

The carrier told the 911 operator what she found and was told help was on the way. Paramedics arrived promptly, and Mazza was taken to a nearby hospital. Mazza was released from the hospital to a rehab facility and then to a retirement community.

Gogue, a 31-year letter carrier as well as an Army veteran, was commended for her actions. “Maryanne’s veteran mail carrier instincts probably saved John’s life,” Mazza’s neighbor, Ray Bello, wrote to NALC.

But the carrier doesn’t think she deserves any accolades for her act. “They consider me family on this route,” she said. “It’s that instinct—it’s just something that pops into you and you jump into action.” **PR**

Help on the way

On Dec. 29, 2015, Rome, GA Branch 536 member **Karen Tant** had just dismounted her vehicle to make a delivery when she noticed her customer's mail piled up. She thought to herself, "That's not normal," she said. "Then I heard her hollering for help." The city carrier assistant spoke to the customer through the door and asked if she needed assistance. The woman said yes, but the door was locked. Tant checked the back door as well, but that too was locked. The carrier knew the woman's caretaker,

so she called her. "She gave me a passcode to get in," Tant said. Once in the house, Tant found the customer in her bed. She had been unable to get into her wheelchair because it was broken. "She told me where another wheel-

chair was," Tant said. The carrier found it and brought it to her, and then helped the customer out of bed and to the bathroom. The woman thanked Tant and assured her that her caretaker was coming over to help her get cleaned up. The four-year letter carrier said she didn't think her actions were that big of a deal. "I just happened to be there," she said. "I just made sure she was OK. It's something that I just thought I should do."



Karen Tant

On March 15, Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 member **Russell Barrus Jr.** was delivering mail to an apartment building when "I heard a small kid crying," he said. "As a dad, you hear those things." It quickly turned into yelling—the carrier then heard, "Help, he's dead! He needs CPR!" Barrus went to the third floor, where one of the apartment doors was open. Approaching the apartment, he noticed a young man on the floor and a neighbor kneeling next to him. The carrier asked if he could help, and was asked if he knew CPR. Barrus proceeded to administer CPR the way it was taught to him in high school. He checked the young man's pulse--there was none. "I kneeled by his head and we gave him CPR for a while," he said. "[The neighbor] did the compressions and then I'd listen for breaths." Barrus checked his pulse again after 10 compressions--still none. So Barrus then proceeded to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and had the neighbor start compressions again. After about five or six cycles, the carrier felt a pulse and small breaths. "It was a weird pulse," he said. The carrier kept his fingers on the man to make sure the pulse continued while watching his breathing. The neighbor and Barrus talked to the man, telling

him to stay with them and that help was on the way. The paramedics arrived and the carrier updated them. Barrus then grabbed his satchel and continued his duties. After finishing the two buildings left in his loop, he noticed the young man walking to the ambulance on his own. The second-year letter carrier doesn't think his actions were heroic, though. "It's just something we're supposed to do," Barrus said.

One day this past winter, Binghamton, NY Branch 333 member **Doug Lewis** was delivering his route and approached a house for a delivery. "She had a parcel that day, so I knocked on the door," the carrier said. "I thought I heard her yell, 'Doug!'" Lewis called back, "Martha?" Determining she needed help, he went inside. "She was just covered in blood," the carrier said. "She had fallen and broken her nose in two places." Martha told Lewis that she felt like she was about to pass out. Lewis got her to the kitchen and asked her to lean her head back to help stem the flow of blood from her nose

as he prepared a cold compress. He called 911 and waited with her, cleaning the blood off the floor of her kitchen when he saw it was making her anxious. EMTs soon arrived and took her to



Russell Barrus Jr.



Doug Lewis

the hospital. After returning home, she asked Lewis the next time he delivered to her, "Can I give you a hug?" the carrier said. But the 28-year postal veteran doesn't think he's a hero. "It's part of our job," Lewis said. "You get close to your customers. It feels good to help out once in a while."

On May 8, Dayton, OH Branch 182 member **Ruth Bennett** had just returned to the post office from her route. "I heard someone screaming outside," she said. She and another letter carrier saw that a highway contract route driver's leg below the knee was pinned between the dock lift and the truck. The man had finished loading his truck and was pulling the door down when he lost his footing and his right leg became pinned. The other carrier hit the lift release button, allowing the driver's leg to become free. Bennett helped the man to a chair and called 911 as she elevated the man's leg and tried to keep him calm until help arrived. The man had a swollen leg but sustained only a minor injury due to the quick response. "He got really lucky," Bennett said. But the 11-year postal veteran doesn't think she's a hero. "I just recognized that he needed help," she said. "It's just common sense. Anyone who saw it would have done the same thing." **PR**