



2016



## OF THE YEAR AWARDS

**“T**he men and women who deliver mail throughout this vast country take their job seriously as they provide Americans with the most affordable and efficient postal services anywhere,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said as he welcomed a large audience to the 2016 NALC Heroes of the Year Awards luncheon. “But their commitment to the families and the neighborhood goes way beyond that. Every day, letter carriers help people who need help—and they sometimes save lives in the process, and sometimes at great personal risk.

“They don’t do these things because they are supermen or superwomen,” Rolando said. “They do them because they are familiar with the communities that they serve and they know when something’s not as it should be. Because they are often the first ones on the scene. Because they’ve watched the families grow and they’ve watched the children grow up over the years and they care about their well-being and they care about their safety.”

The Heroes event was held on Sept. 21 in the nation’s capital. Attendees included the union’s resident national

officers, U.S. Postal Service executives and reporters. The annual ceremony highlighted the special acts of courage and compassion performed by seven NALC letter carriers, as well as an entire NALC branch, to improve lives—or save lives—along their route.

Before presenting the awards, Rolando thanked the panel of independent judges who had reviewed the stories about heroic and humanitarian acts published in *The Postal Record* between July 2015 and June 2016. The judges were Richard Bowers, chief of the Fairfax County, VA, Department of Fire and Rescue; Christopher Godfrey, chairman and chief judge of the Employees’ Compensation Appeals Board at the U.S. Department of Labor; and Ana Avendano, AFL-CIO Community Services liaison at the United Way of America.

Rolando also recognized a number of special guests who were on hand, including American Postal Workers Union President Mark Dimondstein; National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association President Jeanette Dwyer; Commissioner for The Postal Regulatory Commission Mark Acton; USPS Labor Relations Manager Alan Moore; AFL-CIO representatives Christyne Neff and



Opposite page: NALC's 2016 Heroes of the Year honorees

Below: NALC President Fredric Rolando commends the selfless nature of carriers who look out for their communities.

Mike Cavanaugh; National Association of Postmasters of the United States President Tony Leonardi; and National Association of Postal Supervisors President Brian Wagner.

Rolando explained why the USPS, and especially the nation's 180,000 city letter carriers as the face of the agency, are so trusted by the public.

"From coast to coast, letter carriers unite this country, delivering to each and every neighborhood that makes up the American community," he said. "They provide hand-delivered, personal service to every home, every business, every American—six and increasingly seven days a week. For too many Americans, letter carriers may be their only daily human contact. And when storms or floods or other



natural disasters engulf areas of the country, letter carriers continue to do their work, often offering the only sign of normalcy after such an event for the residents in that community."

The NALC president even referenced the U.S. presidential election. "During this long campaign, there has been,

naturally, a good deal of talk about leadership," he said. "I would submit to you that the heroes gathered here today have exhibited the very essence of what leadership is all about.

"They saw an urgent danger or an unmet need—and they stepped up. They evaluated the situation, they devised a plan, and they took action. In so doing, they demonstrated alertness, empathy, bravery and decisiveness. And then, rather than seeking personal credit, they simply moved forward—doing their job with the same quiet professionalism as before."

Rolando told the crowd that letter carriers tend to deny that their actions were anything out of the ordinary, while asserting that any of their colleagues would have done the same thing in the same circumstance.

"That also pertains to how we tend to learn in the first place that something occurred," he said. "The one person that we rarely learn about what happened is the letter carrier himself or herself. On the contrary, after doing something extraordinary and even putting themselves in danger to save someone, letters carriers typically brush themselves off and simply resume their routes, delivering the mail. The thousands of letter carriers who go beyond the call of duty every year, make me proud to be a letter carrier. And they make me proud to lead the National Association of Letter Carriers."

Rolando also mentioned that nearly a quarter of letter carriers are veterans who are wearing their second uniform, a proportion that was reflected among this year's honorees. "Protecting and saving others is second nature for them," Rolando said. "That also applies to letter carriers in general, whether or not they're military veterans. For letter carriers, this isn't merely a job; it's a career in public service."

He then recounted each hero's story to the audience. Their stories are found in the following pages of this issue of *The Postal Record*.



Rep. Rod Blum (R-IA) attended the Heroes ceremony to greet Humanitarian of the Year Brad Gentz (r) and Ryan Hemann (c).

While in Washington, DC, to receive their Hero awards, some of the honorees met with their congressional representatives, who were eager to thank them for looking out for their communities.

NALC's Hero of the Year Mark Pizzo spoke with Georgia Sen. Johnny Isakson (D) and Rep. Rob Woodall (R-7); meanwhile, Humanitarian of the Year Brad Gentz spent time with Iowa Sens. Chuck Grassley (R) and Joni Ernst (R) along with Rep. Rod Blum (R-1).

Western Region Hero David Crestik spoke with California Rep. Susan Davis (D-53), and Central Region Hero Michael Murphy met with Illinois Rep. John Shimkus (R-15).

Special Carrier Alert award winner Evangeline Johnson had meetings with Michigan Sen. Gary Peters (D) and Rep. Brenda Lawrence (D-14).

Both Massachusetts Sen. Edward J. Markey (D) and Rep. Seth Moulton (D-6) congratulated NALC Education Award winner Patrick Byrne. Soon after, Markey praised Byrne on the Senate floor.



Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA) and Patrick Byrne (r)





President Rolando presented National Hero of the Year Mark Pizzo with a certificate of commendation.

The NALC president presented each honoree with an award certificate and a special lapel pin that the carrier can wear to highlight the distinction.

This year's honorees were selected from more than 100 nominees, whose stories of heroism and community service were published over the course of

a year in this magazine. Those stories were collected into a booklet, *A Year's Worth of Heroes*, which was distributed to the luncheon's guests.

"And what lends even greater meaning to the individual awards is that they reflect something much larger—how letter carriers as a whole view their relationship to the communities they serve," Rolando said. "For our carrier heroes, looking out for the community may not be in the job description—but it just plain comes with the uniform."

Reports on the heroes were run in various media outlets in the days following the event.

Articles appeared in the *Gwinnett (GA) Daily Post*; *Des Moines Register*; Mason City, IA's *Globe Gazette*; *Mitchell County (IA) Press*; *York (PA) Daily Record*; *Pop-sugar*; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*; *Lynn (MA) Daily Item*; and the *Syracuse Post-Standard*. TV coverage appeared on Iowa's KAAL-TV and KIMT-TV, Pennsylvania's WPMT-TV, Missouri's KTVI-TV, and California's KUSI-TV and KNSD-TV.

You can find links to all of the coverage, as well as hear the heroes themselves telling their stories, on the NALC website at [nalc.org/heroes](http://nalc.org/heroes). **PR**





# Syracuse, NY

## Branch 134

**M**atthew Watkins, age 17, always greeted the letter carriers from Syracuse, NY Branch 134 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 arrived safely back from their routes. Carriers nicknamed him “Matthew the Mailman” because he told them he wanted to be a postal employee someday.

Then one day, Watkins stopped appearing at his door, and a postal employee who knew his family got wind that he was in the hospital, being treated for 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—including carriers from Branch 134—joined with local firefighters and police officers in February to launch a parade of various vehicles past Watkins’ house. But it was the LLVs that really thrilled him.

“Everyone got together,” said Thomas Dlugolenski, executive vice president of Branch 134 and steward at the Bayberry station. “The entire office drove by his house.”

The local postmaster gave Watkins his own letter carrier uniform, and Branch President Jim Lostumbo declared Watkins an honorary Branch 134 member. The young man and his

family were elated by the show of support.

The parade brought out the whole neighborhood, including other children, to watch and show their support for Watkins, bringing joy not only to the boy, but to the entire community.

“Matthew is a special-needs guy who has a love for people, which is what I think attracts him most to mail carriers,” Matthew’s mother, Jennifer Watkins, wrote in a letter to the branch. “He loves to meet the mail carrier at the door, obtain and distribute the family mail, point out mail trucks in the neighborhood and visit the branch in Bayberry to count the mail trucks.”

On the day of the parade, she said, “each postal worker that passed by in their vehicle did so with a smile and a wave. It was truly an unforgettable homecoming.”

“This act extended beyond one morning,” she added. “Matthew proceeded to receive letters, cards and packages. Many of those items were received from NALC members countrywide.”

In selecting Branch 134 for the Branch Service Award, “this speaks so well of the branch to have concern for the young man, and also pride in their work,” the Heroes of the Year judges said. “They have a great sense of community engagement. This epitomizes what a postal worker is and what they do.” **PR**

**Top right: President Rolando presented the award to Branch 134 President Thomas Dlugolenski and the carrier on the route, Colleen Maiorano.**

**Right: Matthew Watkins**

**Below: the parade of postal vehicles**



2016 BRANCH  
SERVICE AWARD







# Evangeline Johnson

Detroit, MI Branch 1

**E**vangeline Johnson was delivering the mail on a warm May morning when she saw smoke coming from a patron's house. She went to the back yard to investigate and discovered that the back of the house was engulfed in flames.

"I knew someone lived there and I ran to the front door to alert anyone who might be inside," Johnson said. "A woman answered the door and ran to grab her child. They had been sleeping." Both escaped. Johnson called

911 and firefighters soon arrived and extinguished the blaze. The firefighters said the family had been lucky that Johnson was able to wake up the family before the fire spread throughout the home.

Her heroic actions led the judges to name her the Carrier Alert Hero of the Year.

Johnson said she was glad to be at the right place at the right time. She had chosen to deliver on that street first thing in the morning because it had little shade and the air was still cool in the morning. When she first noticed the smoke, she thought, "Who is barbe-



cuing this early in the morning?"

But she doesn't feel like a hero. "I always help people on my route," Johnson said. The hero award is "a bit overwhelming, because I think anyone would do the same thing."

That morning, the Heroes of the Year judges said, Johnson demonstrated "the four C's of being a letter carrier—carrier, cool, calm, collected."

"She did something that saved an entire family," they said. **PR**

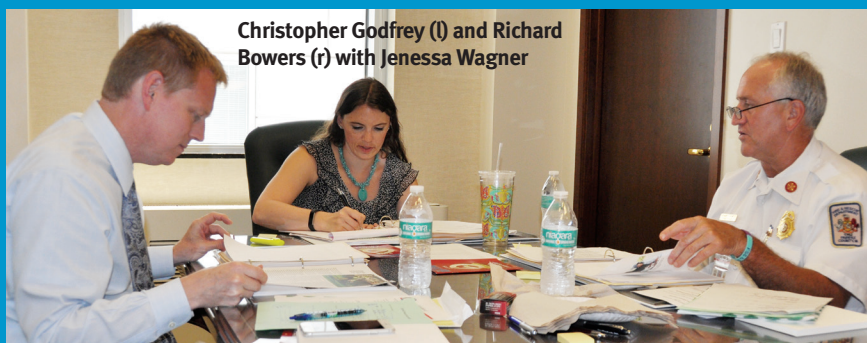


Evangeline Johnson

## How the heroes are selected

The Heroes of the Year judges—Richard Bowers, Christopher Godfrey and Ana Avendano—met in July to select this year's winners. All three read through the nominees' stories found in *The Postal Record* from July 2015 through June 2016, then Godfrey and Bowers met at NALC Headquarters to discuss them. Avendano had a schedule conflict that day, so she participated by submitting her rankings to the other judges, who discussed the merits of their choices over the course of a few hours before carefully choosing the honorees. Jenessa Wagner, who writes the "Proud to Serve" heroic carrier stories for

*The Postal Record*, sat in on the proceedings to record the judges' picks and reasons for their choices. **PR**



Christopher Godfrey (l) and Richard Bowers (r) with Jenessa Wagner



# Patrick Byrne

Lynn, MA Branch 7

**J**ames Byrne lived a fairly normal life in many ways. The son of Lynn, MA Branch 7 president and Army veteran Patrick Byrne, James had a good upbringing and strong family ties. He had a master's degree in computer science and made a good living in information technology. But throughout his adult life, James had been hooked on heroin, a drug easily found on Lynn's post-industrial streets. James had periods of sobriety, but circumstances always seemed to steal them from him, eventually.

James had enjoyed seven months clean of drugs when an old friend and fellow addict called him one January day in 2014 to beg James to find heroin. After first refusing, James gave in and bought some for the friend, but apparently couldn't resist using it himself instead. The friend called James on his cell phone over and over, trying to plan a meeting to get the heroin, as James lay dying of an overdose—on the floor of his sister's house, just down the street from his father's home. That's where Patrick found him.

When his son died, Patrick Byrne already had an understanding of the immense difficulties of dealing with chemical dependency. James had struggled with it for two decades, and since retiring from the Postal Service in 2006, Patrick has counseled homeless people in Lynn, many with substance-abuse problems and the mental illness that often comes with them.

The death of his son put the issue in sharp focus, Byrne said, as did the reaction of scores of letter carriers from his own branch and across the country who contacted him about their own family members with chemical dependency after reading about James in *The Postal Record*. "They fought this problem while trying to protect their privacy," he said, "a choice that they now regret."

"We felt confident that his upbringing was solid," he said, but James is proof that

parents aren't to blame for drug addiction. "Good parents have kids who have problems," Byrne added. "Parents feel that a child's activity is a reflection on them." But parental shame only makes things worse if it prevents them from seeking help, he said. "You've got to break that."

After making his story public, Byrne heard from many other letter carriers about their own struggles with addiction, depression or mental illness in their families. "I was shocked at how many people are dealing with similar problems," he said.

Inspired by Byrne's experience and his efforts to educate fellow carriers and the broader public about the need to remove the stigma of addiction, the Postal Service's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) launched the "Silent No More" initiative. The program is designed to help postal employees or their families break through the stigma and shame—whether by helping with suicide prevention, mental illness or chemical dependency—and to share personal stories.

Silent No More urges postal employees to share their experiences with a mental health issue—their own or a family member's—for which they received help from the EAP. Stories from those who wish they had sought help, or who regret not seeking help sooner, are also welcome.

All communication with the EAP remains confidential and sharing stories is strictly voluntary and separate from EAP assistance or counseling.

The Heroes of the Year judges praised Byrne for helping to turn a personal tragedy into help for other postal workers who need help for substance abuse or suicidal thoughts, but who

often suffer in silence.

Byrne said the experience of sharing his story is done as a service to others, much like the way he serves those struggling in his own community, but it's not part of dealing with his grief. "It isn't a healing process," he said—healing requires far more, if it's even possible.



2016 SPECIAL EDUCATION  
AWARD HERO OF THE YEAR



Patrick Byrne



James Byrne  
with his niece

"But you might as well do what you can to help other people."

"I never considered what I had done to be heroic," Byrne said. Nevertheless, he's happy that the award is leading to renewed awareness of the Silent No More campaign and of the problems of suicide and addiction.

In naming Byrne the Education Award winner, the judges said they were "impressed that someone could transform a personal tragedy into a mission to help countless people. Awareness, prevention and education are so important to solving problems like these." **PR**



# David Crestik

San Diego, CA Branch 70



David Crestik received his award from President Rolando.

**“I heard a beeping sound and thought, ‘What the heck is that?’ ”** San Diego Branch 70 member **David Crestik** recalled. It was on Saturday, July 12, 2014, and he was delivering mail on the last part of his swing, at a retirement mobile home park. No one was around.

The carrier then noticed dark smoke coming out of a screen door from a nearby mobile home and quickly went over. “I couldn’t see, but yelled in, ‘Anyone in here?’ ” Crestik said. He

then heard his elderly customer, Sharon Branden, respond that she was on the floor and also had cut herself.

“Once I heard her voice, that was it,” Crestik said. “I went inside, and I kept calling her.”

There was thick smoke everywhere and the flames were concentrated in the dining room. “The fire was going pretty good,” he said. “The dining room table was on fire; [so were] the chairs.”

He found Branden lying on the ground by the back bedroom. Crestik asked the woman if she was able to walk, and she said no. So he started to lift Branden from the floor, but she fell back down again.

Crestik wouldn’t give up. “I picked her up, threw her over my shoulder and went to the neighbor’s house,” he said. The carrier then called 911 and waited for firefighters and paramedics to arrive. Once they responded, he explained to them what had happened.

When the carrier knew Branden was in good hands, he continued on with his route. The woman’s home was destroyed, but Branden was doing all right after being treated for smoke inhalation.

Crestik has received a lot of media attention as a result of his actions, later receiving a plaque from the

mayor, who also declared a day in his honor. “That was pretty amazing,” the carrier said, but added, “I just take it in stride.”

In selecting Crestik as the NALC’s Western Region Hero of the Year, judges commended the carrier’s situational awareness. “He placed himself in incredible danger and put his life second to others,” they said. “A house can be rebuilt—a life cannot.”

The carrier doesn’t think he’s a hero, though; he said it was just fortunate timing. “God blessed me and called upon me,” the 21-year postal veteran said. “He put me there at the right time. If I hadn’t gone in there, she probably would have perished.” **PR**





# Michael Murphy

Hazelwood, MO Branch 5847

**A** little girl screaming, “Someone help my mommy!” alerted Hazelwood, MO Branch 5847 member **Michael Murphy** as he walked out of a bread company after delivering its mail on Oct. 28, 2014.

“I wasn’t sure what was going on,” he said. He noticed two people on cell phones talking to police, and then he saw a man acting strangely.

“He was going back and forth, grabbing car doors,” Murphy said. The carrier watched from his LLV to try to fully grasp the situation. He found out that the man had attacked the girl’s mother’s van, hitting it and apparently trying to snatch her purse.

The man walked out of Murphy’s sight, then reappeared. “He had some type of cinderblock or brick in his hand,” Murphy said. As an SUV pulled up, the man started hitting one of its windows, though it didn’t break.

There were three women inside the SUV; one woman fell to the ground from the passenger’s side as she tried to flee the attacker. The driver came around to try to help her, and was herself attacked by the man.

“He swung, attempted to hit her and missed,” the carrier said. “He was yelling, cussing and trying to carjack them. He really frightened them.”

Bakery employees started coming out of the store to see what the commotion was.

Then, the man “raised the brick to hit the lady on the ground,” Murphy said, and that’s when the carrier knew he

needed to jump into action. He ran across the street.

Murphy, a 27-year member of the Marine Corps and the Navy Reserves, said, “I then grabbed him by his arm and picked him up by his legs and slammed him to the ground.”

Once down, “we tussled for a little bit,” the carrier said.

A passerby helped Murphy turn the attacker on his stomach, face-down. “I secured him and held him down until police came,” the carrier said, adding, “It all happened so fast.”

Police put handcuffs on the man and thanked Murphy for his help. An officer later told Murphy that the man had a record as a repeat violent offender.

Murphy said his military training helped in the situation. “It was a natural thing for me,” he said. “All I’ve known is service and sacrifice. We run toward the fight, not away from it. I was just doing what I was trained to do.”

Judges cited Murphy’s courage when naming him the 2016 Central Region Hero of the Year. “There’s a whole lot that makes this guy a hero,” they said. “He knew these people were human and needed help, and he put himself in imminent danger.”

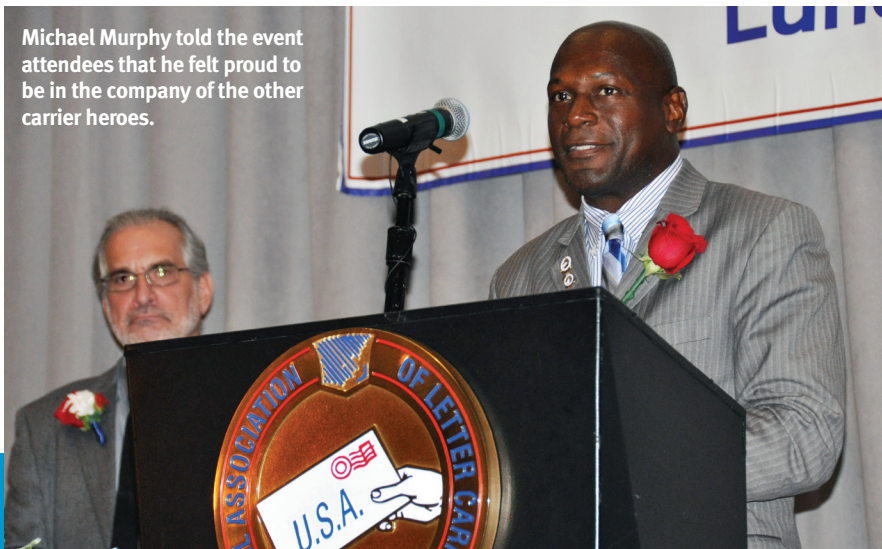
The 18-year postal veteran says that receiving this honor is “humbling,” but he doesn’t think of himself as a hero. “When I saw this, I just thought about my mom and sister,” Murphy said. “If you are conscious and mindful, then you help someone.” **PR**



2016 CENTRAL REGION  
HERO OF THE YEAR



Michael Murphy told the event attendees that he felt proud to be in the company of the other carrier heroes.





# Lars Edleblute

York, PA Branch 509



Lars Edleblute was a CCA when he rescued the boy and has since been converted to career.

**L**oading up his vehicle at the post office in pouring rain on Dec. 1, 2015, York, PA Branch 509 member **Lars Edleblute** suddenly heard a woman yelling while she ran toward a highway. “I wasn’t sure why,” he said. “I was wondering what’s happening.”

Edleblute, a city carrier assistant at the time, scanned the area. He spotted a small child first climb over a fence separating the neighborhood where the post office was from a busy four-lane highway, and then dart across the roadway.

“I saw him jump the fence and I panicked,” Edleblute said.

The woman stood in place and was frantically crying on the phone with a 911 operator. But Edleblute went into action and followed after the 8-year-old boy. “My fatherly instincts jumped in,” the carrier said. “I just ran up the hill and jumped over the fence.”

Once he was on the other side, Edleblute saw that the youngster had made it to the middle of the busy highway, with traffic going in both directions. “It was pouring rain and no one was slowing down or stopping,” Edleblute said.

The carrier waited for a break in the traffic and then darted to the middle of the road. By the time he reached it, the boy had made it to the other side and was now running along the side of the highway toward the next exit.

When Edleblute finally caught up to the boy, he grabbed a harness that was attached to him, put his arm around him and held his hand. “He didn’t say much, except, ‘I just want to go to church,’ ” the carrier said. He told the child, “It’s OK; we are going on an adventure.”

The boy was mumbling, so Edleblute tried to keep him calm. (He later found out that the boy is autistic.)

Eventually, a passerby came to help. They safely escorted the boy across the



highway and back to his mother, who had stayed behind the fence. She was thankful when they put the boy over the fence and returned him safely to her care.

The second-year letter carrier, who has since made regular, doesn’t think he did anything out of the ordinary, though. “I just feel like I did my job,” Edleblute said. “I was just happy I was there to save the boy.”

The Heroes of the Year judges disagreed. “He really stabilized the situation by getting to the child,” they said, “and he kept his cool and kept his wits about him in an unpredictable situation.”

Edleblute said he’s not used to media attention, but that he wouldn’t change anything about his actions if he could. “I’m very proud of what I did,” he said. “I was just doing my job and trying to keep people safe, that’s all.” **PR**



# Brad Gentz

Mason City, IA Branch 471

**O**ut on his route, Mason City, IA Branch 471 carrier **Brad Gentz** had seen a boy sitting in his front yard under a tree, in a wheelchair, on sunny days. Gentz didn't know the boy's name. But one such day last summer, an idea popped into Gentz's mind that would change both of their lives.

An avid runner, Gentz had watched a television documentary about a father who runs in marathons while pushing his son in a wheelchair. "I thought about that boy who sits outside," he said. "The very next day, I delivered the mail and there's Ryan at the mailbox."

Ryan Hemman, he soon learned, was a teenager with spina bifida who was paralyzed from the waist down and who rarely went anywhere beyond school, home or the hospital. Spina bifida happens while a baby is in the womb and the spinal column does not close all of the way, usually causing paralysis and other severe health problems.

Gentz approached Hemann's parents with an idea: Could he push Ryan in a marathon?

They boy's mother, Tami Hemann, was skeptical because of Ryan's heavy motorized wheelchair and fragile condition, but Gentz had done his research. He showed Ryan and his mother a picture of a custom-built adaptive running wheelchair, and his mother was convinced.

All they needed was \$7,500 for the chair.

Gentz reached out to friends and family to raise the funds through a Facebook page called "Running with Ryan." Students at Osage High School, where everyone knew of Ryan but few knew him as a friend, supported his cause.

At a volleyball game, the Osage High girls' volleyball team invited Ryan to speak about his quest to run with Gentz. Ryan, shy and not used to attention, read his speech and received a standing ovation. Then the letter carrier surprised the teen and the crowd with the new chair. Donations, it turned out, had come in fast, and the chair company, Adaptive Star, had rushed the order.

Gentz strapped Ryan in and pushed him through the school. A crowd of supporters lined their path. With a police escort, they left the school grounds and ran the mile to Ryan's house.

A few days later, Gentz and Ryan participated in a 5K race that raised funds for University of Iowa Children's Hospital, where Ryan had undergone 17 surgeries. Fellow runners and spectators responded with enthusiastic support.

"I was so, so surprised at how many runners and how many people were at the finish line supporting me," Ryan said.

"It means everything to us," Ryan's mother said. "We never expected him to be able to do anything like that."

The pair has since run in other races and plans to run in more. But running isn't really the point, of course. A shy young man who once had few friends is now a celebrity in his town and has many supportive friends in his school, and a dedicated letter carrier has shown his community what inclusion of people with disabilities is all about—and has also formed a deep bond with the quiet kid sitting under a tree on his route.

"He went from being this little boy in a wheelchair," Gentz said, "and now, anywhere he goes, he's like a rock star. It's changed his life dramatically."

"It's changed me, too," he said. "The friendship I have with Ryan is second to none."

"I just wanted to share what I love to do with this boy. I wasn't even looking to become his friend. It was never even part of the plan. And now it's my life," Gentz added. "I never in a million years thought doing one little nice deed would come back to me this way. I can say without a shadow of a doubt my one little gesture for another became a pot of gold."

In naming Gentz NALC's Humanitarian of the Year, the Heroes of the Year judges said, "This was an awesome display of compassion and courage for a worthy cause. He changed this young man's life."

Gentz, an Army veteran, and Ryan planned to be back in Washington soon after the Heroes of the Year ceremony to run the Marine Corps Marathon together. **PR**



2016 HUMANITARIAN  
HERO OF THE YEAR



Below: Brad Gentz with Ryan Hemman







2016 NATIONAL  
HERO OF THE YEAR



# Mark Pizzo

Rock Hill, SC Branch 1003

## **I**t started out as a normal workday.

On Nov. 30, 2015, Rock Hill, SC Branch 1003 member **Mark Pizzo** was delivering mail as usual and pulled up to the last part of his route on a cul-de-sac. “Every day I see a group of kids playing,” he said. “That day, there was a dog with them,” a neighbor’s pit bull.

He then saw the kids run between two houses, and Pizzo kept going on his route. “I could see between the houses, and at that point, I saw the dog jump up at the girl,” he said.

Pizzo told WSOC-TV, “I thought it was playing with her...but then it knocked her down.”

He decided he needed to take action. First, he whistled over at the dog. “When I yelled out of my truck, nothing happened,” Pizzo told WBTW-TV. “Then I heard her scream. The scream I will never forget for as long as I live.”

The carrier then ran toward the girl, 7-year-old Kayden White, whose head was gripped in the jaws of the dog as it was dragging her under a trampoline and was covered in blood. “It had her by the top of her head, by her braids,” Pizzo told WSOC. “So it was like a rope toy. It was pulling at her head and she was screaming.”

Once he was at the scene, Pizzo tried to grab the dog by its muzzle, but it wouldn’t let go of White. “The dog had started to pull the child away from me, so I knew the dog didn’t want to let go,” Pizzo told *The Charlotte Observer*. “At that point, I struck the dog until it let go of her.” He punched the dog at least four or five times, he said, before the pit bull finally relinquished its hold.

Then, the dog shifted its attention briefly toward the carrier. “I was hoping that was going to happen,” Pizzo told the newspaper.

Pizzo threw White onto the trampoline to try to move her out of harm’s way. But the pit bull wasn’t done. “The dog jumped up on the trampoline to go after her again,” Pizzo told the *Observer*.

A neighbor who had heard the commotion joined to help the carrier get

the dog under control and also was bitten.

Pizzo grabbed the child and took off running, somehow making it away without sustaining an injury to himself. “I had blood down my shorts, on my face,” Pizzo said. “You would have thought I was half-dead with the amount of blood I had on me from the little girl.”

White’s brother arrived after hearing the ruckus and took her home, and police soon arrived on the scene. The youngster was taken to the hospital, where she received seven staples in her head. The dog was picked up by animal control and was euthanized.

White’s mother, Shaquitta, told WSOC how grateful she was for Pizzo’s actions. “If this man, this man of God, was not there, my daughter would not be here,” she said. “I’ve seen stories that kids die every day, from a pit bull, and she’s alive. She’s here with me now.”

But the 11-year postal veteran doesn’t think he’s a hero. “Some people say I saved her life, but do I know that? I stopped the situation from what was happening. That’s all that mattered to me,” Pizzo told the *Observer*. “I’ve been bit before; I’m a mailman. It’s part of the job.”

Pizzo has received a lot of media attention because of his actions, including in newspapers and on local TV news broadcasts, and he even was featured on the “Steve Harvey Show.”

“The spotlight’s not for me,” he said. “I like to do my job and fly under the radar.”

Well, unfortunately for Pizzo, that’s probably not going to happen anytime soon. In naming the carrier NALC’s 2016 National Hero of the Year, judges described Pizzo’s persistence in the face of danger. “He took action immediately, no second thoughts,” they said. “It must have been terrifying to hear someone so in need.”

The carrier summed up his actions simply: “I did what I thought was right,” Pizzo said. “I would hope that everyone would do that.” **PR**