

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.

Carrier helps defuse tense situation

On Dec. 6, 2014, Connecticut Merged Branch 20 member **Clinton Parker** was delivering mail when he was contacted by the police and asked to help out with a police standoff.

The carrier, who has spent 30 years on active duty in the Army and in the Army Reserves, got a police escort to the scene but didn't know much about the situation, only that shots had been fired and a fellow soldier he knew was involved. The soldier's father had suggested Parker to police as someone who could help.

When they pulled up to the scene, Parker saw a neighborhood cordoned off. "He had fired off a shot and he had barricaded himself," he said. "I was nervous and concerned because there were live weapons. I didn't know what to expect."

Police and a SWAT team had surrounded the house after receiving a call that an armed man who was had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was threatening himself and others. The power in the neighborhood had been cut off, and police were trying to apprehend the man.

"During the standoff, they weren't going to let me on the scene," Parker said.

The carrier convinced them that he would only be of help if he could go to the soldier. "I knew the soldier. I didn't think he was a threat, but I knew that situation needed to be defused," Parker said. "I knew he needed to see a familiar face."

Parker entered the home with an offi-

cer and began to counsel the man during what became a seven-hour standoff.

"It was a tense moment for everyone involved," the carrier said. "Once they let me on scene, I could relate to what he was going through. I talked him into laying down his weapons."

After the peaceful surrender, Parker accompanied the man, along with his family, to the hospital, where he received treatment for his PTSD. Parker said the man is now doing well. "I try to stay in contact with him as much as possible," he said.

The Watertown, CT Police Department issued a memo that said, "With total disregard for your own safety you entered the home and counseled the subject which resulted in his surrender shortly thereafter. You should be commended for your actions."

But Parker brushed off any accolades for helping defuse the situation. "It was about helping out a fellow soldier," the 30-year postal veteran said. "I was glad there were no injuries or fatalities and it ended peacefully. If I had to do it all over again, I would do it the same way."

It was just perfect timing

Western Massachusetts Branch 46 member **Rick Ridenour** had just parked on his route to deliver mail on Dec. 8 when "I saw a couple of guys running toward the back of a home," he said. There was some sort of commotion, and he looked around to try to identify the source.

Ridenour started hustling over to the group. He then saw that a man, Aarin Coates, was pinned to the ground beneath a vehicle that he had been repairing. It had slipped off the jack and onto his chest. "He was yelling that it was crushing him," the carrier said. "The guy was clearly in trouble."

Heidi Mayhew, Coates' fiancée's aunt, who lives at the apartment house where the accident occurred, was inside watching TV when she heard the screaming and ran outside to see what happened. She then ran back inside and called 911.



Connecticut Merged Branch 20 member **Clinton Parker** was recognized for his role in talking down a soldier with PTSD who had threatened to shoot himself and others.



John Zeis

Along with a few other neighbors and passersby, Ridenour helped to lift the vehicle off of Coates, relieving the pressure and allowing him to be pulled from beneath the vehicle.

By the time Ridenour and the others had Coates free, first responders arrived. Coates was airlifted to the hospital, where it was discovered that he had broken about a dozen ribs during the incident. He soon recovered.

"The doctor said if he'd been under there for longer, he would have died," Mayhew told the [Greenfield, MA] *Recorder*. Coates' fiancée, Tabitha Sisto, told the newspaper, "If it wasn't for the people who helped him he wouldn't be here right now. I just need to say thank you again from the very bottom of my heart for everyone who was involved and the quick thinking and actions of everyone who helped save my future husband's life."

Ridenour brushed off any accolades for his actions. "There's not a single brother or sister in the union who wouldn't have done the same thing," the

11-year postal veteran said. "That's just who we are."

Dedicated carrier looks after his customers

Pittsburgh Branch 84 member **John Zeis** was working his normal route on Saturday, Oct. 1. On the first day of the month, when his 93-year-old customer, Catherine Schatzel, receives a check, the carrier usually knocked on her apartment door at her nursing home and handed it to the woman, or she would tell him to just stick it in her mailbox.

"She didn't come out that day and I thought it was really odd," Zeis said. So he put the envelope in the mailbox and continued delivering his route.

By Monday, Zeis became worried as the mail was still in the mailbox from the previous delivery day, so he contacted Schatzel's neighbor, who called the landlord, who in turn called police.

Responding officers broke the door down to find the woman on the floor

with an apparent leg injury. Schatzel said she had suffered a fall a few days prior and had been stuck on the floor ever since.

Police commended Zeis, saying that, had he not contacted somebody, Schatzel might have died. The woman soon after was moved to a different nursing home, where the carrier went to visit her.

Zeis, a 29-year letter carrier, has seen his fair share of unusual situations during his postal career. In March 2008, he was emptying a relay box when two men approached him and demanded money. One of the suspects pulled out a gun and shot Zeis as he ran down the street with his satchel.

"I feel that if I wouldn't have survived the shooting, I wouldn't have been able to save [Schatzel]," he said. "That's a bonus for sure."

But Zeis doesn't consider himself a hero. "It's all in a day's work," he said. "I love my job. I'm made to be a letter carrier. I really enjoy it. We all have a limited time here, and we should all give back and look after the elderly."

Fire and rescue



Dan Maguire

"I saw some smoke," Boston Branch 34 member **Dan Maguire** said of delivering his route on June 27. Since it was summertime, he figured it was probably just a barbecue, so he continued on his rounds. "A couple of houses later, the wind blew

the smoke into the vehicle," he said. Maguire decided this was no barbecue. He went up to the customer's driveway and saw that a bag of trash had caught fire there. "It was close to the house," he said, so he called 911. He saw three or four teenagers who were inside upstairs and tried to grab their attention. "I was throwing rocks at the window," Maguire said. "The rest is history." The teens made it out safely, and the one who lived there later told Maguire, "You saved my life, man." Maguire doesn't think he's a hero, though. "I'm just glad I stopped," the 31-year letter carrier said.

While Cedar Rapids, IA Branch 373 member **Cyler Stewart** was performing some park-and-loop deliveries on Oct. 5, "I smelled something burning," he said. As the carrier approached a home on his route, "I noticed some smoke coming from the back of



Cyler Stewart

the house," Stewart said. As he got closer, he noticed flames shooting from an electrical box on the side of house. Stewart called 911, who told the carrier to keep an eye on the situation and to make sure no one went near it. "I tried knocking on the door, but no one was home," the carrier said. Responding fire crews were able to put out the fire without extensive damage to the home or property. Stewart later returned to check on the returned residents, who commended Stewart for his quick actions. The second-year letter carrier insisted he wasn't a hero. "I was just out there, doing my job, taking care of my customers," he said. **PR**

When 'seconds and minutes' count

Oshkosh, WI Branch 173 member **Eric Momsen** was delivering mail on a cold day in January 2016 when "I heard someone shouting and yelling," he said.

The carrier first thought it might just be teenagers, but he quickly identified the source outside a nearby house. "I looked over and saw this woman screaming on her cell phone," Momsen said. "She was saying, 'My baby's not breathing and turning colors.'"

Momsen rushed over and learned that the woman's 6-month-old daughter was inside and had stopped breathing. He went in and found the baby on the

sofa with her grandmother. "It was non-responsive, lying there with its eyes closed," he said.

Momsen, a veteran of the Navy, Navy Reserves and Army National Guard as well as a Boy Scout leader, had extensive CPR training. "Adrenaline starts to go and I was trying to stay calm," he said.

Momsen took a "look, listen and feel" approach. "I assessed that the baby looked like it had swallowed its tongue," he said, possibly from a seizure. The carrier instructed the woman to tilt the girl on her side, to allow her tongue to fall to the side of her mouth and create an airway.

"I touched its wrist to take her pulse," the carrier said. "I think the coldness of my hands shocked her."



Eric Momsen

The baby opened her eyes; soon, color returned to her face and she started to breathe normally again.

EMTs took the baby to the hospital, and the girl soon recovered and returned home.

"It all happened so quickly," the carrier said. "Seconds and minutes count when they have that small of lung capacity."

Momsen brushed off any heroics, though. "I think anyone would have done the same thing," the 23-year postal veteran said. "How could you live with yourself if you walked by?"

This wasn't the first time Momsen has been recognized for actions on his route; he was featured in the April 2016 *Postal Record* for alerting a customer that her house was on fire.

Neighborhood watch



Cynthia Perkins

Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Cynthia Perkins** was delivering mail on a park-and-loop route on Saturday, Oct. 15, when "I see a little boy running down the middle of the road, and I mean running," she said. The 2-year-old, barefoot in just a diaper, was headed directly toward a

busy road. The carrier parked her postal vehicle, caught up to the child and asked where he lived and where his mom was. The boy kept repeating what Perkins said, and was not able to tell the carrier where he lived. "I started walking with him, door to door, trying to figure out where this little dude lived," Perkins said. There was no answer at the first few houses, but then the carrier spotted a house with a door open. The toddler went inside, and his mother was there. Perkins followed him in to introduce herself to the mother, who had apparently fallen asleep on the couch when the child was sleeping. The boy had awakened and gotten out of the house without waking her. The mother

was grateful to the carrier for watching out for her child. Perkins brushed off any major heroics. "I think any mom would feel I just helped this kid out," the nine-year postal veteran said.



Agana, Guam Branch 4093 member **Paul Carbullido** was preparing to leave his delivery at a

local mall on Aug. 12. As he was securing his mail to proceed to his next delivery, he noticed two women and two children gathered around a vehicle. He soon realized that it appeared that they were locked out of the car. "But what caught my attention was when one of the la-

dies was crying and banging on the vehicle window," Carbullido said. "That's when I ran to the vehicle to see what was going on." As he looked through the window, he saw a child crying and sweating in the back seat. "They had a metal rod, but just could not pick the lock," the carrier said. He took hold of it and tried himself, and after a few minutes was successful in opening the car door. "Boy was everybody happy," the 30-year postal veteran said. Carbullido, an Air Force veteran and current Air National Guard member, doesn't think he is a hero. "Everything happened so fast, I did not think I was capable of doing what I did," Carbullido said. **PR**

Help on the way

On June 14, Maine Merged Branch 92 member **Vernon Moore** was going about his mail route. Driving by a house, “I could see a hand waving out through a window,” the carrier said. Moore rushed over and asked, “Glenn, are you OK?” The man responded “No.” He found out that his customer, Glenn Oxley, had been home alone when he passed out



Vernon Moore

and fell down five stairs inside his split-level home. The man had been on the floor inside; hearing Moore’s mail truck, he dragged himself to the door, pulled himself up enough to unlock the deadbolt, turned the door handle and fell against the door to flop partially outside to attract the carrier’s attention. Moore tried to put the man’s back against the wall and pivot him, but the man asked him to stop because it hurt and asked him to call 911 as well as a neighbor, who was a registered nurse.

Moore quickly knocked on the neighbor’s door and they returned to Oxley. “We both talked to him until the ambulance got there,” he said. “We assured him that he would be OK.” EMTs soon arrived to give Oxley medical attention for his five broken ribs. “If Vern had not been there driving his appointed rounds in his truck with its unique sound, I don’t know what might have happened to me,” wrote Oxley, whose injuries required a long hospital stay and months of rehab. “I always knew Vern was a great guy, but I didn’t know that one day he might save my life.” But the nearly 30-year postal veteran simply said it’s all part of being a letter carrier. “It’s something we do. You’re glad you can help,” Moore said. “It’s human nature to help someone in need.”

“I heard a girl scream across the street,” Maine Merged Branch 92 member **Jon Olauson** said of his route on Sept. 3. He then heard the girl scream a second time, “Mom, call 911.” The carrier ran in their direction and saw that there was a man pinned under his car in the garage. He noticed a jack sitting on the floor close by, and the Olauson instinctively grabbed it. “I jacked it up, got it off him, and he scooted out,” he said. Once the car

was off the man, the carrier asked him if he was all right. The man said his chest was a little sore and he had cut his forehead. The carrier stayed with the family to comfort them until emergency crews responded and then left to deliver the rest of his route. The family profusely thanked Olauson the next time they saw the carrier and told him the man had suffered multiple broken ribs, cuts and bruises. But the 20-year postal veteran and Army veteran doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I’m just a good Samaritan,” Olauson said. “I was just in the right place at the right time, that’s all.”

While delivering mail one day last fall, Lincoln, NE Branch 8 member **Zach Paremske** noticed a customer outside. “She was sitting on her porch,” he said, so he asked her, “Do you want your mail?” The customer whispered to the carrier, “Help me.” The woman, speaking in broken English, asked Paremske to call 911. She had apparently had stomach surgery the day before and was having complications. The carrier waited with the woman to comfort her, and paramedics and the woman’s husband arrived at the same time.

“While I was sitting there, they were asking me questions,” Paremske said. Once he filled everyone in and



Zach Paremske

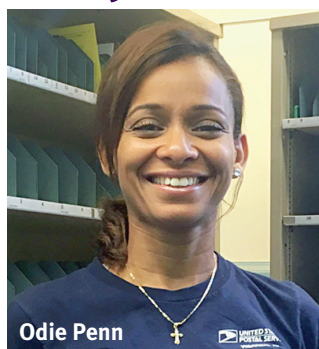


Andrew King

saw that his customer was in good hands, the carrier continued his route. He later checked in on the woman, who was doing better. But the fourth-year letter carrier doesn’t think he deserves any special credit. “I feel like anyone would have done the same thing if someone was asking for help,” Paremske said.

Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Andrew King** was on his route on Oct. 21, and had just pulled onto a street when he saw a woman attempting to lift a man. “He appeared sick,” the carrier said. “The woman screamed, ‘Can you help?’” King quickly parked his LLV and went to assist the woman. He asked her if 911 had been called and the woman said yes, but she seemed confused, so the carrier decided to call 911 to be on the safe side. “He was very dizzy,” King said, so they gently moved him to the grass. The man started vomiting, so King got the man on his side and tipped his head so he wouldn’t choke. They continued to make him comfortable until help arrived. Responding paramedics said that the man was most likely experiencing an allergic reaction. King said that the man is doing well now, but that he is not a hero. “I was just doing the job,” the third-year letter carrier said. “We’re all heroes. It’s our responsibility to keep an eye out.” **PR**

Eye on the elderly



On Aug. 2, Newport, RI Branch 57 member **Odie Penn** stopped by an elderly customer's house to bring the mail to her, as she normally did. "I always check in on her," the carrier said. Penn called for the woman upon her arrival, but there was no answer. She walked through the house and saw the woman's laundry room door open but didn't see the woman. Penn thought, "Nancy's not here today; what's going on?" She then left the customer's mail on her countertop and continued her route. The following day, she returned to deliver the mail and noticed that the mail from the day prior was still there. "I got a feeling," Penn said. She called inside the house, "Nancy, where are you? Are you here?" Concerned after getting no response, Penn went next door and asked a neighbor for help. The neighbor called the woman's daughter, who said her mother should

be home and something was not right. They called 911, and responders found the woman lying on her bedroom floor with only a faint pulse. The woman was taken to the hospital, where she died several days later. Penn was credited for giving the woman's family members, who lived in other states, a chance to be with her at the end of her life. The 18-year postal veteran doesn't think she did anything heroic. "I always love to help people, especially those elderly people who need help," Penn said. "I always try to be there for them."

Eden, NC Branch 3712 member **Blake Cooper** was delivering mail on Saturday, Aug. 27, to the home of his 93-year-old customer, Gladys Campbell, who lived alone. "I slid some mail in the door slot," he said. "She said, 'Hey, can you help me?'" Glancing through the mail slot in her locked front door, "I could see her lying on the floor," the carrier said. He called 911 and kept talking to Campbell to comfort her until help arrived. Emergency responders crawled through a window to get to the woman,

who told them that she'd been lying there overnight and had been waiting for her letter carrier to come by on Saturday. Campbell feared she had either a broken hip or a broken leg and was taken



to the hospital for treatment. Cooper later visited the woman in a nursing home to check on her. The four-year letter carrier and Air Force veteran doesn't think he's a hero, though. "I was just doing what I was supposed to be doing," Cooper said: "helping somebody."

Hot Springs National Park, AR Branch 543 member **Sandra Emerson** was delivering mail on her route on Saturday, Sept. 10, when she saw something concerning at the home of an elderly woman who lives alone. "I noticed mail piling up in her



box," she said. A few days prior, Emerson had helped the woman after she had gotten stuck in a recliner and her walker was out of reach. Concerned for the woman, the carrier decided to check on her and knocked on the door. The woman said to come in. Emerson discovered that the customer had fallen after getting out of her chair and had been lying on the floor for two days. "It just breaks my heart," the carrier said. Emerson called 911 and stayed with the woman until the ambulance arrived, offering her water and comfort, and help for her cat. The woman



was taken to the hospital and later to a rehab center, and is doing well. Soon after, an EMT told Emerson's postmaster about her actions, and also said that, had the carrier not helped, the customer likely would not have made it. Despite the praise, the 29-year postal veteran insisted that she doesn't consider herself a hero. "I did what I'm supposed to do as a human," Emerson said. "Part of being a letter carrier is looking out for people."

"I walked up to the door and I heard a grunt when I opened the mailbox," McCook, NE Branch 1278 city carrier assistant **Tyler Bruggeman** said of delivering mail to an elderly customer on his route on Sept. 8. "He went to my church, so I knew he was older and used a walker," he said. Concerned, the CCA knocked on the door. The customer called out in response, and Bruggeman entered the house. "He was on his back and couldn't move," the carrier said. "He had just gotten breakfast and had fallen and couldn't get up." The man had been on the floor for about four hours. Bruggeman called 911 and the customer's family and stayed to comfort him until help arrived. The man was taken to the hospital to treat a bladder infection and then went to a nursing home to continue to recover. Bruggeman, a first-year letter carrier, doesn't think he's a hero, though he admitted, "If I hadn't gone in, I don't know when someone would have checked on him." **PR**

Johnstown, PA Branch 4551 member **Matthew Lamb** (below right) was praised for his role in helping a young boy and his grandmother escape their burning home (pictured top right).



The heat of the moment

As Johnstown, PA Branch 451 member **Matthew Lamb** was delivering the Rucoskys' mail on Nov. 21, he could smell smoke. Since there had been snow recently, he attributed the scent to a woodburner or other heat source.

He continued on his route and as he delivered a package on a nearby street, "I looked down and could see flames from their porch," Lamb said.

Concerned, Lamb ran over to the Rucoskys' front porch and knocked on the door. He helped Helen Rucosky out of the home and to a safe distance away. "I asked if there was anyone else in there," he said. At first, she said no.

The carrier called 911 and the operator asked him about others inside. Lamb again asked the woman, and this time, "she said her grandson was inside," he said.

Rucosky's grandson, Adam, was upstairs sleeping when the fire broke out, so Lamb started looking for another entrance to the house. "I went to another door, because by then the fire had spread," the carrier said. It was locked, and roofing on the porch had begun falling around him.

Lamb then decided to try to go through the basement. Held back by heat and smoke, Lamb became discouraged. But when he heard cries from Adam, Lamb was determined to help.

The cries were coming from the other side of the house, so Lamb ran over. "Black smoke was pouring out," Lamb said. He told Adam, "Just jump out and I'll catch you." The boy climbed out of his window and jumped into the waiting arms of the letter carrier, who immediately took him to his grandmother.

The boy's father, Robert Rucosky, who is a volunteer firefighter, had not been home, but when he saw fire trucks near his house, he rushed to the scene.

Firefighters from four towns responded to the fire, and West Hills Fire Chief Don Blasko told *The Tribune-Democrat* that a preliminary investigation showed that the fire started after something hot from the kitchen was placed on the porch. The fire caused extensive damage to the front porch and first floor.

Lamb stayed with the family until fire crews arrived, then returned to and finished his regular route, insisting he was just at the right place at the right time. "I didn't think about it too much," the five-year postal veteran said. "Someone was needing help. I wasn't looking at it like I was in danger. I was just trying to help out one of my customers."



and saw a man by the bathroom door. "Her friend had a rope around his neck," he said. "He was motionless and dangling."

Zhu quickly rushed over to him. "I grabbed him from behind and lifted him up," he said. He called out to the woman to go to the kitchen and get a knife to cut the rope.

Zhu set the man on the floor as the woman called 911. She was upset and having trouble giving information, so Zhu talked to the operator to give the address.

The man was still having trouble breathing, and it was warm in the apartment with no air-conditioning on a hot day. The carrier looked around and saw a cutting board and grabbed it. "I kept fanning him and trying to get the air circulating," he said.

A few minutes later, he heard the man begin to breathe regularly, and paramedics arrived a few minutes later to take over. Zhu filled in police and was commended for likely saving the man's life.

Even though Zhu's co-workers have started to call him "Zhuperman" for his heroic actions, the carrier claimed he was simply in the right place at the right time. "It just happened," the 13-year postal veteran said. "I was scared, but in the moment, I just thought, 'I got to do it.' " **PR**



Huan Boi Zhu

'Zhuperman' to the rescue

On Aug. 6, Flushing, NY Branch 294 member **Huan Boi Zhu** was delivering mail when "this young lady came to me and said, 'Hey, mailman, help me!'" the carrier said.

The woman told Zhu that her friend was trying to hang himself. The carrier followed the woman to an apartment