

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.

Team effort to save lucky patron

On May 23, Mt. Clemens, MI Branch 654 city carrier assistant **Dennis Denham** was delivering mail and had just flipped around to deliver to the other side of the street.

Nearby, retired South Macomb, MI Branch 4374 member **Steve Futach** had just pulled into his driveway and stopped to pick up his mail. Neighbor **Joseph Pomante**, a retired Detroit Branch 1 member, and his wife, Michelle, were riding bicycling through the neighborhood and stopped to talk to Futach.

Denham passed the group, approached a patron's house to deliver mail and saw the customer, 81-year-old Fred Baker, lying in the driveway between his car and the house. The carrier thought the man was working on his car and heard him say something. In fact, "He was calling for help and was in a pool of blood," Denham said.

The CCA began calling out for help. The Pomantes rushed over to assist Denham and called 911. "His head was gashed open. There was a lot of blood," Joseph Pomante said. "I never had seen so much blood in my life."

Futach, meanwhile, "went and got some towels from my house to help

stop the bleeding," he said.

Denham put his phone on speaker so Pomante could listen to the 911 operator and help the operator assess the situation. "I just kept talking to [Baker] to keep him conscious," Pomante said. "I was only trying to follow their instructions."

Once the fire department arrived and took over, Denham continued on the route.

After EMTs stabilized Baker and left for the hospital, Futach noticed that the man's keys and wallet were still in the driveway. By this time, Futach's wife (a retired postal custodian) had arrived. They found an emergency contact list in the wallet, and Futach's wife called Baker's daughter, who gave the group permission to get Baker's dog from the house. "We then cleaned the blood from the driveway, secured his belongings and retrieved the dog," Futach said.

Baker apparently had fallen on his driveway a half-hour earlier and hit his head on the concrete. He received stitches and, after leaving the hospital, went to a rehab facility.

"This is a very unique situation where two different generations of letter carriers worked together," Branch 654 President Clarence Blaze said. "In this case, they worked together to save a human life."

Pomante, who retired in 2016 after 32 years as a letter carrier, said, "We want to give Dennis all the credit. He reacted fast enough to call 911."

Futach, who retired in 2012 after 36 years of carrying mail, concurred, calling Denham a conscientious carrier. "Dennis was the hero; I was a helper," he said. "None of us would have realized Mr. Baker was lying in that pool of blood had the letter carrier not seen him."

Denham, a second-year letter carrier, said being called a hero "makes me feel pretty good," but that his actions were just part of his job of looking out for the neighborhood.



Mt. Clemens, MI Branch 654 member **Dennis Denham** (above) joined with retired members **Steve Futach** of South Macomb, MI Branch 4374 and **Joseph Pomante** of Detroit Branch 1 to help out a customer who had fallen at his home and was lying in a pool of blood.

Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member Robert Sweeny was interviewed by a local TV station after helping customers and their dogs when a house on his route caught fire.



Habits of a hero

Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member **Robert Sweeny** was delivering mail on Saturday, June 24, when he thought he heard a noise at a house on his route.

As he came back down the other side of the street, “I saw smoke,” the carrier said. “A lady was sitting on the porch with her dog.”

Sweeny rushed over to her and asked if she was OK, if there was anyone else inside and if she had called 911. She said she had already called and that there were animals inside. “Don’t go back in,” Sweeny told her.

At this point, the blaze began spreading from the woman’s garage to the roof of a neighboring home. The carrier grabbed a garden hose and started spraying it in an attempt to quell the flames.

He saw the man who lived in the second house and asked him to check on the woman. “I kept spraying the house down because it was spreading to his,” the carrier said.

The man told Sweeny that he had pets inside, too. “I got the three dogs out,” Sweeny said. He then brought them to the back yard to keep them penned in. “Then I went back to the lady’s house to get her pets out in the front yard,” he said.

Firefighters soon arrived to put the fire out at the two houses. The woman’s garage was damaged, but the damage to the man’s home was not as bad. “They were pretty thankful,” Sweeny said.

The 20-year letter carrier and Navy veteran doesn’t consider himself a hero, though. He insisted that he just couldn’t walk away. “I tell people that I just happened to be there at the right place at the right time,” Sweeny said.

The carrier has somewhat of a hero habit. He was featured in the May 2009 *Postal Record* and gained national attention when he was featured on Fox News and “The Oprah Winfrey Show” for administering CPR to an infant, as well as when he received a citizen hero award from the American

Red Cross. Sweeny also was recognized in the September/October 2010 *Postal Record* for helping a woman and her child escape from a house fire on his route.

“I am grateful that I am able to help the customers on my route whenever needed,” Sweeny said.

Carrier watches out for potential danger

One day in late March, Moundsville, WV Branch 893 member **Brad Scherich** was delivering mail to an 87-year-old customer, Ms. Dakan, when he noticed that a truck was parked in her driveway. “Just being familiar with the area, I recognized that the vehicle didn’t belong,” he said.

A man was behind the wheel of the truck while a woman who had knocked on Dakan’s door was standing on her stoop talking to her. The truck was dilapidated and the people appeared to be unkempt, so Scherich thought something might be wrong.

Eye on the elderly



Heather Rea

On June 30, Barberton, OH Branch 897 member **Heather Rea** was going about her route when she noticed an accumulation of

mail outside her elderly customer’s door. “He hadn’t gotten his mail in two days, which was really unlike him, so I kind of knew something wasn’t right then,” the carrier told the local Fox TV news station.

She also noticed that the man’s car hadn’t moved. “I knocked on his door that day and still got no response,” she said. After a few days of trying

to knock on the door, Rea called her supervisor, who in turn called 911 for a welfare check. Responding police officers and firefighters got inside the house by breaking through a window and found the man injured on his bathroom floor, where he had apparently been for several days. “The [police] came and told me that he’d been there so long, he was dehydrated, hadn’t ate or drank, and he was in really rough shape,” Rea told Fox. “If I hadn’t notified them or

called, he probably wouldn’t have made it much longer.” The man was treated at the hospital and released to a rehabilitation facility, and he was expected to make a full recovery. Doctors said he had become weak after a leg infection had spread. Rea, a fifth-year letter carrier, said she tries to get to know people on her route. “I really don’t think I’m a hero,” she said. “I can tell when something’s not right. All that mattered to me is that he was OK inside his apartment.”

Proud to Serve

Denver 47 members Amy Bezerra and Phillip Borrego were recognized for helping to reunite a family with their relative who suffered from dementia.



The carrier decided to deliver Dakan's mail to her personally and placed himself between the two women on the stoop, calling Dakan by her first name and allowing her to ask him for help if she felt she was in danger. "They looked suspicious," Scherich said. "I could hear them asking for money." The woman told Dakan that she would be evicted if she didn't pay. Dakan politely refused.

The carrier went back to his mail truck and called out to a neighbor he saw, Lisa Meeker, near the vehicle. "I went over to talk to her to try to get the plates of the truck," he said. Scherich and Meeker remained in their conversation for several minutes until the couple drove away. They noted that the couple did not stop at any other house on the street.

Scherich was commended for his actions. "I want to acknowledge the exemplary service and dedication of mail carrier Brad Scherich," Dakan's daughter Roseanna Keller wrote to the local postmaster. "He saw a potential danger and took action to assure the safekeeping of an elderly citizen. [He]

represents what is best about our community, the U.S. Postal Service and stands as a representative of what is best about America."

But the 21-year postal veteran said he doesn't think his efforts were a big deal. "A lot of bad things can happen without someone intervening," Scherich said. "I just wanted them to know they're being watched."

Teaming up to help

Denver Branch 47 member **Phillip Borrego** was delivering mail one afternoon last spring when he encountered a disoriented man walking down the sidewalk. The carrier didn't recognize him, but he knew a family nearby had reported a missing relative a few days prior.

About 20 minutes later, Borrego saw a family circling the neighborhood. "The family said they had lost him again," the carrier said. They showed him a photo of the man, and Borrego told them, "He was walking south."

The carrier then called to alert fellow Branch 47 member **Amy Bezerra**, who had the next route over, that the man had been missing for four hours. He had

dementia, was visiting his daughter and didn't know the neighborhood well. "I told her what he looked like and asked if she could keep an eye out," Borrego said.

It had been the end of the workday for Bezerra, and she was headed back to the post office on a different route than she normally takes. "I happened to see the guy trying to cross a busy street," she said. "He was headed in the complete opposite direction from where his daughter lived."

Bezerra quickly tried to stop the man. "He was scared to death," the carrier said. "He said he was on a walk. I kept him where I found him and the family met up with me."

The family later called the local post office to thank the carriers for their help. But Bezerra and Borrego don't think they are heroes, insisting that helping is just what carriers do.

"Our jobs are more than putting mail in boxes," Bezerra, a 22-year postal veteran said. "We're taking care of the people we serve."

Borrego agreed. "If you pay attention, you can help people out," the 13-year letter carrier said. "I was just looking out for my community."

Neighborhood watch



Kenneth Craig

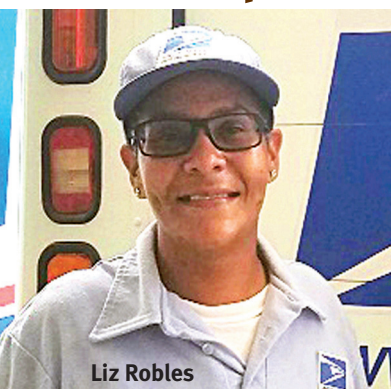
"I was out on my route and was walking through a

yard," Great Falls, MT Branch 650 member **Kenneth Craig** recalled about delivering mail on June 9. He then noticed an unusual amount of standing water in the back yard of a customer's home. "I see there's a lot of running water out by a gate," he said. "There's water gushing out." Since the homeowners, the Scotts, were out of town, the carrier alerted neighbors, who were watching the home for them. They determined that a broken lawn sprinkler valve in

the basement was the problem. The basement and another room had started to flood, but they were able to shut off the valve before it caused thousands of dollars in damage. The grateful Scotts soon returned and found out what their observant letter carrier had done. "Had carrier Craig been less observant or less caring, our basement would surely have been flooded by rising, uncontrolled water for possibly the entire time our home was vacant," the home-

owner wrote to the local post office. "My wife and I profusely thanked carrier Craig for his remarkable observation skills, his heroic actions of reporting a danger and for his overall obvious dedication to his job and those he serves and we congratulate him on a job well done." But the 22-year letter carrier and Air Force veteran said he was just doing his job. "I don't think I did anything out of the ordinary," Craig said. "I was just looking out for someone's property." **PR**

Help on the way



Liz Robles

On May 29, Memorial Day, Central Florida Branch 1091 member **Liz Robles** was attending a birthday party at a nearby pool with friends when someone called out, “Whose child is this?” As Robles looked over, she saw a man pulling a child out of the pool. “A 7-year-old boy was drowning in the pool,” the carrier said. “There was no lifeguard.” The carrier’s motherly instincts kicked in and she quickly ran to the boy while someone else called 911. “I took charge and gave him CPR,” Robles said. The carrier said she kept saying to herself, “Please save this angel.” She continued the life-saving procedure until the child started to breathe. Robles comforted the child until the ambulance arrived, and she answered the EMTs’ questions. Though the third-year letter carrier had received CPR training at a previous job, this was the first time she used the procedure. The boy was in the hospital for observation overnight and returned home soon after. Robles checked in with his parents to make sure he was all right. Though Robles said it’s a “really awesome feeling” to

have helped save the boy, she denied any major heroics.

On the morning of May 15, Central Iowa Merged Branch 352 member **Jason Berkley** was delivering mail along his route when he heard an odd noise coming from nearby trees. “I heard something and it just didn’t sound right,” he said, wondering if it was a wounded cat. When he heard the sound again, Berkley decided to walk over to take a look. There, he saw a young woman lying unresponsive. It appeared that she had been beaten. Berkley used his phone to call 911. “I took her pulse and it was hard to get,” Berkley said. “Her breath was shallow.” Berkley kept an eye on the woman as he went to a better-viewed spot so he could flag down the ambulance. Medics soon arrived and tried getting her to move, but she remained unresponsive. The carrier later found out that the woman had been out with friends the night before and had been attacked and then



Kristina Olson

left in the wooded area. She later was released from the hospital. Though Berkley said that “it was a strange situation,” he said that letter carriers are vigilant. “We try to keep our eyes and ears out on our routes,” Berkley said. Still, don’t try to call him a hero. “I’m glad I heard her,” the 23-year postal veteran said, “but there are way better definitions of people who are heroes.”

After being injured on the job, Bismarck, ND Branch 957 member **Kristina Olson** was on limited duty one cold day last winter, driving a supervisor around on a rural carrier’s route. They soon saw a commotion nearby and rushed to help. At first, “I thought I saw a kid playing in the snow,” she said. The person appeared to be perilously close to the street. “As I rolled down the window, I saw that it was an adult,” she added. The patron had been emptying trash outside while holding her dog when she slipped on some ice. It happened on the back side of an apartment complex. “No one would have seen her there,” Olson said. The woman appeared to be seriously injured and couldn’t get up. Rural carrier Jeffrey Bolte also saw the situation and came to help. As the trio tried to lift the woman, they found she had been lying on her phone. They called 911 and then calmed the woman, who was anxious. They tried to make her comfortable by locating a blanket to lie on and a coat to keep her warm while waiting for paramedics to arrive. “She had



Mike Fox

broken her leg in two places,” Olson said she learned later. “She’s OK, and that’s all that matters.” The customer later contacted the postmaster to thank the postal employees for their assistance. But the 19-year postal veteran doesn’t like to be called a hero for her efforts. “You just do what you feel you should do,” Olson said. “I was just afraid the person would get hit. I’m glad we were able to get her help.”

On March 15, Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Mike Fox** became concerned when he noticed that a customer had not picked up her mail. “There were a couple of newspapers out there,” he said. It had recently snowed, and Fox also noticed that there were no tracks in the snow besides his own. “Something just didn’t seem right,” the carrier said. So, he checked in with a neighbor, who told him the customer was disabled. Fox called his manager, who in turn called county adult services, who sent someone to perform a wellness check on the customer. They discovered the woman in medical distress after a recent medication change had caused a severe reaction. Following medical attention, the woman was doing all right. Fox brushed off any talk of heroism. “I would like to think that anyone in my position would do the same thing,” the 31-year letter carrier and Navy veteran said. “If something seems wrong, you bring attention to it.” **PR**

Eye on the elderly

Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Holly Montroy** was delivering mail on March 16 when she approached the house of an elderly customer. “The gentleman would normally come out and greet me and take the mail,” she said. That day, he was sitting in a lawn chair outside near the garage, slumped over. It had



snowed earlier that day and Montroy figured that he had probably been out shoveling and might be “taking a rest.” Still, the carrier was concerned and went over to check on him. “He was unresponsive,” she said. Montroy called 911 and then went to the house to get his wife. The man unfortunately did not survive the ordeal, but Montroy was commended for her caring actions. “I would expect anyone else to do the same thing in that predicament,” the first-year letter carrier said.

Janesville, WI Branch 572 member **Brent Penniston** was going about his route one day in early June when he no-

ticed that an elderly customer, Don, had not taken his mail from his box. “I was not too worried until I delivered again the next day and his mail was still not picked up,” the carrier said. “I can usually see the man sitting in the living room, but he was not there.” Penniston rang the doorbell but got no answer. “I knew his next-door neighbor had checked on him before, so I asked them to check on him,” he said. “I told them, ‘I’m getting worried.’” The neighbors called the police, and when Penniston saw an ambulance come through the neighborhood, he rushed back over to the house. When responding officers got inside Don’s house, they found him on the bathroom floor, dehydrated. The customer apparently had been there for up to three days. After a couple of days in the hospital and two weeks in a nursing home, the man returned home. “He thanked me about 10 times,” Penniston said, but the 22-year postal veteran doesn’t think he’s a hero; he said he just tried to watch out on his route. “You get used to your customers,” he said. “I was very happy to do it.”

On Nov. 7, Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member **Jeffrey Sinn** delivered mail to an elderly customer. “I noticed her TV was on, and I put her mail in the box,” he said. He also saw a box of chocolates that someone had left for her on her stoop. The next day when he came, Sinn noticed that the mail and chocolates were still there. The carrier had been on the

same route for 30 years and knew the woman for all three decades. “She’s always on top of everything,” he said. “I knew something was wrong.” He knocked on the door, but got no response. Concerned, he decided to investigate. “I walked around the house and tried to look inside the windows,” he said. When Sinn saw no sign of his patron, he alerted a neighbor, who fortunately had the phone number for the woman’s daughter. The neighbor called the woman, who was able to tell them where her mother’s spare key was located. They then called city hall to come for a welfare check, and all of them were able to enter the house without breaking in. They found the resident on the floor, incapacitated after having had a stroke, and they called 911. The woman was soon rushed to the hospital. After several months in the hospital and nursing homes, the woman was moved to an assisted-living center, where she has recovered. The woman’s family commended Sinn, saying he may have



saved her life, and Sinn was relieved to receive a note from the customer herself to thank him. But don’t try to call the carrier a hero. “I just think anybody would have done that in that situation,” Sinn said. “It’s just being observant.”

Annapolis, MD Branch 651 member **Kirk Moyer** was concerned by an unusual accumulation of mail at an 85-year-old customer’s home on Dec. 8. “I had noticed that Mr. Fink’s mail was piling up and he never does that,” he said. “I looked in his garage and his car was there.” When the carrier knocked on the door and got no answer, he called 911 to ask for a welfare check. “You don’t want to be intrusive, but you want to make sure they’re all right,” Moyer said. The carrier continued his route but rushed back to his customer’s home when he saw police vehicles approaching. “Evidently, he made a noise but couldn’t come to the door,” the carrier said. Emergency responders found the man inside in need of medical attention and they thanked Moyer for his possibly life-saving intervention. Fink received multiple blood transfusions in the hospital and has since gone to an assisted-living facility. The 19-year letter carrier and Navy veteran who fought in Desert Storm brushed off any accolades. “I care about the people in the community,” he said. “It’s the same thing I would have done for a family member or neighbor. You look at it like, ‘I do what I need to do.’” **PR**

Fire can't keep this carrier from helping

"I was crossing the street," Freeport, IL Branch 223 member **Jim Goeke** said of delivering his route on March 30, "when I got a whiff of something."

He looked around and saw smoke billowing out of the window of an apartment at a nearby three- to four-story complex he was about to deliver mail to.

"I hurried up the stairs," the carrier said. He went to the first-floor apartment where the smoke was coming from and knocked on the door until the tenant answered. "I was glad she came to the door because I didn't want to have to break it down," Goeke said. "There were no smoke alarms going off."

The resident was disoriented from the smoke fumes, and Goeke could see that the couch was on fire and the room was filled with smoke. The carrier got the tenant outside while a neighbor called 911. He asked her if anyone else was inside, and the woman said that her roommate was.

Goeke then waited outside with the woman until police and firefighters arrived. "I told them there was someone else in there," he said.

Firefighters were able to enter the apartment to rescue the other woman,

who had been sleeping.

"If the window weren't open, they would have been in more trouble," Goeke said. Indeed, the resident later contacted him and said that a paramedic had told her that she and her roommate had a lot of smoke in their lungs and that they had been in danger.

Still, the 12-year postal veteran said that he wasn't big on being called a hero. "I was just a person doing their job," Goeke said. "I was glad I was in the right place at the right time."

Looking out for his people

When Central Florida Branch 1091 member **Jose Fonseca** noticed on March 15 that an elderly customer's mail was



piling up and that Joyce Bodor had not retrieved packages from the porch, he became concerned.

"It was odd she didn't pick up her mail," he said. "I

talked to her every day. Something just told me that it wasn't right."

When the carrier also saw the woman's car in her driveway, he decided to take action. Fonseca asked Bodor's neighbors if they had seen or heard from



Jim Goeke

her. They had not.

He called 911 to ask for a welfare check, but was told they already knew about Joyce and that she was at the hospital with her husband. Fonseca informed them that the woman was a widow. (It turned out to be a different Joyce.)

When he saw that the situation was unresolved the next day, Fonseca again called police out of concern. This time, "The cops came, the ambulance came," the carrier said. "They went straight through the window."

Responding officers found the woman on the floor inside her home, where she had been for five days. "She was barely alive," Fonseca said. "I would have busted a window sooner if I had known she was in there."

Bodor spent a few weeks in the hospital in and out of the intensive-care unit. Fonseca went to visit her there. "She told me, 'I love you,' and it was so touching," the carrier said.

Bodor, who eventually recovered and returned home, called the post office to thank Fonseca for saving her life. Fonseca, a 31-year letter carrier and Marine Corps veteran who lives on his route, downplayed any heroics and insisted that letter carriers just try to look out for their customers. "This is what we do and these are our people," he said. **PR**

Fire and rescue

On June 12, Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126 member **Gregory Harris** was delivering mail on a loop of his route when he saw something of concern at a vacant home. "The side of the house was on fire," he said. "I was about 15 to 20 feet away when I spotted it." The carrier called 911 and then alerted the neighbors of the situation by knocking on

their doors. "It was going to get out of hand pretty fast," Harris said. "The fire department and police department responded very rapidly. I just continued delivering my route." When Harris returned to his postal vehicle from his loop, the fire captain thanked the carrier for reporting the fire, saying that had the fire gone unreported any longer, there might have

been more damage. The third-year letter carrier has been overwhelmed by the attention his actions have received, but he said reacting to a situation like this is "just like breathing," because you don't think about it—you just act. "It's something you would do anyway, whether acknowledged or not," Harris said. "It's my community as well." **PR**



Gregory Harris