

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.

A twofer of heroism

On June 30, 2016, Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Evelyn Woodward** had just gone off the clock and was working in the union office at the post office when "I heard this weird scream," she said.

Others seemed to think that the noise was from children playing in the lobby. "I just had this intuition that it wasn't," Woodward said.

She got up to check out the situation and saw that a clerk was lying down. "She fell face-first on the floor," Woodward said. "She was convulsing and in a pool of blood." The clerk had just finished working the window and was walking to the back to close out her drawer when she had an apparent seizure, then fell to the floor and hit her head.

Woodward yelled out for someone to call 911 and ran to the woman's side. The clerk was bleeding from the head, so Woodward began first aid. Then the clerk stopped breathing.

After he heard the scream and Woodward's shout out, fellow Branch 56 member **James McKay** rushed over. The two carriers rolled the woman onto her back and picked her head up. "She had bit down on her tongue so hard, we couldn't get her mouth open," Woodward said.

"We need to start CPR," McKay said. Woodward cleared the woman's

wind pipe and secured her head while McKay, who is also an EMT with the local fire department, began performing chest compressions. "She started breathing again," McKay said. Then the woman came to and jumped up. McKay and Woodward tried to keep her lying down to prevent any further injury and asked her questions until paramedics showed up to take over.

The clerk was taken to the hospital and soon recovered. Because Woodward got so much blood on her in the process, the two women now joke that they're "blood sisters."

But Woodward, a 30-year postal veteran, doesn't consider herself a hero. "I was pretty happy that she came back to life," she said. "I would just hope that someone else would do the same."

McKay echoed that sentiment. "I'm not a hero," the 22-year letter carrier said. "Luckily I had the training. I was just glad I was there."

All in a day's work

On July 7, 2016, Buffalo-Western NY Branch 3 member **James Burkhardt Jr.** was on his route training a city carrier assistant. "As we were walking down the street, we could smell smoke," the carrier said. They couldn't see its source, so they continued to deliver.

When they looped back around on the street a little while later, the CCA said, "Well, that doesn't look like a barbecue." They could see flames coming from a back porch, so Burkhardt—a 26-year volunteer firefighter in the community as well as a Marine Corps veteran—told the CCA to go on ahead delivering. "I'll go check this out," he said.

Burkhardt knew the residents' vehicles and didn't see them there, so he went straight to the patio. There, he saw a lawn chair engulfed in flames. "I didn't see a garden hose there or at the neighbor's house," he said.

He had his personal vehicle on the



Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 members **James McKay** and **Evelyn Woodward** were recognized for their role in providing CPR to a clerk at their post office.



Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member Gary Sulz was commended for helping to save a man who had a drug overdose. Pictured (l to r) are Branch 6000 President Walter Barton, Sulz and Area Representative Vince Calvanese.

route because the CCA was using an LLV, so Burkhardt headed to his car for his personal fire extinguisher and called in to report the fire. Meanwhile, a neighbor saw what was going on and knocked on the door to make sure the residents weren't home, and then called them to let them know what was happening.

The carrier used his extinguisher to hold the flames at bay until the fire department could arrive to take over. When firefighters arrived, "It was still kind of up between the floorboards," he said.

Burkhardt said the homeowners were thankful for his actions, but the 10-year postal veteran brushed off any heroics. "It's just part of the day," he said.

Letter carrier intuition strikes again

Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member **Gary Sulz** was driving back to his route from lunch on a hot Aug. 15, 2016, when he noticed a man lying half on the grass and half in the street. "I thought he was just lying on

the lawn because it was hot out," the carrier said. "I thought they were just relaxing."

As Sulz passed, though, he looked back and noticed the man was holding his cigarette strangely. The customer had the nagging feeling that something wasn't right, so he turned around to check on the man.

When he got over to the man, Sulz became even more concerned. "He was staring into the sun and not breathing properly," he said. The man was unresponsive when Sulz shook him, and his pupils were pinpoints.

The carrier tried to call 911 but the call got dropped. A passerby stopped, and Sulz told them to call 911. The carrier, also a 30-plus volunteer firefighter and EMT, ran to his postal truck, where he kept a pocket CPR mask.

Sulz ran back and started rescue breathing on the man. People started coming up to them, and the carrier asked, "Does anyone know him?" Someone said they were his neighbor, so the carrier asked questions to see if he could narrow down the reason for his medical episode. "It could have

been anything," Sulz said. When he asked if it could be because of drugs or alcohol, one neighbor said yes.

Sulz suspected then that it was a heroin overdose and told the responding EMTs that they should bring Narcan, an opiate antidote. He continued to work with EMTs, helping the man to breathe, while they set up an IV. The man was revived and taken to the hospital.

Word soon spread, and the carrier was praised for his actions. "Gary Sulz showed outstanding citizenship and what it means to help another human being and that we all need to be aware of situations that we may come across to help another human in crisis," an anonymous patron wrote to the post office. "I hope that you will take the time to recognize Gary for the wonderful person he is and for the fine example he showed that day. He is an asset to the ... post office and our community."

Sulz said that he was simply in the right place at the right time. "I was just glad I was able to use my expertise," the 29-year postal veteran said.

Neighborhood watch



Mary Wilkins

On May 25, 2016, Peoria, IL Branch 31 member **Mary Wilkins** was on her route when she saw some-

thing concerning. "I was taking a break and I pulled into a gas station," she said. "I see a little boy in an alley on a battery-operated toy vehicle." The toddler was riding his toy tractor and looked like he was headed toward a busy street. "That gets your adrenaline going," the carrier said. Wilkins got out of her vehicle quickly. "I stopped the truck that was coming at him and I grabbed him," she said. After bringing him to a safe

location, Wilkins assessed him. She noticed that the boy was bleeding from an injury on his face and could not tell Wilkins his name or where he lived. "He couldn't speak," she said. She called police and assisted the responding officers by contacting nearby houses looking for the child's parents. After about an hour with no results, the police officer took custody of the child. "The cop took the boy around and stopped at

houses that had toys at it," she said she later found out. The officer eventually saw a matching part to the toy tractor at a house and found the boy's mother inside. "The mom said she was cleaning and didn't know he was gone," the carrier said. The 10-year postal veteran doesn't think she's a hero, though. "I just love kids and love helping people, and I love doing my job," Wilkins said. "I just look at it as doing my job." **PR**

Proud to Serve

San Diego Branch 70 members Joe Meyers (l) and Greg Wilder (r) received media attention for their actions in helping customer Joel Gerber (c) after an accident with woodworking machinery.



A double dose of heroics

“All I heard was a big boom,” San Diego Branch 70 member **Greg Wilder** said as he had been delivering mail on Sept. 7, 2016.

The sound drew Wilder’s attention to customer Joel Gerber, a woodworking hobbyist, who had had an accident with a piece of machinery in his garage. Some of the wood came loose from the equipment; the piece hit the floor, while another part hit the man on the side of his jaw and in his chest. Gerber was thrown from the force.

“He flew up in the air,” the carrier said. He hit his head on the concrete floor and landed on his back.

Wilder ran to Gerber’s side and saw that the man was unconscious and bleeding profusely from the nose, chin, ear and head. “His eyes were floating in his head,” Wilder said.

Fellow Branch 70 member **Joe Meyers** was about a block away and had been heading to Wilder to give him some mail. “I heard it happen,” he said. Meyers pulled up in his truck; he and Wilder called 911 and tended to Gerber.

“He finally came to. He was kind of

out of it,” Meyers said. “We got towels for his head.”

They began asking Gerber about his wife. Wilder yelled her name, but she didn’t respond, and they looked for Gerber’s cell phone. Wilder then went outside and flagged down a neighbor driving by. The woman knew Gerber’s wife and called her to fill her in. The two carriers also retrieved Gerber’s wallet from inside the home, gave it to EMTs, and locked up Gerber’s home.

“It all happened so quickly,” Wilder said.

Gerber received 35 stitches in his chin and a few dozen more stitches in the back of his head, and he underwent surgery to reconnect his jaw, which had been pushed into his ear. He recovered soon after. “He’s doing great now,” Meyers said.

“One thing sticks in my mind: I wouldn’t be alive but for these two postal employees,” Gerber, a federal judge, told the *Solana Beach Sun*. “This is just a beautiful story where two civil servants saved somebody’s life—a citizen who they were serving.”

Gerber also wrote a letter to the local postmaster to commend the carriers.

“Had Mr. Wilder and Mr. Meyer not acted with dispatch, compassion, and courage, it is a relative certainty that I would have bled to death,” he wrote. “Too often public servants are maligned and treated with disdain. Mr. Wilder and Mr. Meyer’s actions reflect the high quality of our civil servants and the important role that they play in our daily lives. I am forever indebted to them and to the Postal Service for selecting quality people to serve our community and county.”

But the carriers brushed off any accolades.

“We did what we had to do to make sure he was safe,” Wilder, a 20-year letter carrier as well as a Navy veteran, said. “I just felt like, as a human being, you help people. It should be automatic. You want to see people live.”

Meyers echoed that sentiment. “I was glad we were in front of that house,” the second-year city carrier assistant said. “I’m just happy he’s OK.”

At a reunion soon after, Meyers told Gerber on the local NBC-TV affiliate, “I just want to thank you for taking time out of your day to say hi to us every time you see us. I always enjoy delivering to your house.”

Eye on the elderly



When Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member **Rebeckah Gold** noticed an unusual accumulation of mail one day in summer 2016 at her elderly customer Jack’s home, she became concerned. “He’s usually on it,” she said. The carrier and a neighbor checked on the man and found him in his house with a bruised face but otherwise OK. She was off the next day, and when she returned to the route

the day after, she saw that the mail pile had grown. “I knocked on the door and he wasn’t answering,” the carrier said. Gold could not find the neighbor, so she called the local sheriff to ask for a welfare check on Jack. She explained that he is usually sitting at a table at the back of the house, which you can see through the glass front door, but she could not see him. The responding sheriff found Jack in his back yard.

“He had gotten a cut on his face and it went septic,” the carrier said. Emergency responders credit Gold with potentially saving the life of the man, who recovered after spending weeks in intensive care. Gold, a 10-year postal veteran, brushed off any praise, saying she was just doing her job. “It’s a good feeling to be at the right place at the right time,” she said. “I was just watching out for my guys.”

Help on the way

Hopkins, MN Branch 2942 member **Brian Halbakken** was working at his case on June 20, 2016, when a supervisor appeared. “She seemed to be really scared,” he said. “She came to me with a choking sign, so I turned her around.” The carrier, an office safety captain with responder training, grabbed the woman and gave her three quick thrusts of the Heimlich maneuver. The piece of food she had been choking on flew out. After the woman got

a breath in, she thanked the carrier, who responded, “Relax, it’s over.” The woman had been

eating her lunch at her station when she started choking and had wandered to find someone. “I was the only person there at that time,” Halbakken said, adding that he felt like he “was meant to be there.” When Halbakken saw that his supervisor was all right, he went back to casing mail. The 30-year letter carrier denied any major heroics, however. “I just felt like anyone would have done it if they knew the technique,” Halbakken said.

On April 27, 2016, Worcester, MA Branch 12 member **Brian Cole** was going about his route when he came across a man lying

on the ground. “He had blood on his face,” the carrier said. “I thought he had tripped off the wall.” Cole rushed closer to the man. “He was gasping for air,” the carrier said. Cole gently rolled the man into a better position. “He had a needle sticking out of his arm,” he said, speculating that he had probably come out of the halfway house nearby. Cole called 911 and talked to the operator as he started CPR. “I did chest compressions until paramedics arrived,” he said. Cole was confident it was a drug overdose, and directed EMTs to provide the man with an antidote. They were able to stabilize the man and told Cole that he would be all right. The fourth-year letter carrier and Army veteran, who did a combat tour in Iraq, does not think he’s a hero, though. “It was a natural reaction to help someone,” Cole said simply.

Charlotte, NC Branch 545 member **Alex Pachter** was going about his route one day in July 2016. “There was a plumber working outside,” the city carrier assistant said. “He started screaming and jumping around. Pachter ran closer and realized that the man was being electrocuted. Pachter quickly unplugged the machine the plumber had been using and asked if he was all right. The man

said he was OK and declined the CCA’s offer to call 911. “He seemed to be fine,” Pachter said, so he continued on his route. He later found out that the outlet the man had been working on was wired backward. When Pachter looped back around the street, the plumber was back to work. Still, the man was grateful and went to Pachter’s manager at the post office the next day to commend him. “It’s not that big of a deal,” the first-year letter carrier and Navy veteran said. “All I did was unplug something. I’m glad the guy was OK.”

Corpus Christi, TX Branch 1259 member **German Osorio** was going about his route on July 29, 2016, when he found a note in a customer’s mailbox. “He usually doesn’t get much mail, but I saw the letter,” the carrier said. It appeared to be a suicide note, instructing the carrier to call the police and stating that the side door was open. Osorio quickly called his super-

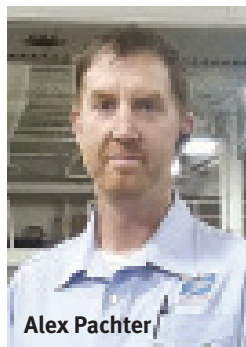


Corpus Christi, TX Branch 1259 members **Corisa Ruiz** and **German Osorio** were praised for their role in helping a suicidal customer.

visor at the post office, fellow Branch 1259 member **Corisa Ruiz**. “He sent a picture of the note on the mailbox,” Ruiz said. “I immediately called 911.” Ruiz, a third-year letter carrier and Army National Guard veteran, told the dispatcher the address and the information she knew, then headed to the scene, which was only a few blocks away from where she was on a route. The two carriers waited until police and EMTs arrived. Officers found the man lying on the floor inside after attempting suicide. “He was unconscious, but they saved his life,” Osorio, a second-year letter carrier, said. They were glad they made it in time. “If that man hadn’t had mail that day, it would have been too late,” Ruiz said. They don’t think they’re heroes, however. “Anyone would have done the same thing, I’m pretty sure,” Osorio said. Ruiz agreed, saying it was a “team effort” and that “it could have happened to anyone.” **PR**



Brian Halbakken



Alex Pachter

Eye on the elderly



Sara Hauck

When Marshfield, WI Branch 978 member **Sara Hauck** was delivering mail one day last summer on the route she's had for 15 years, she noticed that her longtime customer, Sally, was not sitting in her usual chair outside on her porch. "She always waited for me and I'd hand her her mail," the carrier said. She described the woman as friendly. "She's the grandma of the neighborhood," she said. Suspecting something was wrong, Hauck decided to look closer and tried the door, which was unlocked. She spotted Sally unresponsive on her kitchen floor and called 911 and then the woman's daughter. Sally had apparently gone into diabetic shock because of low blood sugar and suffered some bruising from her fall as well. She was briefly hospitalized and returned home a few days later. In a letter to the local postmaster, the customer's family wrote, "We can't express how much appreciation we have for our mail lady." Hauck brushed off excessive praise. "My customers are like family to me," the 20-year letter carrier and Army veteran said. "I was just glad I was on the route that day. I did my job and took care of my customer."

On June 10, 2016, Naples, FL Branch 4716 member **Joey Featherston** was deliver-

ing to a retirement community on his route. "I said hello to one of my customers," he said. He knew the 85-year-old woman, Vivian, well, and when she responded, she did not seem to be acting like herself. She was trying to get to her car but was fumbling with her keys and mumbled to him in response. "Everything about it was out of the ordinary," he said. Featherston suggested that the woman return to her apartment, and walked her there. The carrier mentioned it to a nurse administrator, who followed up with Vivian, finding her in the midst of having a stroke. Vivian received medical treatment at a local hospital, went to a rehab facility, and returned to her condo shortly thereafter. "Mr. Featherston exemplifies everything I suspect you aspire for in his role with the USPS," Kent McRae, senior vice president/COO of the retirement community wrote to the local postmaster. "Mr. Featherston's responsibilities are to deliver the mail... but he does so much more than that. We are truly grateful that he is assigned here and hope that he continues to be a member of the...family for years to come." But the 22-year letter carrier and Navy veteran describes the people on his

route as his second family and doesn't think he's a hero. "I was just in the right place at the right time," Featherston said. "I would expect anyone to do what I did."

Noticing mail piling up at customer Mr. Wilson's apartment on her route one day last summer, South Suburban Merged, IL Branch 4016 member **Kathyleen Sinwelski** became concerned. "He faithfully picks it up daily," she said. In addition, there had been a robbery at the complex the day before, so the carrier wanted to be extra cautious. She went to the man's apartment door and also noticed two deliveries from Meals on Wheels. Sinwelski quickly notified the apartment complex manager, who she asked to call 911 for a welfare check. Responding authorities checked on the man and found him unconscious in his bed, where he had been for up to two days. Mr. Wilson was hospitalized for having a blood sugar level six times above normal. He soon recovered, and his grateful son told the postmaster that Sinwelski was "a life-saving angel." The 30-year postal veteran said that carriers encounter situations like this daily. "I know my customers. I knew



Kathyleen Sinwelski

something was up," Sinwelski said. "It makes me feel good that I'm out there and aware. Carriers know everything. If you want to know something, talk to a mail carrier."

As Corpus Christi, TX Branch 1259 member **Kenneth Grigsby Jr.** went about his route one hot day in July 2016, he saw an elderly customer waving to him. He waved back, thinking it was a friendly gesture, but then noticed that the wave was more urgent. The woman had apparently fallen outside her home. "She had been attempting to water her garden on the front porch area," he said. The woman had then tripped on the water hose and fell to the concrete. Unable to get up, she was sweating and tired. Grigsby ran over and raised the woman to a kneeling, then a standing, position. He asked the woman where her husband was, and she said he was in the back yard. Grigsby went through the house to find him and brought him to his wife. The two helped the woman inside and made sure she was OK. The woman's husband, Vic Menard, later wrote a letter to the editor of the *Caller Times* in Corpus Christi to praise the carrier. "Without his help, I am uncertain how long she would have lain there in pain," Menard wrote. "Thank you, Ken Grigsby, for your over-and-above assistance in a difficult situation, and kudos to all the other postal angels who cruise our neighborhoods on a daily basis, providing the best postal service in the world." But the 18-year letter carrier and Army veteran brushed off any accolades. "I just felt anybody would do that," Grigsby said. "It was a gift for me to be able to help them." **PR**



Naples, FL Branch 4716 member **Joey Featherston (c)** was congratulated for his role in tending to a customer having a stroke.

Carrier not afraid of a little fire

On May 12, 2016, Worcester, MA Branch 12 member **Matthew Demma** was delivering his mail when he noticed something unusual. “All of a sudden, I saw smoke coming out of a screen door,” he said. “I heard someone inside and a TV.”

He opened the door and asked, “Is anybody in here?” He heard his

92-year-old customer, Morrie Johnson. “I couldn’t see, the smoke was so bad,” Demma said. “I put down the mail and went inside the house. I grabbed the woman and brought her outside.”

Johnson kept saying that she was sorry about the stove. Demma figured that meant that was the origin of the fire. So, after calling 911, “I took my shirt off, wrapped it around my face and I went back in,” the carrier said.



Matthew Demma

He turned off the stove, threw a burning pan into the sink and then headed back outside to fresh air, where he comforted his customer until emergency responders arrived.

Johnson’s grandson found Demma on his route a few hours later to thank him. The second-year letter carrier and Navy Reserves member declined any accolades, however. “I’m not a hero,” Demma said. **PR**

Fire and rescue



Dwayne Martin

Alexandria, VA Branch 567 member **Dwayne Martin** was delivering mail to a home on Saturday, May 28, when he noticed something unusual. “I smelled smoke coming toward a house,” he said. When he got closer, “I heard the fire alarm,” the carrier added, and saw that smoke was pouring out from under the front door. Martin saw a car in the driveway, so he began knocking on the door, but got no response. He went next door to a neighbor’s home, but they were not home either. With his cell phone back in his LLV,

the carrier quickly went to another door and asked the neighbor there, Stephanie Beekman, to call 911 to report the fire. Firefighters arrived shortly. “They busted open the door and smoke was everywhere,” Martin said. They discovered that food had been left cooking on the stove unattended and were able to put out the fire before there was any extensive damage to the house. “We caught it just in time, but it was pretty close,” Martin said. Neighbors praised the carrier’s efforts. “If it wasn’t for Mr. Dwayne, only God knows how many homes could have caught fire, and so many people would have been homeless,” Beekman wrote to the post office. “I thank God Mr. Dwayne was in the right place at the right time and responded as quickly as he did. He’s an awesome mailman who takes his job very seriously.” Martin contends that he was just in the right place at the right time. “I was just doing my job,” the 10-year postal veteran said.

While Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Roy DeLeon** was delivering mail on his route on the hot morning of July 25, 2016, he noticed something out of the ordinary at a house. “As I’m driving down, there’s black smoke coming from the porch,” he said. The carrier ran up to the enclosed front porch and called 911. “I wasn’t sure if anyone was in the house,” he said. DeLeon couldn’t get to the front door because of the blaze, and couldn’t get to the back door because the property was fenced in, so he improvised. He grabbed a stick and started beating on the side of the house and screaming, “Is there anyone in there?” DeLeon said. “After a few minutes, they opened the door.” The family, which included three children, had been sleeping and awoke to the carrier’s banging. “I woke ‘em up and got them out of there,” DeLeon said. They all got out to safety before firefighters came and were able to contain the fire from

spreading to the rest of the house. When the 18-year letter carrier and Marine Corps veteran saw that the situation was in good hands, he continued on his rounds. Despite praise, DeLeon doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I don’t want to take much credit,” he said. “I was happy to be there in that moment. Any normal person would do it in that situation. **PR**



Roy DeLeon