

## 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](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, 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 not deterred by flaming car

Rapid City, SD Branch 1225 member **Kene Roberts** was driving home from work one day in November just a few weeks after beginning as a city carrier assistant when he saw an alarming sight on the highway: a car traveling in the opposite direction with its bottom on fire in the engine and axle area.

"I turned around as quick as I could," the carrier said. "It took maybe 30 seconds to catch up to the guy."

As he was doing so, he called 911 and gave the operator directions to where they were. At that point, the elderly man driving the flaming car had pulled off the road. Now there was smoke pouring from the windows as flames engulfed the car. "I just feared this guy wasn't going to do well," Roberts, a Marine Corps veteran, said.

Roberts, along with two other passersby, ran to the vehicle. The man and woman who had stopped to help had trouble pulling the man from the vehicle, so Roberts tried a fireman pull by yanking him from under his chest. "I did my best to pull him out," he said. "He kept saying, 'my wheelchair, my wheelchair.'" Roberts retrieved the wheelchair from the trunk and put it near him.

Scared that the vehicle might explode, they quickly got the man as far away

from the vehicle as possible. They asked the man if there was anyone else in the vehicle, and he said there was not.

Roberts said that as a Marine, "We're trained to run toward the danger, not away from it."

Emergency responders soon arrived and put out the fire, which they suspected had started from a mechanical malfunction. The driver suffered some smoke inhalation but otherwise was not injured. "The car burned down to basically ashes," Roberts said.

Despite praise for his heroics, the CCA insisted he is just a concerned citizen. "I feel like anybody would have done it," Roberts said.



## Watching out for her route

Minneapolis Branch 9 member **Shannon Peterson** was delivering her route on June 20, 2016, when she noticed a woman walking on the sidewalk. "I was observing her and she looked like she was struggling a bit."

The carrier pulled over and spoke to the woman to see if she was OK. "She seemed lucid," Peterson said. "She said she was on a walk."

The carrier could see swelling on the woman's body and what appeared to be a dialysis port. She asked her a series of questions, and the woman responded easily enough. She asked her, "Do you need help?" and the woman responded, "No, I'm fine."

Peterson was uncomfortable leaving



Rapid City, SD Branch 1225 member Kene Roberts received media attention for his role in helping a man escape a burning car.



Ray Griffin

her there, but the woman had answered everything correctly, so the carrier finished her route and returned to the office to punch out for the day.

As she was leaving work, Peterson checked her Facebook news feed and saw a story pop up about a local missing person, matching the description of the woman she had met on her route in the same clothing. “It was obviously her,” Peterson said.

She promptly called police to let them know. They asked her about the location and health of the woman, who had apparently walked away from a hospital and had not been heard from. Peterson drove back out to her route while on the phone with the police and found the woman again near the same spot where she had talked to her an hour before.

The carrier reported to police their exact location and stayed with the woman until officers arrived. “She had walked a couple of miles away from her dialysis center and had been walking all afternoon,” Peterson said.

Police took the woman back to the hospital. Later, they called Peterson to tell her that she had greatly helped the woman—that she likely would not have been able to function much longer in her medical condition.

The 17-year letter carrier didn’t consider herself a hero; she said she just tries to watch out for the community. “I think it’s something we all need to be watching out for,” Peterson said.

## Customer’s life in carrier’s hands

Puyallup/Sumner Merged, WA Branch 1484 member **Ray Griffin** was delivering packages on Sunday, Dec. 18, when he saw one of his customers, Mr. Franks, walking up the sidewalk.

When the carrier looped by again, the man seemed to be in a lot of pain and was huffing and puffing. The carrier asked the man if he was OK, and “I heard him moaning,” Griffin said. “I didn’t know what was going on.”

Before Franks could reply, he collapsed to the ground. The carrier saw that Franks had vomited. “He couldn’t breathe, so I was going to start CPR,” Griffin said. “I thought, ‘His life’s in my hands.’”

He called 911 and then rolled Franks to one side and cleared his airway. Two neighbors came outside to help, and the carrier asked that they call the man’s family. They then stayed to assist Griffin. “It was a team effort,” the carrier said.

Franks came to and was talking a little

bit. “He said, ‘I don’t want to die here,’” Griffin said. “He was in a panicked state.” The carrier and neighbors stayed with Franks to make sure he could breathe and was as comfortable as possible.

Emergency crews showed up within a few minutes and took over. When Griffin saw that his customer was in good hands, he returned to his duties.

He later found out that a blood clot had traveled from Franks’ leg to his lungs, which blocked or partially blocked two major blood vessels.

Franks has started calling Griffin his “Ray of sunshine”—playing on the carrier’s name—and wrote a letter to the post office commending the carrier’s actions. “I am writing to commend one of your carriers for literally saving my life,” he wrote. “If Ray hadn’t been there, I could have died. His calm, comforting demeanor helped bolster my spirits while [we] waited for the ambulance. I have heartily thanked Ray since then. He’s my hero and should be recognized as such.”

Griffin, a 32-year postal veteran as well as an Air Force veteran, denied any accolades for his actions. “Anybody would have done the same,” he said. “To me, it was something that I was there at the right time.”

## Neighborhood watch



TyReke McGruder

“I saw three teens walking down the street,” West Coast Florida Branch 1477 member **TyReke McGruder** said as he was delivering his mail route in a retirement community on Dec. 29. The teenagers were milling about the neighborhood suspiciously, checking yards and garages. “My instincts kicked in, like, ‘they’re up to something,’” McGruder said. Soon, the carrier witnessed

one of the group go near a customer’s garage. “I’m watching him the whole time and I see him come out riding a bicycle,” McGruder said. The carrier called police and gave a description and location to them. The next day, the teenagers showed up to a bicycle event the police department was putting on, and officers there discovered the stolen bike. The recovered bike was returned to the

homeowners soon after. The customer told the post office that they were grateful for the carrier’s actions, and that the bike was not expensive but it was her husband’s transportation around the retirement park. McGruder called his actions just part of the job. “We’re the eyes and ears of the whole community,” the third-year letter carrier said. “If I have a gut feeling, I’ll be on alert.”



## Proud to Serve

Oklahoma City Branch 458 member **Reggie Sloan** was interviewed by a local TV station after helping a woman escape her burning home.



### Carrier delivers just in time

While Oklahoma City Branch 458 member **Reggie Sloan** was approaching a duplex on his route to deliver mail on Jan. 27, “I saw smoke coming out of a window,” he said. He approached the burning unit, but said there was too much smoke to reach the door. “It was burning pretty good,” he said.

So Sloan ran to the front of the duplex to alert the woman who lived in the other unit; he knew she was home. “She normally waits for me to get her mail,” he told KWTU-TV.

“I beat on the door,” he said, to no avail. “I wasn’t going to take no for an answer because I knew the woman was inside.”

Sloan continued beating on the door, and the woman finally appeared and said she had been sleeping. He told her, “You need to get out—it’s going to spread pretty quick.”

Neighbors called 911. Firefighters unfortunately found the resident of the burned unit dead in her bedroom.

Though Sloan had continued on his route when he saw that the situation was in good hands, fire investigators later

called him back to the scene to provide information. When the resident he saved saw him, she ran across the yard and gave him a hug. “Thank you for saving my life,” she said.

The third-year letter carrier said he was glad he could be there, but denied any heroics. “I was just in the right place at the right time,” Sloan said. “I would want someone to do that for me.”

### It’s not smart to mess with letter carriers

As Milwaukee Branch 2 member **Scott Peller** was on his route on Nov. 17, he went up to a house to deliver a few packages. While he knocked on the door, two men he didn’t know approached and claimed the packages were theirs.

“You need proper identification,” Peller told them. One of the men grabbed one of the parcels, hit the carrier and started running, telling his friend to grab the other one.

Unscathed, Peller took off after the one who ran. “I told him it was a federal offense and don’t mess around with me,” he said. As the carrier chased the

man, he yelled for neighbors to call 911.

The man called out “Help me, help me!” He threw the package over a fence then began climbing after it, with Peller close on his tail trying to pull him down.

The second man then appeared behind Peller and pulled at him. As the first man ran off, Peller tackled the second. “We were tussling big-time,” Peller said.

The carrier pinned the man to the ground just as neighbors started coming up to them. A tenant from a complex across the street asked Peller, “Do you need any assistance?” and then secured the man on the ground.

Police arrived, and Peller told them he needed to retrieve the stolen package. Soon police dogs and postal inspectors came to investigate, discovering illegal substances inside the packages. Milwaukee police took the first man into custody and took the second to the hospital. While the carrier has not heard an update on the first man, the second one is awaiting trial.

The 20-plus year carrier doesn’t consider himself a hero. “I thought it was just my duty,” Peller said. “I just kept doing what I thought was proper.”

## Eye on the elderly



Dayton, OH Branch 182 member **Eric Haney** was on his route on Dec. 1 when he approached the home of one of his nonagenarian customers. “I was walking up to the door and I heard her screaming,” the carrier said. The woman had apparently fallen the night before and knocked the phone off the hook, and her Life Alert necklace wasn’t working. “She was able to crawl to the front door but couldn’t get

up,” Haney said. “She knew I would come up there.” The carrier attempted to open the door, but it was locked. Haney yelled to the woman that because the door was locked, he would have to break it down to get in. The woman said that was OK, so Haney went for it. Once inside, Haney found the woman lying on the floor and called 911 as well as the woman’s friend and her son. The carrier stayed with his patron

to comfort her until medics arrived. EMTs determined the woman had a sprained ankle, and she underwent some physical therapy following her hospital stay. The woman’s family soon came to the post office to give their thanks for Haney’s actions. Even after receiving praise, the 26-year letter carrier and Navy veteran thinks it’s “silly” to be called a hero, “because I think it’s something anyone would do.”

## Help on the way



Brandy Miller

On Jan. 19, St. Louis Branch 343 member **Brandy Miller** was driving to begin her mail route when she saw someone walking alongside the road in a heavy traffic area. “I saw him stumbling,” she said. The man then fell on the side of the street. “I stopped and I got out and went over to him,” the carrier said. “I put him on his side and made sure he wasn’t biting his tongue.” The carrier was worried he might be hit, so she moved him further away from the street as cars whizzed by, and she called 911. When the man came to, “he didn’t know what was going on,” Miller said. She didn’t want to stress him out, so she comforted the man and waited with him until help arrived. The man apparently has epilepsy and was having a seizure. Paramedics soon arrived to take him to the hospital, and Miller now sees him out and about. The third-year letter carrier said it was second nature to try to assist. “I just think it’s something you should do if you see someone who needs help,” she said.

As Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Crystal Trout**

approached the house of an elderly customer to make a delivery on Dec. 9, “I heard her calling for help,” she said. The carrier looked around the corner and found the woman lying on the icy ground in short sleeves. She told Trout she had taken her recyclables outside and tripped on her front steps. Trout called 911. “It was really, really cold,” the carrier said. “I went inside to get her a blanket to wrap around her.” She also grabbed a rug for the woman to sit on to get off the wet ground. Trout waited with the woman until EMTs loaded her into an ambulance. The woman had broken her shoulder and arm but soon returned home to recover. “I don’t think I’m a hero,” the second-year letter carrier said. “When someone is hurt, you do everything you can to help them.”

On Dec. 27, New Jersey Merged Branch 38 member **Jerell Stanford** was delivering his route when he saw his customer Fay Susskind, a resident of a nearby senior complex, walking down the street. “When I looked back, I didn’t see her,” the carrier said. Susskind had fallen to the ground,

so Stanford ran over to help the woman. “She was bleeding heavily from the face,” the carrier said. “There was blood everywhere.” Stanford helped Susskind up and offered to call an ambulance, but she declined. In the meantime, a passing vehicle also stopped. The driver knew Susskind and volunteered to take her back to the complex. The woman got into the vehicle and Stanford saw that it headed back toward the woman’s building. “I was concerned about what happened still,” Stanford said. “I didn’t just want her to go home.” So the carrier decided to go to the complex and alert the staff, who in turn called 911 to provide Susskind medical aid. He later checked on the woman and found that she was doing all right. The 10-year letter carrier brushed off any heroics, though. “That’s somebody’s grandmother,” Stanford said. “I would want someone to do that for my mother or grandmother.”



Jerell Stanford

One day last September, Eastern Shore, MD Branch 902 member **David Phillips** was delivering mail on his route with a trainee when “we came upon a car,” Phillips said. They noticed that a regular customer, Elizabeth Link, was



David Phillips

sitting inside her car in her driveway. As Phillips approached the woman to hand her the mail, he noticed that Link appeared to be in distress. “I put my hand on the window and told her to put the window down,” he said. “She was drooling and incoherent.” He asked through the car window if she was OK, but the woman did not respond. The carrier requested that she open the locked car door. Link attempted to unlock the doors, but had trouble with her hands and could not get them unlocked. But through the trunk, “We could reach over and unlock it,” the carrier said. “There was a burst of heat escaping from the car.” Phillips called 911 while the trainee relocated the LLV to allow the ambulance entrance to the dirt lane. Both carriers stayed with the customer until the ambulance arrived to take Link to the hospital. The customer apparently had been in diabetic shock. “It was a pretty scary situation,” Phillips said. After Link recovered, she wrote a thank-you note to the post office expressing her gratitude to the carriers for their help. Phillips doesn’t consider himself a hero, though. “It was good to help. I don’t feel like I did anything more than any of my co-workers would have done,” the five-year letter carrier said. “We’re out there every day. We’re basically first responders as mailmen.”



## Neighborhood watch

“I was walking back after a long loop,” Carbondale, PA Branch 163 **Frank Surace** said of his route on Nov. 16, when he saw a toddler standing on the edge of the curb about 40 yards away, appearing ready to walk out onto a busy highway. “I started running after her,” the carrier said. “She had her eye on me, and I said, ‘Don’t move.’” The carrier reached the 2-year-old and picked her up just before she could step



Frank Surace

off the curb. She kept looking at one house, so Surace took the girl to that home and knocked on the door. The girl’s mother answered, crying frantically, saying she thought the door had been locked. She thanked Surace for his actions, but the carrier didn’t think it was a big deal. “Thank God she didn’t get hurt,” the 22-year postal veteran said. “Anybody would do something like that.”

As Painesville, OH Branch 549 member **George Hearst** was delivering his route on May 27, 2016, he saw kids playing with a ball in

the street. “All of a sudden, I saw a kid running toward a car,” he said. The carrier, who is the office safety captain and trainer, quickly ran toward the 5-year-old as a car was traveling fast toward him. Hearst put his hands up to signal the driver. “I grabbed him and stopped the car,” Hearst said. “It was a spontaneous thing. He was going to be hurt.” Hearst carried his young patron to the safety of his mother, who was nearby and kept telling him, “Amigo, thank you.” The second-generation letter carrier insisted that anyone else would have done the same thing. “It’s just amazing what a letter carrier does,” Hearst, a 10-year postal veteran, said. “You see a lot of things. I was glad I was on this route that day. It’s good that God put me in this situation to help somebody.”

Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Kenneth Friend** was going about his route one day in November and as he crisscrossed in front of one house, “I detected a strong



George Hearst

odor of gas,” he said. Suspecting a gas leak, the carrier knocked on the door and let the homeowner know, and they in turn called the gas company. The resident contacted Friend soon after to thank him for his attentiveness. She said it had indeed been a large gas leak, and his actions may have prevented a tragedy. About a month later on his route at a different house, Friend again smelled the scent of natural gas and notified the residents, who then had their gas line checked out for a leak. The 31-year



Kenneth Friend

postal veteran rejected any accolades for his actions, though. “There’s nothing exciting about this story,” Friend said. “I just noticed something and said something. If it ever happened at my house, I would hope someone would ring my doorbell and tell me.”

“I was finishing up one of my loops and headed to the next one,” South Florida Branch 1071 member **Louie Golden** said of his route on Aug. 31. He then saw two people, a man and woman, tussling with each other and the woman was screaming. “The guy was over her, kick-



**South Florida Branch 1071 member Louie Golden received media attention after he helped police apprehend a man who had allegedly robbed and assaulted his customer.**

ing her, punching her, and trying to grab her purse,” he said. Golden ran over to help his customer. The elderly woman, Betty Ann Curtis, said she had parked her car and was approaching her house when a man came up and knocked on her car window to ask if she had any money. He then tried to grab her handbag. “He dragged me to the middle of the street and I was trying to kick him,” Curtis told the local NBC-TV news affiliate. “It was horrible. I thought he was going to kill me.” Golden quickly took out his phone to call 911. The suspect had started running, so the carrier pursued him in his LLV while on the phone with an operator. “I was in my vehicle and I was able to catch up to him,” he said. “I was giving them turn-by-turn directions.” Police soon arrived to arrest the man, who was subsequently charged with robbery and battery. Curtis suffered some bruises but was otherwise OK. She told NBC how grateful she was to her letter carrier. “I am just so happy,” Curtis said. “We all depend on police officers and law enforcement, but this mailman was my law enforcement and he really helped save my life.” Golden, a fourth-year letter carrier, insisted he was just in the right place at the right time.

## Carrier provides 'neighborhood watch'

On March 15, 2016, Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member **Marcela MacLean** was delivering mail on her route of nine years when she noticed her 92-year-old customer, John Erickson, lying on his front porch. "There was blood everywhere," the carrier said.

As she checked his vital signs she learned he had fallen on the porch and hit his head. "He asked if I could help him up," she said. "He was pretty adamant that he didn't want 911 called."

MacLean noticed that the front door was open, so "I just grabbed him by the back of his pants and got him to his chair," the carrier said. She then found a towel to try to staunch Erick-

son's bleeding.

"I asked him questions to check his memory," she said. "I also asked him to smile and stick out his tongue, to check for a stroke."

Erickson continued to refuse medical attention, so MacLean thought quickly. "I knew his next-door neighbor worked from home," she said. "I asked him to come over, and he did." They then called Erickson's son-in-law, a paramedic, who came to the house.

Erickson's wife came home to find the carrier tending to her husband. "She even cleaned up the blood on the porch so I wouldn't see it," Mrs. Erickson told USPS. "Marcela took good care of my husband until I returned."

Mrs. Erickson later wrote a letter to the post office commending the 22-year



**Marcela MacLean**

postal veteran. "Marcela has become a friend through her daily rounds," she wrote. "Neither sleet, nor snow, rain nor gloom of the night—and now I add that neither aiding a fellow customer—will keep them from their appointed rounds."

MacLean, a 23-year postal veteran, doesn't consider herself a hero. "It's not something anyone else wouldn't have done," she said. "The uniqueness of our job is that we're the original neighborhood watch. I'm glad I was there."

## Help on the way



**Scott Czerneski**

**H**urley, WI Branch 2285 member **Scott Czerneski** was on his route on Saturday, Nov. 5, when he found one of his elderly customers in his usual position. "He was sitting on the tailgate of his truck," the carrier said. He yelled out, "Hi!" but the man didn't respond. Looking closer, Czerneski said, "his mouth was wide open and his eyes were open." The man suddenly started falling forward off the truck. "I caught him before he nose-planted on the ground," Czerneski said. The carrier noticed that the man was having trouble breathing, so he called 911 and stayed with the man until an ambulance arrived

to take him to the hospital. The man had apparently been low on potassium, which made him dizzy and affected his breathing. The man soon returned home to recover. Czerneski said his helpful actions were all in a day's work. "I just do the job every day," he said.

**M**ount Pleasant, IA Branch 660 member **Toi Mills** noticed mail piling up for one of her customers on Oct. 3. "He was usually waiting for me," she said. "He knew my schedule." The carrier knew the customer well, as he was friends with her dad and she had known him a long time. "I knew something was wrong," she

said. Mills decided to call police to ask for a welfare check on the man. When responding officers got there, they found the customer on the floor and took him to the hospital. "He had fallen and couldn't get up," Mills said. The man's brother later called the post office to thank Mills and told her that he had been moved to a nursing home. The 30-year letter carrier doesn't think she's a hero, though. "When you deliver in your hometown, you get attached to the people on your route," Mills said. "It's just what you do when you do your route. You keep track of your customers."



## Jumping into action

On Sunday, Nov. 27, New Castle, PA Branch 22 member **Ryan Artman** had just finished delivering packages and had gone to meet his friend Kyle Willis for a late lunch at a sub shop.

As they sat eating at the front of the shop, the carrier noticed something unusual across the street at the Market House, a historic building: Two people were huddled at a bulletin board at the front of the building.



Photo courtesy of *The Meadville Tribune*

**New Castle, PA Branch 22 member Ryan Artman (r), helped stop arson at a historic building while his friend Kyle Willis led police to the suspects.**

When Artman looked over at the building again, the two were walking off, just as flames sprang from the bulletin board.

"I jumped up and yelled for someone to call 911," Artman said. While the sub shop's staff called, he and Willis ran across the street to the fire. Willis chased the alleged vandals while Artman attended to the fire.

"I literally tried batting it down because I thought it was just papers (on fire)," Artman told *The Meadville Tribune*. "Then I realized it was the corkboard."

Realizing his bare-handed attempts were for naught, Artman ran back

across the street to the sub shop and asked, "Where's the fire extinguisher?"

Once he had one in hand, he rushed back across the street and put out the fire for good.

The Air Force veteran told the *Tribune* he had put out fires on airplanes before, "but nothing like this."

Firefighters soon arrived on the scene and checked to make sure the fire had not spread further; meanwhile, Willis eventually managed to lead a police officer to the two people he had followed.

Although Artman and Willis observed two people, only one had been charged in connection with the fire.

Meadville Central Fire Department Capt. Jill Staaf told the *Tribune*, "If they hadn't been there it would've caused more damage. They did a great job." At a city council meeting, Meadville Mayor LeRoy Stearns issued a proclamation recognizing the two "for their heroic acts."

Artman dismissed any accolades. "I didn't really think anything of it," the first-year letter carrier said. "I just did it because it was the right thing to do."

## A little holiday heroism

"I noticed a little smoke coming from a home," Little Rock, AR Branch 35 member **Eugene Udell** said of delivering parcels on his regular route last Christmas Eve.

Since it was wintertime, he thought that the smoke might just be coming from a fireplace. "As I got closer, I began to smell a soot smell," he said. "The whole outline of the roof had smoke billowing out."

The carrier knew an elderly man lived in the home, and there was a car out in



Eugene Udell

front of the home, so Udell feared he was inside. He knocked. "I heard a noise inside but no one was responding," the carrier said.

He called 911 and told the operator he wasn't sure if anyone was inside. "I was begging them to please come as quickly as possible," Udell said.

The carrier went to the other side of the house and saw that it was becoming more engulfed with flames. "I knocked and knocked," Udell said. He was trying to push open a door to relieve some of the smoke as firefighters arrived.

Fortunately, no one was inside; the resident and his grandson drove up as firefighters began battling the blaze. However, the house was a total loss.

Soon after, Udell helped to coordinate an effort in the community for people to donate items to the family as they began to rebuild.

Family members and friends of the resident spoke highly of Udell, with one stating on a TV news interview, "The mailman knows us very well. He not only cares about our deliveries, but our lives, too."

Udell said he doesn't consider himself a hero, just a fellow human being. "That's just part of my job," the five-year postal veteran said. "There's just no way I could see a fire and not do anything."

## Observant carrier helps elderly customer



Jeremy Jones

One day last winter, Key West, FL Branch 818 member **Jeremy Jones** was delivering his route and came up to the house of a 90-year-old customer who lives alone and is

not very mobile.

"I noticed his mail sitting on the small white table by his front door where I always put it," the carrier said. "When

I saw that mail there and his Meals on Wheels still there, I got worried. He picks up that mail without fail every day.”

Jones started ringing the bell and banging on the door. “His little dog was running around barking,” he said. “I looked in every window I could but could not see him anywhere.”

He looked around the back but was unable to get into the back yard, so he went across the street to a neighbor’s house and knocked on the door to ask them to check on him. The two went back over to the house, but still couldn’t get an answer at the door. “We were all banging on the windows,” Jones said.

They called police and then Jones continued on his route. Soon after, he saw an emergency vehicle pull up to the man’s door. “I got in my truck and drove back down there,” Jones said.

Police had jumped over the back fence, went in through a kitchen window and found the man. “He had fallen in the back room where no one could see him and was in grave condition,” Jones said. “I was so happy and relieved to hear he was alive.”

A few weeks later, the carrier learned that the man had died after a stay in the hospital followed by rehab.

The carrier doesn’t consider himself

a hero, but said that it was important to check on the elderly in the community. “There’s people all over like that,” the 10-year postal veteran said. “You have to take a few minutes each day to look out for them. I was glad I could help, despite the circumstances of how everything turned out.”

## Marine carrier runs toward fire, not away

On Dec. 19, Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member **Daniel Ochoa** was going about his route when the scent of smoke caught his attention. “I thought someone at the moment was barbecuing,” he said.

But as he turned around on his loop, he saw large plumes of smoke coming from the back of a customer’s house and saw a woman running with a child.

The carrier quickly made his way to the front door and went over to the woman, who was with her 4-year-old granddaughter. He alerted her to what was going on.

“I made sure there was no one inside the house,” the carrier said. “I heard the fire department on the way, but I thought I may be able to help.” Ochoa,



Daniel Ochoa

a Marine Reservist who also has taken some firefighting courses, ran to the back yard.

“I was looking for a water hose and saw a propane tank,” he said. It was near the flames, so he quickly moved it, knowing how easily it could catch fire and explode.

Ochoa then grabbed a foam cooler he saw and started using it to scoop pool water to douse the flames. “I bucket-brigaded it,” he said.

Firefighters soon arrived to take over, so Ochoa grabbed his satchel and continued his route.

He found out later that the fire may have started from an electrical issue because the owners recently had work done. “Little did Daniel know, there was a vent to my attic exactly where the fire was,” the homeowner, Shirley Ann Ayala, wrote. “Firefighters said his quick response stopped the flames from going into my attic and actually saved my home. My entire family is so very grateful for his public act of kindness and bravery.”

The first-year letter carrier said that he couldn’t just sit back. “I just have to spring into action,” Ochoa said. “It’s something I’ve been taught.”

## Neighborhood watch

On Oct. 26, Peoria, IL Branch 31 member **Roger Stufflebeam** was carrying his mail route when he noticed an elderly woman in a wheelchair on the sidewalk parked directly behind a large work truck with a driver inside. “He started backing up and wasn’t stopping,” the carrier said. The carrier ran toward the vehicle yelling and waving, and

the truck stopped just inches short of the woman’s wheelchair. “That lady could have touched the back of the truck with her hand,” Stufflebeam said. “He didn’t hit her, luckily.” The driver got out of the truck to see what was going on and said he hadn’t seen her. Stufflebeam checked to make sure the woman was OK before continuing on his route.

The carrier was commended for his actions, but he brushed off any praise, saying he tries to look out for his customers. “Carriers should be aware of their surroundings,” the 26-year letter carrier and Marine Corps veteran said. “We can make a difference in people’s lives. We’re a source of protection for our customers.” **PR**



Roger Stufflebeam



## Eye on the elderly

**B**uffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Anthony Meindl** was on his route on Sept. 27 when he noticed mail at an elderly customer's home was piling up. "I saw some flies," the carrier said. The man did not leave the house much, and previously if the mail accumulated, Meindl would just knock on the door. This time, there was no answer. Concerned, the carrier contacted the apartment complex and asked if they had seen the man. They hadn't, so Meindl called his supervisor and then 911. "I said I was a concerned citizen and asked for a wellness check," he said. The next day, police contacted carrier Meindl to tell him that the customer had been in medical distress and likely would not have survived without him taking action. "He was sitting in his computer chair, unable to walk," the carrier said, adding that the man's feet were rotting and had maggots on them. Meindl has since seen the man up and about, but he doesn't consider himself a hero. "I was just doing my job," the four-year postal veteran said. "I would have done it for anybody."

**A**marillo, TX Branch 1037 member **Shanalee Bernal** was delivering mail to an assisted-living facility on her route on July 30 and approached the apartment of her customer, Uvaldo Gonzales. "He always waited for me," the carrier said. "I always looked for him." But that day, she didn't see

him. "I opened the door and I hollered, 'Uvaldo!'" she said. She found the man lying inside his apartment on the floor. The carrier asked the man if he needed help. "He nodded his head," the carrier said. Gonzales had throat cancer and seemed to be choking and couldn't get up. "I called 911 and waited with him until they got there," Bernal said. "I sat on the floor with him and held him." After the man was put in an ambulance, the carrier returned to her route, but after work she went to the hospital to check on Gonzales. The 19-year letter carrier denied any heroics. "I love my people on my route," she said. "It's part of my job."

**O**n Dec. 17, Galesburg, IL Branch 88 member **Mark Duncan** was delivering to the

home of his nonagenarian customer. "I was walking off her porch when I heard a yell," he said. The carrier opened the screen door and heard her yell again. "I went in to check on her," he said, and he saw the woman lying on the floor. "She had a big knot on her head and her forehead was really black and blue," Duncan said. She said she had fallen and wasn't able to get up, but crawled to the front door to wait for him. "She was really confused and didn't know what time of day it was," Duncan said. The carrier asked the woman if she wanted him to call an ambulance, and she said she'd rather he call her son. Duncan did so, and he came over right away. "Between the two of us, we got her up and sat her in the chair,"

the carrier said. "He said he could handle it from there, so I went on my merry way." The carrier sees the woman regularly, and she always thanks him for helping her. But Duncan denies any heroics. "Any letter carrier will help someone out if they get a chance," the 25-year postal veteran said. "That's what's so great about door delivery."

**"I** heard somebody yell out, 'Excuse me, can you help me?'" Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member **Travis Elliott** said of delivering mail on his route on March 8, 2016. The carrier looked across the street to locate where the woman's voice was coming from. He then spotted his 90-year-old customer, June Stephens. "It looked like she had fallen in her garage," Elliott said. The carrier rushed over and was able to help the woman up to her feet and inside her home. He asked Stephens if she wanted him to call anyone, and "she said that her son was on his way over," Elliott said. Once he made sure that his customer was OK, the carrier continued on his route. Stephens' daughter later called the post office to commend Elliott and tell him she was grateful he was there to assist her mother, who was doing fine. The 10-year letter carrier denied any serious heroics in the matter, though. "I'm not a hero at all," Elliott said. "I just happened to be there at the right time." **PR**



**Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member Anthony Meindl was recognized by Customer Services Manager Lisa Mesler for his role in helping an elderly customer after he noticed accumulated mail.**

## Fending off dogs just part of the job

On Oct. 17, Waipahu, HI Branch 4683 member **Josue Ramirez** was going about his route and saw customer Gina Gertsch walking her Bichon Frise dog along the road.

As the carrier turned the corner in his LLV, “two pit bulls came out of nowhere,” he said. When he looked in his rear-view mirror, he saw the dogs pounce and grab the dog from the woman’s arms.

Ramirez quickly stopped his truck, grabbed a mace can and ran toward the woman. “I told her, ‘Get behind me,’” he said. “I got in the middle, spraying. It happened so fast.” Spraying the dogs in the eyes seemed to work, as they both ran off to rub their eyes on the grass.

The carrier asked Gertsch if she lived nearby and said that he would stay with her and walk with her to her house. When they got there, he mentioned that he had to go back to his truck and asked if she’d be all right.

She said she would, so Ramirez headed back to vehicle. He heard someone yell, “Watch out!” When he turned around, one of the dogs headed right for him. Ramirez sprayed it again, and again it ran to rub its eyes.

Another woman called the dogs toward a gate and managed to get one to run into that yard. “The other one was running around the street,” he said. Someone called 911 and the carrier continued on his route. Neighbors said they didn’t know who the dogs’ owner was.

Police and SPCA representatives soon came; they took the one dog in the yard, but the other had gone into hiding.

Gertsch took her dog to the vet; it had broken a rib and was limping for weeks until it recovered. She later thanked

Boulder, CO Branch 642 member **Adrian Helwig** was recognized by local news media for helping to save a customer’s life after the man injured himself outside his home.

Ramirez for helping her.

The third-year letter carrier and Navy veteran said he considers his actions just a part of the job. “You’re out there in the community every single day,” Ramirez said. “You notice things.”

## Keeping eyes and ears open can help save a life

On the evening of Dec. 5, Boulder, CO Branch 642 member **Adrian Helwig** had finished his route and went back out to relieve a carrier on a route he was not familiar with.

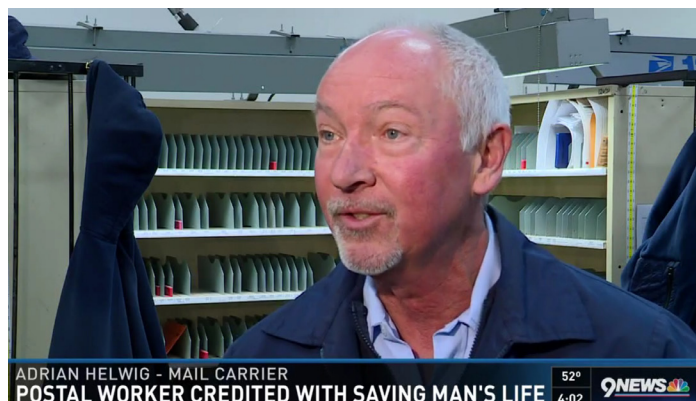
Helwig was in a secluded, dark residential area delivering to a house when “I looked up in a yard and saw a little dog running around. I thought I heard something,” he said. “It was a ‘Help me, please’ three times.”

Following the voice, he came upon the 86-year-old customer outside his garage in 20-degree weather. The man was propping himself up against the garage door. “He was in an awkward position,” he said. “He wasn’t dressed for it. He was in shorts, a baggy T-shirt and I don’t think he had shoes on.”

The patron had apparently fallen when he let his dog out. “He couldn’t get up, he couldn’t walk,” Helwig told local FOX news affiliate KWGN-TV. “I got him up, kind of put him in a bear hug and basically dragged him into the house.”

Once inside, Helwig wrapped the man in a blanket and then asked, “Is there anyone here that can help you?” The man said that his wife was upstairs, so Helwig headed there. The woman was fast asleep and Helwig did not want to wake her, so he instead called 911. The carrier waited for EMTs to arrive before continuing his rounds and went to investigate where the man had been outside. Paramedics soon arrived to take the customer to the hospital, and the man returned home from the hospital to recover a few days later.

The Boulder County Sheriff’s Office commended Helwig, saying the “[victim’s] survival was at risk. Adrian



ADRIAN HELWIG - MAIL CARRIER

POSTAL WORKER CREDITED WITH SAVING MAN'S LIFE

52°

4:02

9NEWS



Helwig’s awareness, and selfless, compassionate actions likely saved his life.”

Helwig has received lots of media attention and admits that “it’s a feel-good story,” but he doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I pay attention on my route and keep my eyes and ears open,” the 33-year letter carrier said.

## The eyes, ears—and nose—of the neighborhood

St. Paul, MN Branch 28 member **Mike Ochs** was on his route on March 9 and headed to the back of one house for a delivery. Because the mailbox was near a dryer vent, he usually smelled the scent of fabric softener. “It didn’t smell like Downy fresh that day,” he said.

The pungent, woodsy smell gave him pause and he looked around. “There was smoke just barreling out of the chimney,” Ochs said.

He delivered the mail and when he saw a neighbor outside at his next delivery, he filled him in. The man told him, “They just burn wood, so it’s normal.”

But Ochs was concerned, so the neighbor said he would contact the homeowner. The carrier finished a few more deliveries and was heading back to his vehicle when he saw the neighbor again and asked if he got ahold of the owner.

The neighbor said he hadn’t, so Ochs said he thought, “I better go and knock—it just doesn’t seem right.” He went to the back of the house. “I started knocking vigorously,” he said. “I was looking in the



windows and the blinds were closed.” (He later found out that there were no blinds—he had seen white smoke inside.)

When he opened the storm door to try to knock on the actual door, “all this smoke comes barreling out,” Ochs said. There was still no answer.

As he was reaching in his pocket to retrieve his cell phone to call 911, the owner came out from the garage and asked Ochs what he needed. The carrier told the man that the house was on fire, and the owner called 911. The man’s wife and children fortunately were not home.

As they waited, it appeared that the man was shaking. “I could see that he was going into shock,” the carrier said. So Ochs asked the neighbor to retrieve a jacket for the owner; it seemed to help. “He was happy I took such care,” Ochs said.

Firefighters soon arrived at the scene to put out the fire and clear the smoke.

The 17-year postal veteran doesn’t think he is a hero, though. “I feel like I just care about my fellow man and it’s just what anyone else would do,” Ochs said. “I’m just glad there wasn’t further damage and no one was hurt.”

## Doing what needed to be done

On Oct. 28, Moorhead, MN Branch 1051 member **David Martin** was on the last loop on his route as he went up to his elderly customer Dick Overby’s house. “I opened the slot, put the mail in and started to walk away when I heard him call, ‘Hey!’” he said.

The sound was coming from inside Overby’s garage. The carrier entered the side door of the garage and found Overby stuck between a car and the wall. The customer explained that he was trying to put air in a tire of the car when he tripped and fell—the cord of the air hose had wrapped around his ankle. When he fell, he had also knocked over a large board that landed across his shoulder and leg. He said



that he had been there at least two hours. “He said he was counting on the mailman to show up,” Martin said.

Overby did not want to call emergency services; he said he was fine, he just couldn’t get up. “I made sure he wasn’t bleeding,” Martin said. He lifted the board off of the man and removed the hose from around his ankle.

After moving the other items out of the way, “I grasped him by the forearms, had him grab mine, and pulled him straight back from under the car,” the carrier said. “I was repeatedly asking if I could call an ambulance.”

After getting Overby out of the garage, Martin had him lie down on the ground. “I sat with him for a little bit to make sure he wasn’t showing signs of a concussion,” he said.

The carrier then helped the man stand and move to the steps and inside the house. When Overby assured that he was OK, Martin continued on his mail route but stopped at a neighbor’s house to explain what had happened; the neighbor promised she would check on Overby.

Despite receiving praise, Martin said he doesn’t feel like a hero. “I think any carrier in our office would have done the same thing,” the fourth-year letter carrier said. “I was doing what needed to be done.”

## Fire-averse carrier watches out for ‘family’

On July 26, Lynn, MA Branch 7 member **Dan Bean** had just delivered to a house and was driving on his mail route when “I saw a little puff of smoke coming from the corner of the house,” he said.

He looked closer and saw flames between the first and second floors. The carrier quickly went to the fire department on his route, but they were already out on a call. Bean next called 911, and the operator said to make sure that everyone was out of the house.

The carrier then saw one of the residents out walking in the neighborhood. Bean told her, “Your house is on fire. Where is everyone?” The woman made it sound as if everyone was out of the house. “I asked, ‘do you have a garden hose?’” Bean said.

They did, so the carrier grabbed the hose and began trying to spray the flames to put them out as he waited for help. “I could hear the fire truck coming for the longest time,” Bean said. “It took forever, it seemed.” Firefighters soon took to putting out the blaze, so the carrier returned to his route.

A local fire inspector later found Bean on his route to thank him for taking action. The woman’s two children, 95-year-old mother and two dogs had still been inside the home, but everyone was able to get out of the home safely with no injuries. The fire started because of an improperly disposed cigarette and the house had significant damage. Bean also found out that there were two oxygen tanks on the second floor, so the fire could have been a lot worse had it spread.

Despite “unbelievable” media attention, Bean doesn’t think he’s a hero. The Marine Corps veteran and 30-plus-year letter carrier insisted he did what anyone would normally do. “That’s just the nature of us letter carriers,” he said. “We’re not going to let something bad happen without stepping in. We look out for our customers. My customers are my family.” **PR**

## Help on the way

On Dec. 19, Tampa, FL Branch 599 member **Jerry Lewers** was about to start to deliver his mail route with a trainee, fellow Branch 599 member **Taniqua Newkirk**. The carrier dismounted the truck to put in the code to open a community gate when “I heard what sounded like a whisper—a raspy call for help,” he said. He looked over to see an elderly man lying in the bushes next to what appeared to be a water pipe. He cried again, “Help me! Can you help me?” Lewers walked over and asked if he wanted him to call 911. “No one knew he was there,” Lewers said. The man instead held out his hand and the carrier slowly raised the man to his feet. He asked, “Can you take me to where I live?” So Lewers asked where that was, and the man said in the middle of the complex. Lewers asked, “Are you sure you don’t want me to call an ambulance?” but the man declined, so he asked, “Are you OK to walk?” The carrier asked Newkirk to make sure the truck was secure and to wait there. Lewers put the man’s arm over his shoulder and an arm around his waist and started to walk slowly. But when they made it through the main gate and around the corner, “he started to collapse,” Lewers said. “I swooped him up in my arms like a fireman’s hold.” Maintenance staff and the apartment manager pulled up alongside them in a golf cart and showed the carrier which apartment the man lived in. Lewers helped him to his door, where his family

members were waiting to take over. When he saw that the situation was in good hands, Lewers continued on his route. Despite praise, Lewers doesn’t consider himself a hero. “I’m just a mailman who did a good deed,” the 18-year letter carrier said. “Why wouldn’t I want to help?”

**W**est Coast Florida Branch 1477 member **Thomas Phillips** was crossing a street while delivering mail on Sept. 29 when a window salesman who had been going door to door stopped him. As they were talking, they saw a man, Clarence Rideout, out walking his dog. “He suddenly collapsed,” Phillips said. The carrier asked the salesman to call 911 and ran over to Rideout. At that moment, a nurse drove by and stopped to help. “We started chest compressions until paramedics arrived,”



**West Coast Florida Branch 1477 member Thomas Phillips (r) reunited with his customer Clarence Rideout after helping give chest compressions to the man while he was having a heart attack.**

Phillips said. Once the carrier saw that Rideout was in good hands to be taken to the hospital, he continued on his route. The man, who ironically is a defibrillator salesman, spent nearly two months in the hospital and then returned home. One day when Phillips went to deliver Rideout’s mail, he saw a note attached to the mailbox that said, “If you are the mail man that saved my life, please ring the doorbell. You are my angel.” Though Phillips was credited with saving his customer’s life, he doesn’t believe he’s a hero. “I was just at the right place at the right time,” the 24-year postal veteran said.

**F**ort Collins, CO Branch 849 member **Dennis Ketterling** was working at the post office on March 31 when he saw a co-worker, fellow Branch 849 member **Paul Couperus**, who didn’t appear to be doing well after returning to the station. Couperus, who was usually quite jovial at work, was acting out of the ordinary. “He was serious, distressed, pacing back and forth,” Ketterling said. “It instantly struck me as unusual.” The carrier asked Couperus if everything was all right. “He said he



**Tampa, FL Branch 599 member Jerry Lewers (r) was thanked by his customer after he helped the man home after finding him injured.**

had pain in both arms and his chest, and his face was bright red,” Ketterling said. Thinking that the symptoms pointed to a heart attack, the carrier asked if he could call 911. Couperus asked the carrier not to contact anyone, and said he wanted to drive himself to an urgent care center. But as the man’s condition seemed to deteriorate, Ketterling began to insist. “When I said ‘heart attack,’” Ketterling said, “I think he knew what was going on but wanted confirmation.” He called 911 and an ambulance soon arrived. Medics took Couperus’ blood pressure and found it to be dangerously high. The man had stents put in at the hospital and soon returned home to recuperate. Despite praise, Ketterling said it was “ridiculous” to try to call him a hero. “I just picked up on some obvious signals,” the 18-year letter carrier said. “Anyone who knows Paul would have done the same thing.” **PR**