

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.

Neither snow, nor rain, nor trees

A strange noise alerted Northeastern New York Branch 358 member **John Richichi** while he was delivering mail on the morning of Aug. 2, 2016, his 30th anniversary on the job.

"I heard a bending-branch-type sound," he said. The carrier paused to try to locate the source of the unusual sound. He looked around to see if anyone was around him—there was no one. "Coming back on the other side [of the street], I heard it again," he said.

Seconds later, he realized the noise was coming from a tree right next to him. "I just had a hunch it was gonna go," the carrier said.

Richichi saw a car containing a woman and her son coming his way, so he ran into the middle of the road to flag it down and stop it. "The limb came down behind me," he said. "It was just a fluke."

The tree was so large that it fell across the whole roadway.

The woman told Glens Falls, NY's *The Post-Star* that without Richichi's intervention, "the tree would have been right on top of us."

Another customer, Richard Ost, praised the letter carrier in a letter to the editor of *The Post-Star*. "I was very pleased, but not surprised, to read the

front page article about our mail carrier, John Richichi," he wrote. "John has been our neighborhood mail carrier for a number of years now and he always goes the extra mile for everyone. The postal service and our community can be very thankful for John and all that he does for others."

Richichi brushed off any praise, saying that "being called a hero is hard to digest."

Carrier keeps a watchful eye on his route

While going about his route in a foot and a half of snow last winter, Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **James Bigham** came across an elderly customer who had fallen outside his home on some ice. "It was one of those days that you had to watch yourself," he said. The carrier got the man back inside his home, made sure he was OK, and then continued on his route.

A few hours later, Bigham came across another elderly customer, Larry Lewis, outside of his apartment complex with his dog. "It wasn't unusual to see him out there with his dog," Bigham said.

When the carrier got closer and looked over again, he saw that Lewis had fallen into the snow. Lewis wasn't wearing many layers and couldn't get up. He had called for help and his dog barked, but no one had stopped. "He was struggling and it looked like he was in trouble," the carrier said. "It was so cold, there was no way he was going to be out there that long."

Remembering that Lewis had a heart condition, Bigham was extra concerned. "I asked him, 'Are you OK?'" the carrier said. Lewis replied that he was not and that he needed help, so Bigham set his satchel down and went over to him.

He knew he would have to lift the



Northeastern New York Branch 358 member John Richichi was recognized for his role in preventing a large tree limb from crushing an oncoming car.

As Atlanta Branch 73 member Zipporah White (l) helped a customer (r) who was having medical issues on the roadside, fellow Branch 73 member Chadwick Green diverted traffic away.



man up, so he got behind Lewis and managed to get him standing. The man fell again, and Bigham lifted the man up yet again and helped him over to the apartment building. Bigham gently guided the man to his apartment and told him, “Catch your breath.” A few minutes later, Lewis was speaking more coherently.

The man didn’t want Bigham to call 911 and promised him that he would go to the doctor’s office soon. Assured that he was OK, Bigham continued on his route but stopped by later to check on Lewis.

The man wrote about his appreciation for Bigham to the local postmaster. “Outside of my feet and hands turning a little blue, I am alright thanks to Jim,” Lewis wrote. “I probably would have laid there until I expired, so I guess Jim saved my life. I thought someone at the post office should know about him and what he did for me that day in the snow.”

Bigham, a 28-year postal veteran, said that despite the praise, he doesn’t believe he’s a hero. “I just feel that I have been on that route for a number

of years and I know my customers,” Bigham said. “I think anybody would have [done it], had they known the situation.”

See something, do something

Atlanta Branch 73 member **Zipporah White** was in the process of driving city carrier assistant and fellow Branch 73 member **Chadwick Green** for delivery training one day in summer 2016 when they noticed an elderly man sitting on the curb, looking dazed.

“He was trying to flag people down,” Green said, but to no avail.

“There were so many cars that passed him, I couldn’t believe it,” White said.

The carriers pulled over to help the octogenarian. “I asked if he was OK, and he was slurring,” White said. “He kept shaking.”

“It was extremely hot that day,” Green added.

Green headed toward the busy street and directed traffic away from White and the man. “A lot of people didn’t see him,” Green said. “It was a lot of traffic and I was a little worried about

getting hit myself.”

Meanwhile, White called 911. “He had been walking from a grocery store for a mile with no water,” White said of the man. “The operator told me not to give the man water but to keep talking to him until first responders arrived.”

When EMTs arrived on the scene, they took the man’s vital signs and checked his blood-sugar levels. “When they checked his ID and saw his address was nearby, I went to his complex to look for his roommate and inform the property manager, who returned to the scene with me,” White said.

The man was then taken to the hospital for treatment of heat stroke and dehydration.

“When we returned to the office, our co-workers were calling us heroes,” said White, a 15-year postal veteran. “We just felt good because we were able to help someone who was clearly in danger.”

Green, a first-year letter carrier and Marine Corps veteran, echoed that sentiment. “I was just helping out a fellow citizen,” he said.

Eye on the elderly



Pierce Hodges

On July 12, 2016, Winston-Salem, NC Branch 461 member **Pierce Hodges** was going about subbing on a route when he heard a conversation. “I could hear a woman telling her husband she couldn’t get up,” he said. The carrier couldn’t see her and when he looked over, he saw a house’s front door open, so he figured they were inside. When he looped around, however, he saw his elderly customers,

the Womacks, lying down on the front patio. While trying to walk through a walkway with a walker, Mrs. Womack had fallen and could not get up. Her husband tried to get her up, but was too weak to help his wife, as the couple had both been recovering after recent hospitalizations. The Womacks were on the ground and had started getting sick from the heat. People were driving by but no one stopped to help until

Hodges saw Mr. Womack. The carrier hurriedly pulled over his vehicle and got out to help. “I just rolled her over so she could sit up and then stand up,” Hodges said. The first-year letter carrier and Army veteran said he had checked in with couple and they are doing well. While Hodges said he is “humbled” by being called a hero, he doesn’t think that he deserves the title.

Philadelphia, PA Branch 157 member **Gary Booz** (l) was commended for administering CPR to his co-worker, clerk **Lynette Wilmer** (r), who had a heart attack.

Timing is everything

On July 25, 2016, Philadelphia, PA Branch 157 member **Gary Booz** was getting ready to start his deliveries for the day. The carrier had come in two hours early because the Democratic National Convention was in town, and he wanted to get his mail delivered on time.

In another part of the building, clerk **Lynette Wilmer** collapsed and was unresponsive and not breathing. Employees called 911 and the dispatcher urged them to find someone who knows CPR.

"Another safety person told me someone passed out," said Booz, who is on his station's safety team. "She was sitting there, casing the mail and fell backward."

As a member of the team, it's Booz's responsibility to meet the ambulance and take EMTs to the area where the emergency is, but before going out to meet the ambulance, something told him to check on Wilmer first.

When he reached her, someone was on the phone with a 911 dispatcher who said CPR needed to start right away. Booz was the only person in the area who knew CPR and he started it immediately. Though he had never used the technique before, "It's funny how it comes to you automatically,"

he said. Booz continued CPR until responders arrived.

EMTs continued CPR and took Wilmer to the hospital. The woman was in a coma for six days and given just a 50/50 chance to survive. She recovered, though, and went home a few weeks later. Doctors said that without Booz's quick thinking and starting CPR, Wilmer likely would not have survived.

"All the doctors praised him: 'He was so good. He was better than we could have done.' I'm grateful, Gary, I'm grateful," Wilmer told WPVI-TV, the local ABC station. "I know without Gary on the work floor, I wouldn't be here."

The 31-year letter carrier said he's honored at being called a hero, but brushed off any praise. "I wasn't supposed to start that early," Booz said. "I believe God used me that day—there's no doubt in mind."

Well, that's not something you see every day

"I was just doing my route, walking," South Suburban Merged, IL Branch 4016 member **Grace Pott** recalled of a hot June 24, 2016, when she heard a commotion.

The carrier soon realized in horror that the sound was that of a customer



throwing a body into his van, locking the vehicle, and then walking back into his house.

Pott called 911 and when officers came, she described what she had seen. "I told them, 'The back door's open. The person's in there,'" she said. "I was spooked and freaked. My legs were shaking."

The customer had apparently thrown his mother into his van. Officers found that the elderly woman was alive and called paramedics. They also took the man to a hospital; the reporting officer, who commended Pott for her actions, told the letter carrier that the customer was planning to kill his mother and then himself.

"It was a pretty bizarre day," Pott said. "This is not something you see carrying mail."

The 16-year postal veteran doesn't consider herself a hero, though. "I just think I was there at the right time and the right place," she said.

Help on the way

On Dec. 10, 2015, Lynn, MA Branch 7 member **David Crowley** was delivering his route when "I noticed a syringe in the street," he said. Since it was a nice neighborhood and the gutters were usually cleaned, the carrier took note. Crowley next saw an SUV pulled over to the side of the street. Since it was a main road,

it was not unusual to see someone pull over to send a text message on their phone, but the car had been sitting there for quite a while. "I just got curious," the carrier said. He checked the car and noticed a young man slumped over inside with the engine running. "I didn't see him moving at all," Crowley said. Remembering the syringe,

he became concerned. "I knocked on the window," he said. "I knocked pretty loud." The carrier reported it to a nearby neighborhood police patrol, saying, "I think this kid is OD'ing." The officer arrived to investigate and called in an ambulance. The 18-year-old man had indeed apparently overdosed and was able to be revived

by medical personnel and taken to the hospital. "I just put two and two together," Crowley said. "They told me he was pretty close to dead." The carrier brushed off any major heroics. "I'm glad I was able to help out," the 30-year letter carrier said. "Anybody would have done it, especially carriers in my office." **PR**

Eye on the elderly



Sharon Bennett

Fayetteville, NC Branch 1128 member **Sharon Bennett** was delivering to curbside mailboxes on May 27, 2016, when she saw her octogenarian customer, Mr. Gregory, who had been walking down the sidewalk with the aid of a walker, fall to the ground. Bennett, an Army and National Guard veteran, knew that the man had previously had a stroke and was concerned. So, Bennett pulled over, secured her vehicle, and “I ran diagonally across the road,” the carrier said. The man had some bruises and was bleeding from his hands, but was otherwise OK. She helped Gregory in getting back on his feet and stayed with him until his relative who was inside his house came to help him home. Bennett denies being a hero, though. “I was just in the right place at the right time,”



Robert Snee

the four-year letter carrier said. “I deliver to a lot of elderly customers on my route and I’m just always on the lookout.”

Wilkes-Barre, PA Branch 115 member **Robert Snee** grew concerned on July 14, 2016, when he saw a 93-year-old customer’s mail piled up at his home. The carrier said that the man, “a kind of notable neighborhood character,” walks around the neighborhood all the time. “I didn’t see him for a few days,” Snee said. “Something seemed funny.” When he saw that the grass at the man’s house was kind of high, coupled with the mail pile, he decided to investigate. He knocked on the man’s door, checked with neighbors, and stopped at the man’s favorite coffee shop, all to no avail. Snee’s customer also frequented the post office, so he called his supervisor to ask if he had been there. When Snee found out that he hadn’t, he asked the supervisor to call 911 and ask for a welfare check. Emergency responders discovered

the man in his bathtub, where he’d been for a few days. Paramedics took the man to a hospital and credited Snee with possibly saving his life. Snee, a 40-year letter carrier and Air Force veteran, said there was “nothing heroic about

it. It was just phone calls and ringing doorbells.”

While delivering a package in nearly 100-degree heat on Sunday, Aug. 7, 2016, Dallas Branch 132 city carrier assistant **Devante Lacy** spotted an elderly customer in distress next door. “I just saw him collapse face-first on concrete,” he said. The man was lying on the ground and appeared to have been mowing his lawn. “There wasn’t anyone outside,” Lacy said. The carrier ran over to the man and tried to help



Devante Lacy

him sit up. “He couldn’t say anything,” he said. As he was doing so, a neighbor came over and told Lacy that the man had previously had a stroke, and it appeared he was having another. “We can’t leave him out here in the sun,” Lacy said. They knocked on the door, and the man’s son answered. He hadn’t been aware that his father was outside. “I just grabbed the guy and put him over my shoulder and took him inside to A.C.,” Lacy said. He called 911 and made sure the man was in good hands



Jeff Hawkinson

before continuing on. Lacy doesn’t think his actions were a big deal. “I was just looking at it like I was in the right place at the right time,” the second-year letter carrier said. “It could have been a lot worse.”

One day last fall, Sioux City, IA Branch 69 member **Jeff Hawkinson** was delivering to an apartment complex. As he closed up the boxes, he thought he could hear a customer’s voice. “I heard her start calling out for help,” he said. Hawkinson investigated and noticed it was coming from his customer Mrs. Stusse’s apartment. He knocked as he identified himself as “Jeff the mailman.” Entering the apartment, he found that the 84-year-old woman had tripped over her cat and fallen. “She had broken her arm,” Hawkinson said. “She was on the floor and couldn’t get up.” Stusse had had polio when she was younger and had not been able to move her other arm since. Hawkinson called the woman’s daughter as well as a neighbor and stayed with her until they arrived. Hawkinson, who said Stusse was doing well, brushed off any accolades. “To me, it wasn’t a big deal, but I’m sure it was to her,” the 36-year letter carrier said.

Neighborhood watch



Laura Kish

Akron, OH Branch 148 member **Laura Kish** was on her route on July 28, 2016, when she saw a toddler wandering around alone. “He saw me and just came running at me,” she said. “I had never seen the kid before.” Kish began asking him questions, but he was not able to tell her much about himself. The shoeless boy pointed to a house. “The house he was pointing at was vacant,” she said. Kish canvassed the neighborhood in search of someone who knew the child. Some neighbors recognized the child, who had apparently gotten out from his house before. “This time he climbed out of a back window,” Kish said. She and the neighbors got the boy home safely. The 29-year postal veteran brushed off any accolades for her actions. “It’s no big deal, really,” Kish said. “I didn’t really do anything; the neighbors did.”



Tammy Ernst

York, PA Branch 509 member **Tammy Ernst** was driving down a street on her route one day last spring when she noticed something unusual. “I came to a stop sign,” she said. “As soon as I turned, I saw this toddler walking toward the road.” The young boy was in front of his house by himself but was heading toward the street. The carrier quickly stopped her vehicle across the street and intercepted him. “Hey buddy, what are you doing out here?” Ernst asked him. “I put my hand on his back and turned him around.” At that moment, his mother came out of the front door of the home, asking the boy how he had gotten out of the back yard. Ernst made sure the child was in good hands and then resumed her route. Despite receiving praise, Ernst insists she’s no hero. “I was just there at the right time,” the 22-year letter carrier said. “Anyone, I hope, would have done the same thing.”

On Oct. 17, 2016, Cincinnati Branch 43 member **Martin Mitchener** was

delivering mail on his route when he saw a 2-year-old girl wandering in the streets without shoes or a coat. “I wasn’t sure where she came from,” he said, and the girl couldn’t give him any pertinent information. Mitchener saw a house with a door open, but he knew that a pit bull lived there, so “I was leery of knocking on the door,” he said. The carrier grabbed his phone and called his postmaster, who in turn called local police. Mitchener stayed with the child until officers arrived to take custody of her. After police arrived, “two teenaged kids left the home with the pit bull by the collar,” Mitchener said. They apparently were supposed to be watching the toddler but had left the front door of their home open, and the girl had wandered out into the street. Mitchener, a 29-year postal veteran, brushed off any mention of heroics. “It was not too dramatic,” he said. “I just stayed with the little girl until the police showed up. It was the proper thing to do.”

Mt. Pleasant, IA Branch 660 member **Betty Lutz** was delivering mail on Saturday, May 21, 2016, when she was approached by a customer on her route who said that his 4-year-old son had been missing for at least two hours and asked if she had seen him. “The father came up to me because he knew who I was,” she said. The carrier told the man that she had not seen him, but she took the boy’s description and the man’s phone number,



Betty Lutz

promising to call him if she did come across the boy. Lutz went about her route, looking as she went, and asked neighbors if they had seen the youngster. A short time later, three blocks away, Lutz noticed a boy who fit the description swinging in the backyard of a home on her route, so she went over to talk to him. When Lutz asked the boy if he lived there, “He said, ‘I live here all by myself,’” she said. She believed the child did not belong at that house, so she called his parents and stayed with the child until they arrived. “I don’t know if he could have found his way home.” Trusting his letter carrier, the boy was excited to hang out with Lutz and asked if he could ride in her LLV and deliver mail with her. The parents were relieved and thankful for the carrier’s awareness and assistance. Lutz said she was honored and humbled to be called a hero, but that her actions weren’t a big deal. “I was just doing my job,” the 23-year postal veteran said. “Anybody would have done it. You just look out for everybody.” **PR**



A carrier's helping hand

On Sept. 21, 2016, Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Rebecca Phillips** was delivering mail on her route when she spotted a man who had passed out. There was a liquor store on the carrier's route, so it was not unusual to see people loitering.

"I had seen him before," she said. But this time, "He was just lying there."

Afraid that the man would get hurt, "I grabbed a Clif bar and went over to see if he was OK," Phillips said. She asked if he was all right and also if he had eaten. He said he had not, so she gave him the bar and told him to take care of himself.

When she passed by on her route again a little while later, she saw that the man had again passed out and had stuck the bar in his pocket instead of eating it. "I couldn't leave him there like that," Phillips said. "I saw a lot of people walk by him."

So, she went over and woke the man up again. She asked him if he would like her to call an ambulance, and he told her that would be a good idea. The carrier called 911 and stayed with the man to comfort him.

The man told Phillips that most of his relatives had died and he was using alcohol to cope. "I just wanted him to know that someone cares," she said.

The ambulance took a while to arrive, so the carrier called 911 to check on it. They assured her it would be on its way soon, so Phillips quickly finished her loop. When she came back a few minutes later, she saw the ambulance there.

The 10-year letter carrier doesn't see herself as a hero, though. "I just saw somebody who had kind of given up on life," Phillips said. "I'm just here and I'll help however I can."

Vigilant carrier to the rescue

Casper, WY Branch 1681 member **Annie Humphrey** was on her route one day in October 2016 when "I heard someone yelling, 'Help me!'" she said. The carrier couldn't tell where it was coming from, so she continued to listen as she made her next delivery. "I heard her yell it again," she said. "You could tell something was really wrong."

Humphrey ran for a block and a half until she saw what happened. Sarah, a former co-worker who now worked for a waste management company, was limply hanging out of the cab of her garbage truck. Humphrey would occasionally see Sarah on her route, so "it was hard seeing her like that," the carrier said.

Sarah told Humphrey that she had set the truck's emergency brake and put its transmission in neutral. She then got out of the truck to get a trash can, but a

mechanical failure and caused the truck to roll, pinning her between the front of the vehicle and a telephone pole.

Sarah was able to drag herself into the truck through an open door and radio for help. "She probably helped herself, more than anything," Humphrey said. "She was almost passed out." Sarah also said that she couldn't feel the bottom half of her body.

"All I did was have her lean against me," the carrier said. She then moved Sarah onto the ground.

The truck was still running, so the carrier turned it off. Humphrey then realized that Sarah's feet were higher than her head because of the slope of the ground, so she rearranged her so that her blood wouldn't rush to her head. "I was terrified to move her, but I didn't really have a choice in the matter," Humphrey added.

Humphrey stayed with Sarah and comforted her friend until the emergency crews arrived. The accident broke Sarah's pelvis in five places and her tailbone as well. She is still recovering from her injuries.

Despite being lauded as a hero, Humphrey denies performing any major actions. "I think Sarah's the hero. She's a brave girl, I'll tell you. She's tough," the fourth-year letter carrier said. "I don't need to be glorified. I would have done it for anyone. I'm just glad she's OK." **PR**

Eye on the elderly



While delivering mail to one of his regular customers on Sept. 21, 2016, Hayward, CA Branch 1707 member **Eric Brooks** heard a faint voice calling from inside the house. "I luckily heard, 'Mr. Mailman, I fell down the stairs,'" the carrier said. Knowing that his 87-year-old customer previously had had a double-knee replacement and that he had been using crutches to get around,

Brooks was concerned. The carrier called out to the man, who told him he had fallen. "He went down 10 stairs," he said, and his wife was in the back yard doing some garden work. Brooks found the man's wife and then checked on the man with her. The man did not seem to have any major injuries, but "he was pretty beaten up," Brooks said. The carrier called the sheriff's depart-

ment and made his customer comfortable waiting for help to arrive. Once he saw that the man was in good hands, Brooks continued on his route. The 28-year postal veteran said his customers are proud of his actions, but that being called a hero is embarrassing. "It's not like I saved his life, but I saved him from some amount of misery," Brooks said. "It's the classic mailman story." **PR**