

# Heroes, continued



Philip  
Dine

**E**ven the reporters were moved.

That doesn't happen every day. Reporters have seen a lot, they've often turned jaded or even cynical, and they've learned to be wary of spin.

But the journalists who attended the NALC's 2017 Heroes of the Year event in early October were clearly impressed. Impressed by the brave or compassionate actions that brought the letter carriers to Washington, DC for the ceremony. Impressed by each letter carrier's deflection of the notion that he or she was a hero. Impressed by the fact that several of the award winners were wearing their second, third or even fourth uniforms, and that as a group they represented the full breadth of the military services.

I know they were impressed because they told me. More importantly, because their stories—print, TV and radio—reflected it. As did the news stories by reporters not there but who reported on the event.

Many reporters were impressed enough to go beyond the available material and do more digging that produced intriguing details or moving interviews.

And their stories resonated with their audiences. A newspaper reporter from Charleston, West Virginia's capital and biggest city, who normally covers public safety, told me that he plans to seek out future stories about letter carriers helping people after readers responded strongly to the positive news of our Special Carrier Alert winner looking out for the elderly. Meanwhile, a Connecticut newspaper followed its own news story about our Eastern Region Hero with an editorial headlined, "Carrier a hero."

**It's not hard to understand why. There was rapt attention** throughout the room in Washington as the Heroes recounted their efforts to crawl through broken glass to extract a little girl from a car, rescue people from burning homes, persuade a troubled soldier to lay down his weapons, provide independence to a teenage girl with muscular dystrophy, or save people with injuries or seizures or illnesses. (See story on Page 20.)

President Rolando aptly summarized their actions.

"Every day, letter carriers help people who need help—and sometimes they do so at great personal risk," he said. "When it counted, they didn't talk about service or leadership—they just put it into practice."

Postmaster General Megan Brennan told the Heroes, "You represent the best of the Postal Service, and you make me proud to be a postal employee."

The event took place on the heels of Hurricane Harvey and

the heroic actions of Houston-area letter carriers recounted in last month's *Postal Record*. And, as recovery efforts from recent powerful storms continue in Florida, Puerto Rico and St. Thomas, once again letter carriers are stepping up (see Page 4). That also was the case in the Las Vegas shooting.

Heroes all.

**As a little kid, I'd race home from school to see what treasures** awaited me in my mailbox. On lucky days, I'd grab the small envelope, sometimes hand-addressed and bearing a three-cent or four-cent stamp. One day it might be from Oscar Robertson, another day Jerry West. Maybe Red Auerbach or Bill Bradley or even Wilt Chamberlain. Sometimes these legends gave me advice about basketball or school.

The one NBA figure I never tried to correspond with was the greatest of them all. Bill Russell, I knew, had a firm policy of not signing an autograph.

Fast-forward a half-century to Sunday morning one week ago. I was visiting my youngest daughter, a college freshman in Boston—and in my hotel lobby, I spotted some tall men near the elevator. I recognized one of them: NBA Commissioner Adam Silver.

I related a story about an exchange I had with Auerbach in the Celtics' locker room after an old-timers game in the early 1980s. Silver gestured to the man standing next to him—who turned out to be Celtic coach Brad Stevens—and I told Stevens about then spotting a tall, gray-goateed man in the locker room.

I asked Russell if he still had a policy against giving autographs. "Yes," he replied, smiling, "but thanks for asking."

Stevens wondered where that policy originated, so I told him that while lots of people thought it was arrogance, it was something quite different. Russell didn't think kids should look up to a basketball player, but should instead regard as heroes their parents, their teachers and the public employees who provided important services in their neighborhoods.

Russ had it right, I'd say.

You deliver the world's best mail service. You're helping save an American treasure by getting the truth out about the Postal Service. And when necessary, you take risks to save someone—before simply resuming your route.

Deny it all you will, but in my book, you are heroes.

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