

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.

The nose and lifeline of the community

"I was on my last loop and walked by this house," Willoughby, OH Branch 3688 member **Steven Farkas** recalled of his route on May 5. "There was such a strong odor of natural gas that hit me in the face. I doubled back."

The carrier went to the gas meter at the front of the Mattinglys' house to check to be sure. "After the second sniff, I was pretty confident this was a gas leak," he said.

The carrier then banged on the door until the couple, who had been in the basement, answered. "I kind of startled them," Farkas said. He told the couple that he thought it was a gas leak, and he urged them to get out of the house and to call the gas company.

When the gas company responded, they found that there was indeed a leak. And not only did Farkas save the Mattinglys' home from a possible gas line explosion, the carrier's quick thinking also led to a discovery at the house next door: Gas company crews found a leak there as well.

The carrier has successfully sniffed out four natural gas leaks in the four years he has been delivering mail. "It's something I have a nose for," he said.

The customers were grateful. Gene Mattingly told the local Fox TV news affiliate, "You see these mailmen going up and down your street and all you think they're doing is dropping a piece of mail in your mailbox. But these are other things they do that they don't get recognition for."

His wife, Geri, added: "I guess it was just our lucky day. God meant for him to be here."

But Farkas, who has been surprised at the amount of news coverage and notoriety, said he doesn't feel like a hero. "I try to stay alert," the letter carrier said. "We're the lifeline for a lot of households. You know you're integral to what's going on. This is something I would want my carrier to do."

Always watching out

The co-workers of Iron Mountain, MI Branch 395 member **Heidi Lawson** have joked that, "If something happens, it's on Heidi's route." That's because she had quite a busy April.

As Lawson was putting mail in an elderly customer's box one day, "I heard him calling my name," she said. The man usually comes to the door, so the carrier was concerned.

She went inside and located him. "He had fallen but had gotten to his sofa," she said. He had a Life Alert, but was not wearing it and was unable to get to the phone due to an injury.

Lawson made sure he was comfortable and asked if she could call 911. The man declined a call for an ambulance, saying he was expecting a visit from a home health nurse later that day and would call them instead.

The carrier later found out that the patron had a sprained ankle. He now has an electric wheelchair and a ramp at the entrance of the home.

Several days later, while delivering in her LLV, "I was at a stop sign and



Willoughby, OH Branch 3688 member **Steven Farkas** has detected four natural gas leaks on his route during the four years he has been delivering mail.

looked in my rearview mirror,” Lawson recalled. She saw a man bent down on the sidewalk near a home, clasp his hands together.

The situation didn’t look right, and the man was not easily visible, so she backtracked and went over to the man. “There was just blood everywhere,” Lawson said.

As the man wished, the carrier called his wife and waited with him. Apparently the man had been working on the roof of a relative’s home when he fell from a ladder. He attempted to grab the gutter for balance, but fell to the ground anyway, slicing his fingers on the gutter edge in the process. “It cut through tendons and nerves,” Lawson said she later learned.

When the wife arrived, she called an ambulance. The patron went to the hospital and underwent surgery to save his fingers. The family told Lawson they were grateful for the carrier’s timely reaction to help, as the man had soon after passed out due to blood loss. He has since made a full recovery.

The 10-year postal veteran brushed

off any description of heroics, saying it’s all part of being a letter carrier. “I just basically helped when I saw them,” she said. “You get to know what’s going on.”

Calm carrier coaxes customers from sinking van

“All of a sudden, it started raining,” Athens, TN Branch 1897 member **Zach Walker** recalled of delivering his route on May 12. Then he heard someone yelling, “They are still in the van!”

The city carrier assistant looked around and saw in horror that a mini-van was in a drainage ditch.

“It was flooded bad enough that you couldn’t see between what was ditch and what was road,” Walker said.

The carrier immediately stopped and waded into the waist-deep water along with another man. They quickly located a woman and her 10-year-old son in the vehicle.

When they opened the door, water rushed inside. “They weren’t freaking out; they were frozen in shock,”



Walker said. “I talked them down. It was letting them know what needed to happen. Once they heard me, it registered and they were eager to get out.”

A bystander had called 911, and police began to show up. “We carried them out of the van and onto land,” Walker said.

Assured that the woman and her child were safe and uninjured, Walker completed his mail route.

The second-year letter carrier was hesitant to be called a hero; he insisted he tries to stay alert while on duty. “I always try to put myself in other people’s positions,” Walker said. “I would want someone to help.”

Help on the way



On the afternoon of March 17, Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Stacey McManus** was delivering her route on a cul-de-sac. “When I was turning around, I could see through to the next street,” she said, where she saw a man fall. “I just saw him go down,” she said. He had fallen in the snow while trying to bring his dog inside and could not get up. “He was lying down on the ground,” McManus said. She asked if he was OK, and he replied that he wasn’t

hurt but couldn’t get up. The carrier tried to help him up, but was unsuccessful. She asked him if he wanted her to go get her phone to call for assistance, but he told her, “Just go in the house and use mine,” she said. McManus did so and called 911. Meanwhile, the dog took off. “It just kept running down the street,” she said. McManus kept calling its name and eventually “I got it back inside the house,” she said. The carrier stayed with the man until EMTs arrived to

take the patron to the hospital. “I just wanted to send a very big thank-you out to her for helping my husband,” the man’s wife, Sheryl O’Reilly, wrote to the post office. “Who knows what would have happened if she had not seen him.” The 21-year postal veteran doesn’t think she’s a hero, though. “If you see something, you automatically are going to help them,” McManus said. “It’s something that anyone would do. It’s being a human being.” **PR**



Lansing, MI Branch 122 member Jared Thill was interviewed by a local TV station after using his CPR skills to help save a customer's life.

Carrier's life-saving skills help patron

Lansing, MI Branch 122 member **Jared Thill** was delivering mail on his route on May 25 when he saw a car pull up on the grass outside of a home to make it easier for an elderly man to get inside. Thill said "hi" to the man and his two grandkids and continued delivering the mail.

When he came back around on his loop, the group was with the man on the porch, but "he was on his butt like he slipped back off his walker," the carrier said. "They didn't seem too worried or sound worried. They talked like normal...it sounded like they were trying to have him get up."

Thill continued the last section of his route and checked in again, and the granddaughter looked frantic. "I saw the lady on the phone going in and out of the house. Different mannerisms than before," he said. "So I

yelled across the way to see if they needed help. The guy said yes. I threw my stuff in the LLV, locked it, and did a jog over there."

The woman was on the phone with a 911 operator and the man was on his back. He wasn't responding to anything. "I'm about eight inches from his face and he was purple," the carrier said. "Nobody should be that color." Thill, a Marine Corps veteran, knew he needed to take action, so he began CPR.

"Things were just happening so fast," he said. "My arms were getting tired. About the third time I pushed on his chest, I heard a crackle. All I remembered, from my training years ago, was 'don't stop even though you hear that.'"

The fifth-year letter carrier continued to pump on the man's chest until paramedics arrived to take over. Thill helped get the man onto a stretcher and into the ambulance.

"I was listening to the paramedic who showed up, who tells me what I did was a good thing and probably saved his life," Thill told WILX-TV, "That's kind of powerful coming from the guy that does it for a living."

The carrier has kept in touch with the family, and the man is still recovering. "He's our family's hero," Ida O'Brian, the daughter of the man Thill saved, told the TV station.

The carrier wasn't sure about that title. "That one I'm not used to," he told WILX. "I live for smiles, I love making smiles on people's faces and I live for that, but a hero? Not so much."

Thill said CPR training is what made his feat possible, and that he thinks everyone should get trained. He is working with others to get people certified through local branches and post offices. "Everyone knows we're the first responders," he said. "A lot of good has come from it."

Neighborhood watch

As Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Michael Keicher** was delivering mail on his route one day last February, "there was a customer, Carrie, who was walking her little Chihuahua a couple of houses behind me," he said. The carrier also saw "two big, vicious dogs" in a fenced-in yard. All of a sudden, one dog nudged its nose through the not-totally-closed chain-link fence gate and ran loose. "I had my spray ready to go," Keicher said. "He passed me and ran toward the Chihuahua." He saw in horror as the

large dog "lifted the small dog and began throwing it around like a rag doll," he said. "The woman was screaming. I didn't have time to think." The second large dog also got loose and soon joined in. The carrier, who also happens to be a member of the local safety committee, ran over to help and a neighbor soon joined in. "The neighbor and I lunged and got the small dog out of the big dog's mouth," Keicher said. The two dogs' owner eventually came to get them. Keicher, meanwhile, called 911 and stayed at the scene to give

police a report. The Chihuahua sustained severe wounds, requiring more than 50 stitches, but made a full recovery. Keicher was commended for his quick actions, but brushed off any accolades. "I just did what I thought was necessary," the third-year letter carrier said.

On April 25, Detroit Branch 1 member **James Ledbetter** was delivering mail on his route and when "I got to the corner, I saw a 1-and-a-half or 2-year-old girl with a diaper on, walking," he said. "She didn't have shoes on her feet." The carrier

continued walking while also checking back on her. "I was looking for a parent," Ledbetter said. The toddler soon strayed into the street, so the carrier approached the child and helped her onto a sidewalk. Ledbetter was hesitant to begin knocking on doors, so he instead called 911 and waited with the young girl until an officer responded to pick up the child. Despite receiving commendation for his efforts to help his young patron, Ledbetter doesn't believe he's a hero. "It's something we do every day," the 19-year postal veteran said. **PR**

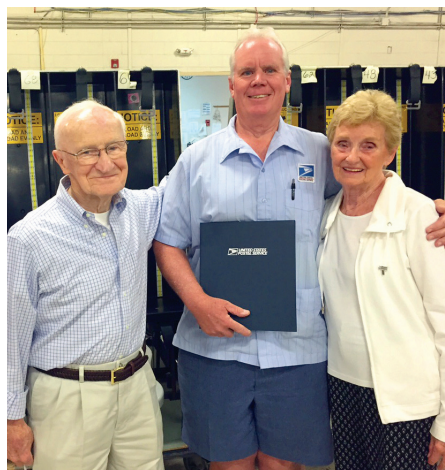
Fire and rescue



David Finch

As Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **David Finch** was delivering to a customer's home on March 10, "I saw a fire on her porch," he said. The carrier knocked on the door, but there was no answer. "I started banging on the door," Finch said, and the woman opened it at last. The carrier warned her about the fire. "It was getting bigger as it was going along," he said. "The flames were as tall as I was." The woman "went inside to get a fire extinguisher, but didn't know how to use it," Finch said. The carrier jumped in to help, while the resident called 911. The extinguisher "snuffed it out really quick," Finch said, "But it had run out, so I had to stomp on the small embers a little bit." Firefighters soon arrived to survey the scene. "The porch got burnt pretty good, but the house itself didn't," Finch said. The woman was uninjured. A neighbor later called the local post office to praise Finch for pitching in during the emergency. The fourth-year letter carrier said it wasn't his intent to try to be a hero. "I just wanted to help," Finch said.

Delivering mail on his route on Saturday, May 13, Elizabeth, NJ Branch 67 member **Patrick Daly** detected something unusual for the rainy day. "At the top of the street, I smelled smoke," he said. As he continued, the odor became stronger and he realized that there were smoke alarms going off at the nearby home of an elderly couple. The carrier rang the doorbell, but there was no response. Looking around, "I saw smoke coming out of every window of the house," he said. Daly then ran to a neighbor's house and asked the resident to call 911. Firefighters responded and, with Daly's assistance, were able to identify the origin of the fire to extinguish it and minimize the damage to the house. "The fire started in the basement and there was only one more minute until it hit the gas line," Daly estimated. Once he knew that



Elizabeth, NJ Branch 67 member **Patrick Daly** was thanked by his customers **Francis and Joan Downey** after calling for help when he found their home on fire.

the situation was in good hands, the carrier left to continue his route. The owners had been out of the country on vacation and when they returned, they thanked Daly and gave him a hug. They told him they would have to be out of the house for a year while the house was gutted and repaired. Their son-in-law, Charles Andrews, contacted the local post office to commend the carrier for his awareness and quick thinking to help mitigate the damage. Daly said he was overwhelmed at being thought of as a hero and downplayed his actions. "I just did what any normal human being would do," the 33-year postal veteran said.

On May 4, Levittown, PA Branch 4973 member **Fred Costello** was delivering mail on his route when he saw something strange on a home's roof up ahead. "The solar panels were on fire," he said. "It was obviously flames." The carrier quickly called 911 and ran up to the house to knock on the door, which the residents answered. "They weren't privy to what was going on," Costello said. "All I did was make people aware and got them out of the house." A fire crew soon arrived to extinguish the fire, and all three



Fred Costello

customers were able to escape the house unharmed. "Thank God nobody was hurt," Costello said. Despite receiving praise, the 17-year letter carrier said he doesn't see himself as a hero. "I did what everyone else would do, hopefully," Costello said.

As Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Christopher Riley** was helping out on another carrier's route on April 14, "I noticed there was smoke," he said. It appeared to be coming from the chimney or gutters from a nearby home. He knew the elderly couple who lived there, and they were usually home. "I tried knocking on the door, knocked on the windows," the city carrier assistant said, but he got no answer. Riley tried to notify a neighbor, but they were not home, either. He saw pets inside and was concerned, so Riley alerted his supervisor, who called 911. Firefighters soon arrived and extinguished the blaze in a second-floor bedroom, preventing the home from being destroyed. "It ended up being an extension cord that had shorted," Riley said. "Police knocked down the door and got the dogs out." The first-year letter carrier said being called a hero is strange, and that his efforts are all a part of being a letter carrier. "I just saw something that didn't look right," Riley said. "You just start noticing routines. It's cool that we have the ability to help when others might not be around." **PR**

The right place at the right time—twice

This has been quite the busy year on the route of Viroqua, WI Branch 2565 member **Tammie Halverson**.



As she pulled up to her park point in the parking lot of an apartment building to deliver mail on Feb. 14, “I saw someone lying on the ground,” she said. It was only 13 degrees

that day, so the carrier was particularly concerned.

She rushed over and asked a man nearby what happened, and found out that the resident had fallen from a second-story apartment. Halverson noticed that others were passing by, almost in a state of shock, so she knew she needed to take action.

The carrier rushed back to her vehicle to get her phone and called 911. She then returned to the scene and saw that the man was moving his hands. “He was talking,” she said. “I put my scarf around his head.”

Halverson remained with him until help arrived. She found out from authorities later that the man had shattered his hips. After a full replacement of both hips, he was recovering. He later thanked the carrier for covering him and calling 911.

A few months later in May, Halverson was delivering mail on her route when “something caught my eye out the window of an assisted-living facility,” she said. Halverson watched closely and soon saw a woman first throw something out of the second-floor window and then motion to the carrier.

She went over to the woman, who told Halverson, “They’re going to kill me.” She

appeared ready to jump. “It scared the living daylight out of me,” Halverson said.

The carrier told the woman, “Let me help you.” Halverson took off running into the complex, quickly found a nurse and filled her in. The nurse knew exactly who the carrier was referring to and shouted for someone to call 911 as she started running toward the woman’s apartment.

They discovered that it was the mangled window screen that was thrown out of the window. Police soon came and helped to calm the resident. “I’m just glad she didn’t jump,” Halverson said.

The woman was soon diagnosed with a brain tumor and unfortunately died just a few weeks later. The nursing staff thanked the carrier for being so alert.

The 22-year postal veteran was hesitant to be called a hero for her actions. “Everybody would have done something,” Halverson said. **PR**

Eye on the elderly

Pampa, TX Branch 3094 member **Miguel Leal Jr.** was delivering mail one day in December when he came upon his 92-year-old customer. “I rode up to my park point and looked off to my left,” he said. “She was sitting in her front yard.” Leal went closer to check on her. “She kind of waved both arms at me,” the carrier said. Leal asked, “Are you OK? Do you need me to call anyone?” The woman responded that she was all right; she just couldn’t get up. She said she had bent down to pick something up and had not been able to move and then tried but failed to get the attention of anyone to help her since that morning. “I just kind of helped her

up slowly and walked her to her front door,” Leal said. The door was open, so he led the woman inside, and she told him that her purse and shoes were at the back. The carrier said he would retrieve them then come in through the back to meet her. Once he was assured that the patron was OK, Leal returned to his route. The customer’s son later thanked the carrier and commended him for his attentiveness and for possibly helping to avert a worse outcome. Leal, a 12-year letter carrier and an Army combat veteran in Iraq, denied any major heroics. “I hope someone would treat my mom that way,” he said. “I was just trying to pay it forward and do right by people.”

On Saturday, May 13, New Castle, PA Branch 22 member **Mark Jones** was delivering mail to his 93-year-old customer’s house. “I saw mail in her box from the day before,” the T-6 said. There were also newspapers. The carrier peeked in the front



window and saw the customer. “She was lying on the floor in her nightgown,” Jones said. He called 911 and yelled out, “Fran! Fran!” and tried to knock down the locked door. “I saw her elbow flinch,” he said. “I heard her breathing.” Police and EMTs soon arrived and, together, they broke the door down to get to the woman. The customer suffered a broken hip and elbow and was dehydrated after falling the day before. She was taken to the hospital and was later moved to a health center to recover. Jones, a 15-year letter carrier, said he was happy to help. “It’s just part of the job,” he said. “We just try to keep an eye on the elderly.” **PR**