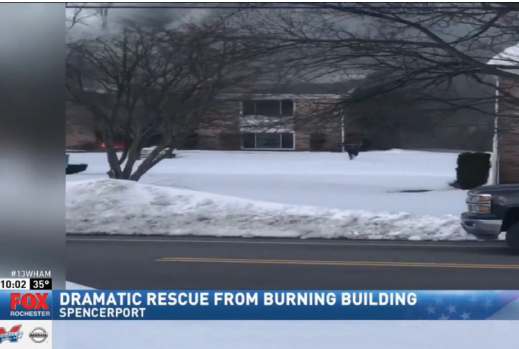


## Proud to Serve

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.



Rochester, NY Branch 210 member Chris Turner (above) received media attention for helping residents escape from a burning apartment building. A customer captured video of Turner running to the scene, which was shown on the local Fox TV news affiliate.

# 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.

## Adrenaline kicks in to help carrier save residents from fire

On March 16, Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Chris Turner**, heading back to the post office after having finished his route, was about five blocks away when he noticed something unusual on his drive.

"I saw a lot of black smoke coming from an apartment building," the city carrier assistant said. "I pulled over to see what's going on and heard screaming and cries for help."

Turner added that he didn't see a fire truck or police vehicles, just people standing outside.

He quickly parked his vehicle and ran toward the building. There, he saw two people, a man and his daughter, on the second floor trapped by the heavy smoke. The front entrance was blocked.

"I told her the building was on fire—you're not going to get out the front door," Turner told WHAM-TV, the local ABC affiliate. "You got to jump out the window or you're not going to make it. She got right out and I caught her, and thank God we had a snow bank beneath us and it kind of broke the fall a bit."

The man seemed hesitant to jump and was still standing in the window

and said he was waiting for firefighters to get a ladder. When firefighters arrived a few minutes later, they were able to position a ladder and grab the man. "Thank God they got him down," Turner said.

The carrier brought the girl away from the smoke and over to a nearby picnic table. He wrapped his postal jacket around her to keep her warm until an ambulance took them away. "I just wanted to give her a hug," Turner said.

The father was treated at the scene for smoke inhalation before being taken to the hospital. "He looked like he just came out of a coal mine," the carrier said. "That's the only way I can describe it."

Turner said he found out that there had been five other people on the other side of the building. "I didn't see because the smoke was so bad," he said.

The apartment manager later told Turner that the girl had broken her leg, and that her father was in serious condition and eventually was discharged from the hospital a few weeks later. Another resident had first- and second-degree burns. A local charity has put up the displaced residents, including a couple of residents who were not injured. "I wish I could help a little more," Turner said.

The carrier, an Army veteran, said his training probably had come in handy during what he called a "hectic and crazy" situation. "Your adrenaline gets going," Turner said. "I did what I could do with what I had."

Though the local police chief thanked Turner for his heroics, he downplayed his actions, saying, "I never thought I'd be called that. I prefer 'good Samaritan.'"

The four-year letter carrier added to WHAM, "I couldn't just drive by, I just couldn't do it. I hear 'help,' I have to go help, I have to save people."

## Carrier doesn't flinch during dog attack

On March 15, Deland, FL Branch 2591 **Hector Barahona** had been delivering on his route and was on his way back to his LLV when, he said, "I saw a woman walking her small puppy with her daughter screaming, shouting and yelling for help."

It appeared that a neighbor's dog had gotten loose from the front yard and had run across the street toward the woman, Jennifer Shultz, and her dog, Shelby. "The woman was trying her hardest to protect her puppy from this bigger loose dog from hurting him," the city carrier assistant said. "During this moment, the loose dog grabbed ahold of the woman's forearm and held on tight."

Shelby got loose and ran away to escape, and Shultz's daughter ran after it. The owner of the loose dog, a pit bull mix, ran to retrieve the dog. "The owner was trying to pull her dog back," he said. The loose dog released

the woman's forearm when its owner got a grip on him.

"I ran toward them to help and got in between the bitten woman and the dog with its owner," Barahona said. "The loose dog was overpowering its owner as she fell and lay on her chest, but she reached out to grab her dog by his rear legs and tail."

But the dog managed to free himself again. The CCA blocked the dog from getting back to Shultz, though it tried several times to move around him to reach her.

The dog's owner's son appeared and took ahold of the dog by its collar.

"Once I saw and made sure the son had full control of his loose dog, I then turned my attention to the bitten woman and aided her to my LLV, as the woman was in shock," Barahona said. "The woman asked for her daughter and puppy's whereabouts and safety. I ensured her they were safe and her daughter had her puppy in her arms and the puppy was unharmed."



**Hector Barahona**

Shultz wanted to talk to her husband, so the carrier called him, followed by 911. The dispatcher gave Barahona instructions on how to help the woman with her arm wound until paramedics arrived. The woman who owned the larger dog was a nurse, so she also helped.

The carrier gave responding rescue crews his contact information and also provided a statement. Once Barahona saw that the situation was in good hands, he continued on his route.

Shultz's husband took her to the hospital, and the attacking dog was taken into custody and placed under a 10-day quarantine.

"I was just doing my job, and my military past experience took charge in protecting and helping those in need," Barahona, a fourth-year letter carrier and Navy veteran, said. "I would do that any day of the week."

## Fire and rescue



**Jovanka Glover**

As Lake Charles, LA Branch 914 member **Jovanka Glover** was delivering mail on March 9, she approached the home of a couple on her route, the Petes. "Normally it's the smell of lavender," she said. As she opened a door slot at the Petes' house, smoke poured out. Worried that the retired man she normally saw might be unconscious or asleep in his chair, the carrier looked around. She noticed that one of the cars wasn't there, but figured it might be in the shop. She began banging on the door. "I was scream-

ing his name," Glover said. She went to a neighbor's house to let them know, but they didn't answer either. The carrier then called 911 and kept knocking. "I'm not leaving, because I don't know if he's in the house," she explained as she called her supervisor. Firefighters soon arrived and discovered that the man had left a pot cooking on the stove while he went to the store. Fortunately, neither customer was home at the time. When she saw that the situation was in good hands, the carrier finished her route and then

returned to the scene to check in. The local fire chief credited Glover's quick thinking, which the chief said may have saved her customers' home from burning to the ground, and the Petes now call Glover their "guardian angel." But Glover denies any heroics. "This is my job. I've been on this route for 12 years," the 19-year postal veteran said. "It was just a natural reaction. I just did what any person would have done. I see these people every day. They're like family. I wouldn't have done anything differently."





Central Florida Branch 1091 member **Eulogio Soto Jr.** was recognized for helping co-worker **Carlos Ramos**, who had a stroke. Pictured (l to r) are District Manager **Eric Chavez**, Ramos, CRC **Debbie Ferencak**, Soto, Manager **Armando Lozano** and Branch President **Rick Myers**.

## Running toward fire

As Athens, OH Branch 997 member **Jeremy Roush** was going about his route on Jan. 26 delivering to a cluster-box unit, he heard sounds coming



**Jeremy Roush**

from a nearby high-rise apartment complex.

He saw a woman out on her balcony a few floors up. She yelled something down to him. “I hollered back up at her,” Roush said, and asked if everything was all

right. Looking closer, the carrier saw smoke coming from some of the windows, and the woman called for help.

The carrier acted promptly.

“I ran up to the fourth floor,” he said. “When I opened the door, the whole apartment was full of smoke.”

Roush got the woman and her dog out of the apartment and then ran back inside to search for the source of the fire. It appeared to be a cooking fire that had engulfed the entire kitchen in flames and was continuing to spread.

As the fire alarms were blaring in the building, Roush found a fire extinguisher in the apartment and attacked the blaze. The carrier then helped to evacuate the building. The woman and her dog are now doing well.

The 13-year letter carrier and Air Force veteran brushed off any mention of heroism. “It was just a reaction,” Roush said. “I heard what she said and went forward.”

## One carrier looking out for another

On Jan. 31, Central Florida Branch 1091 member **Eulogio Soto Jr.** was in the post office locker room when he noticed something amiss with a fellow letter carrier, **Carlos Ramos**.

“I looked at him and he looked at me like he was scared,” Soto said. “He looked like he didn’t recognize me. He was bleeding through his nose.”

Soto asked Ramos if he was OK, and Ramos replied that he wasn’t feeling well and that he was going to go home. Then, Ramos asked, “Who are you?”

As the office’s safety captain, Soto said, “My training and my instincts kicked in.” Observing that Ramos was

disoriented and had a nosebleed, Soto knew that he could be having a heart attack or stroke.

Ramos tried to leave the office, but Soto and a manager grabbed him and took him to the break room. “Don’t let him go,” Soto told the supervisor. “I don’t think he’s capable of driving.”

They treated the man on site as they called 911 and Ramos’s family. Ramos was taken to the emergency room, where they discovered that he was having a stroke.

The manager later told Soto that he heard that the emergency-room doctor tending to Ramos had said that if Ramos had not been admitted within another 30 minutes, the carrier might have died.

Ramos is now taking medication and is doing better.

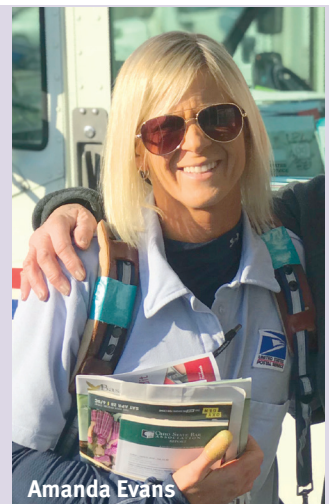
Soto said it was a compliment to be called a hero, but that he was just doing his job as safety captain. “You see someone in need, and you help them,” the 18-year postal veteran said.

## Eye on the elderly

“I pulled up and noticed the door was partly open,” Washington Court House, OH Branch 288 member **Amanda Evans** recounted as she delivered mail to a house on her route on Feb. 15. When she got to the patron’s porch, she heard the elderly customer, Dr. Case, call out for help. The woman told Evans that she had fallen in her hallway and couldn’t get up. Evans got permission to enter the

home. “She was lying on the floor and her walker was to the side,” the carrier said. “Her face was bruised and her eye was bloody where she fell.” Evans helped the woman regain her balance and got her back on her feet. Case declined a call to 911 or to any relatives. The woman later called the post office to thank Evans, calling the carrier her “guardian angel” and saying that, had it not been for the carrier,

she would have been on the floor for much longer before someone found her. Case’s family also reached out to thank Evans. The 18-year postal veteran claimed her actions were simply being in the right place at the right time. “I was just glad to be there,” Evans said. “I love my customers and I watch out for them. They’re family. I’d want someone to do that if that was my mom.”



**Amanda Evans**

## Help on the way



Don Pennington

“I heard someone say, ‘Hey! Hey!’” Oak Brook, IL Branch 825 member **Don Pennington** said of delivering mail on his route on Feb. 26. The carrier followed the sound to a customer lying on the ground near some recycling bins. “He went to swing the bag to put it in the trash can and he lost his balance,” Pennington said, and he hit his head on the concrete. “He was complaining of dizziness and nausea.” The man was bleeding and had temporarily lost consciousness. The carrier called 911 and stayed with his customer until the ambulance arrived. He also asked the man’s neighbor, who had come over with a blanket, to call the customer’s relatives. “We made sure he knew who he was, where he was,” Pennington said. He later heard that the man had suffered a subdural hematoma, a traumatic brain injury, and was expected to recover. The customer returned home from the hospital a few weeks after the incident. Pennington has since talked to the man’s relatives, who told him they are thankful he came along when he did. “I’ve been on this route for 15 years,” the 19-year letter carrier and Navy

veteran said, adding about his customers, “I know these people. They’re family.”

On Jan. 10, Charlotte, NC Branch 545 member **Tamaria Gardner** was delivering her route in a cul-de-sac when she saw a customer lying on the ground, unresponsive. The woman’s two dogs were with her, one still attached to her and the other milling around. “I couldn’t connect the dots right away,” the carrier said. Gardner quickly pulled over, jumped out of the vehicle and ran over to the woman, who appeared to have passed out. The carrier called out to her



Tamaria Gardner

supervisor who had been following her on an observation, to call 911. As Gardner began talking to her customer, the woman began to regain consciousness. Gardner asked the woman questions to keep her alert until medics arrived, such as “What’s your name?” and “How many fingers am I holding up?” “She was able to answer my questions, but she wasn’t [completely] coherent,” Gardner said. A neighbor soon came over to help, and an ambulance arrived. The carrier later found out that the customer had a medical condition that had

caused her to faint. Gardner was commended by supervisors for her attentiveness in helping her customer receive the help she needed. “We happened to be in the right place at the right time,” the 24-year postal veteran said. “When you do the same thing every day, it feels like you’re taking care of your family.”

St. Paul, MN Branch 28 member **Matt Wassenaar** was delivering mail on his route one cold morning in late February when he saw something on the ground up ahead, next to a recycling container. As he got closer, he realized it was his customer, Rieasa, lying in her driveway. The woman apparently had fallen on the ice about 20 minutes earlier and was unable to get up. “I talked to her and asked her if she was all right and she said no,” the carrier said. “I tried to help her up and she was in so much pain.” Rieasa then asked Wassenaar to get her husband, Mark, who she said was inside. The man had been getting ready for work and was unaware of his wife’s condition. Once it became clear that it was too painful for Rieasa to be lifted by Mark, he returned to the house for a blanket for her. The woman agreed to let her carrier call for



Matt Wassenaar



Mike Figler

an ambulance. Paramedics soon arrived to take Rieasa to the hospital, where she had surgery that included inserting 12 screws in her broken shoulder. Mark later called the post office to thank Wassenaar for his actions. “It was one of those things where it just sort of happens,” Wassenaar, a 13-year letter carrier and former Army Reservist, said. “In Minnesota, people go down in ice and snow. I’m not a hero; I just help out.”

On Feb. 1, Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Mike Figler** was delivering on a co-worker’s route and walked into an apartment complex to get to the mailboxes. “A woman was lying slumped in the corner,” he said. Figler asked, “Ma’am, are you OK?” and when he didn’t get a response, he began shaking her—also to no avail. “She didn’t have a pulse,” the carrier said. He called 911 and an operator talked him through CPR. “Everything happened so quickly and I just reacted,” Figler said. The carrier gave the woman CPR until emergency responders arrived. EMTs soon got the woman breathing again and took her to the hospital. It was later discovered that she had had an allergic reaction to medication. The woman unfortunately later died. “She had been without oxygen too long,” Figler said. But the carrier said he was glad he was there at the right time. “I’m a big believer that everything happens for a reason,” the 15-year postal veteran said. “I just did what I hope any other person would have done in that situation.” **PR**



## Eye on the elderly



**Becky Adams**

**A**marillo, TX Branch 1037 member **Becky Adams** was concerned when she received a call from a customer's daughter on Saturday, Jan. 13. The woman told the carrier that she had been unable to get ahold of her mother, RoJeanne, and did not live nearby. The apartment complex's office was closed that day. "[She] asked if I would check on her," Adams said. "I saw her every day." The carrier went to RoJeanne's home and knocked on the locked apartment door. Receiving no answer, Adams located a maintenance man, who helped her to get into the woman's apartment. The customer had suffered a stroke. Adams called 911 and waited until paramedics came. The woman was taken to the hospital and then into hospice care. Adams visited and met RoJeanne's family at both places. The woman's daughter later called the post office to commend Adams for her help. Unfortunately, the woman died a few weeks later. "The blessing behind it was that her kids and grandkids came and got to say goodbye before she passed away," Adams, a

35-year postal veteran, said. "I was glad I was able to be there for them."

**W**hile delivering his route on Jan. 16, Bridgeport, CT Branch 32 member **Michael Bottillo** was heading up to the mailbox on the garage door at an elderly customer's house when he heard a muffled sound. "I put the mail in the slot like I normally do and I heard her yelling," the carrier said. The woman's voice appeared to come from inside the locked garage. Bottillo managed to see and talk to the woman through the mail slot. She told him that she had fallen and did not have access to her walker or life alert button. "I didn't know how long she was there," he said. The carrier told the woman that he would call 911. He then quickly walked around the house, searching for an unlocked door or window. Although he was not able to gain access, he continued to talk to the woman. "She was shaken up," Bottillo said. "I kept her calm and told her that help was on the way."



**Michael Bottillo**

Emergency crews soon arrived and gained entry into the home to tend to the woman. Once the situation was in good hands, Bottillo returned to his route. "It's part of the job," the 17-year postal veteran said of his caring actions. "You see all your customers every day. It's normal."

**O**n Feb. 26, Southwest Missouri Branch 366 member **Tammy Chairez** was delivering mail on her route and, when she reached customer Cheryl Green's house, knocked on the door. "I always take her mail in to her because she uses a walker," the city carrier assistant said. This time, though, when Chairez knocked, she heard Green yelling for help. When the carrier opened the door, she found the customer on the floor. "She said she had been lying there for two hours," Chairez said. "She wasn't sure if anything was wrong." Chairez called 911 and then waited with her customer until paramedics arrived and took the woman to the hospital. Green later called the post office to express her thanks to Chairez, saying that, had the carrier not acted when she did, it would have been several more hours before someone would have come to check on her. "She knew I would be coming," Chairez said. "She's glad I'm on the route because she trusts me."



**Tammy Chairez**



**Stephen Schaal**

The fifth-year letter carrier denied any heroics, and instead simply tries to look out for her patrons. "I try to take care of my customers," Chairez said. "I like to be able to check on my elderly customers and make sure everything's OK."

**W**hen Akron, OH Branch 148 member **Stephen Schaal** was delivering mail to the home of an elderly customer on one of his routes as a T-6 on Feb. 13, "I heard a faint cry for help," he said. The carrier knocked on the door but didn't get an answer, so he checked the door, found it unlocked and opened it. "I found the customer lying in the entryway of her home," Schaal said. He rushed to her side and asked her if she was all right. "Her speech was slurred, so I couldn't figure out what she was trying to tell me," he said. "I didn't want to move her because I didn't know her medical condition." Schaal called 911 and stayed by his customer's side until the ambulance arrived. Once he confirmed that the situation was in good hands, he finished his route. Schaal later was told that the woman had had a stroke at least a day earlier. The woman's son soon contacted the carrier and told him that, though she had died a few days later, they appreciated everything he had done. "I would do it for any customer," the fourth-year letter carrier said. "It sheds a good light on our fellow carriers. It just happened to be me that day." **PR**

South Florida Branch 1071 member **John Sylvain** (bottom right) spoke to local news media about his role in helping put out a fire at a house on his route. The blaze is shown at right.



## Nothing seems to scare this carrier

As South Florida Branch 1071 member **John Sylvain** was going about his route on April 12, he saw smoke billowing from down the street. As he followed the smoke, the carrier realized which customers' house it was coming from. "I knew both gentlemen and talked to them every day," he said.

After Sylvain quickly parked his LLV, a neighbor called out to tell him that the homeowner, Lou Didomenicis, was asleep inside. It was unclear whether the man's octogenarian tenant, Donald Hicks, was there.

"[Hicks] says 'Hi' to me every day," Sylvain told MargateNews.net. "When I didn't see him outside, I knew I had to go in."

So he did, and found that the kitchen was engulfed in smoke. He quickly found Hicks inside. "I grabbed the guy and brought him outside," Sylvain said.

Then he returned to the house. "[Someone] gave me an extinguisher, I believe it was the next-door neighbor," he told WSVN-TV. "I got the extinguisher, trying to extinguish the fire. I couldn't do it from the inside, so I asked [Didomenicis]... 'Could I break the window and try to get the fire from this angle?' He told me, 'OK,' so I broke the window and started spraying the fire."

Didomenicis later told WSVN-TV that, when he woke up, he witnessed Sylvain trying to put out the flames with a fire extinguisher. The homeowner was able to get out of the house on his own.

When Sylvain was told that there were dogs inside, he tried to go back inside. "The smoke got heavy and we had to get out," Sylvain told Margate News.

Four local fire crews responded to the scene. The two residents survived and were taken to the hospital. Sylvain was treated for smoke inhalation. The



house was damaged, and two of the dogs inside were lost in the fire.

Firefighters said the cause of the fire was unknown, but the two occupants thought that it may have started with the water heater.

Neighborhood residents praised the carrier in local news media, but Sylvain, a fourth-year letter carrier and Army veteran, insists he's not a hero. "I'm just paying it forward," he said.

## Fire and rescue



On March 16, Las Vegas Branch 2502 member **George Wood** was delivering mail when he saw thick, black smoke pouring from a house about two blocks down. As he hurried closer, the carrier saw that it was at a customer's house. "His motorcycle was on fire in his carport," he said. Wood ran to the door and alerted the homeowner. "The guy was on his way up to bed, so I'm glad I caught him," the carrier said. "He went over to put it out with his hands." Wood dissuaded him because the gasoline

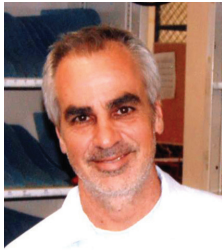
in the tank of the bike could make it worse. Unfortunately, that's what happened—strong winds soon whipped the flames and engulfed the house, as well as the neighboring home. Wood ran to that house to warn the residents, and they called 911. Once fire trucks arrived and the carrier saw that the situation was in good hands, he returned to his route. The owner had a tenant downstairs who was rescued by firefighters because heavy smoke had prevented him from getting the man out. Because the

man was hearing impaired, he easily could have been trapped. He needed a skin graft and was treated for smoke inhalation, but was otherwise doing well. On several Las Vegas TV new outlets, the homeowner credited the carrier by saying, "If it wasn't for the mailman, I would have never known. I would have been caught in the house." Wood brushed off any accolades for his actions. "I just did what anyone would have done if they saw what was going on," the 13-year postal veteran said. **PR**



## If you see a burglar, stop a burglar

“I heard two women scream,” Westchester Merged, NY Branch 693 member **Peter Monteleone** said of delivering his route on Oct. 13. “I haven’t heard a scream like that. It was total fear. It caught me off guard.”



**Peter Monteleone**

A woman and her 12-year-old daughter had just run from their house and were standing in

their driveway. The two had returned home to find a burglar inside. “The intruder happened to be in the daughter’s bedroom and it scared the living daylights out of her,” Monteleone said.

Seeing the women distraught, the carrier attempted to calm them. Monteleone then confronted the burglar, who had followed the woman and girl out of the house in an attempt to explain himself. “There were a few choice words and an ultimatum,” the Navy veteran said. “It was just a reaction.”

Noticing kitchen knives protruding from the burglar’s pants pockets, Monteleone quietly urged the woman to call police and assured her that he was not going to leave them until law enforcement got there.

Police officers soon arrived and arrested the intruder, who had five steak knives, blank checks and jewelry that he had stolen on his person. They also discovered that the man had a prior criminal record, but the man has not yet appeared in court for this incident.

The carrier’s actions have earned him praise from his customers.

“Undoubtedly, Peter’s poise, courage and steadfast clear judgment helped to keep a very tense and dangerous situation from escalating into catastrophic violence, and resulted in a quick and efficient apprehension of an armed criminal,” the woman’s husband, John Piazza, wrote to the local post office. “My entire family owes Peter a huge debt of gratitude for his brave and conscientious actions that day.”

Monteleone, who has worked for USPS for 26 years, said, “I’m sure any letter carrier would have done the same thing.”

## Keeping a watchful eye on the elderly

One day in December, Fort Collins, CO Branch 849 member **Jeremiah Cox** was on his route when he came upon an elderly customer at an apartment complex.

“I pulled up and saw a lady on the ground and I thought she was looking for something because she had a flash-

light,” the city carrier assistant said. “When I asked if she needed help, she said, ‘I’ve been here an hour screaming for help.’”

The woman, Mary, further explained that she had tripped on the way to the mailbox. “She had busted her head and had blood running down her forehead,” Cox said. “There were bits from the sidewalk in her palms, and they were bleeding, too.”

The carrier asked Mary if she needed an ambulance, and she responded, “No, just help me get home.” But the woman didn’t know where she lived. “She said there was a chair and an umbrella on the porch, but pretty much every porch there had a chair and an umbrella,” Cox said. “It was dark and freezing cold.”

For the next 45 minutes, the carrier brought Mary through the complex, and when they finally located the customer’s home, where she lived alone, Cox helped her inside and again asked if she needed an ambulance.

“She said she just needed to sit down,” he said. “I asked if I could use a towel in the kitchen, and I got that wet and got some peroxide and helped clean off the blood.” Cox found a neighbor next door who knew the customer and the neighbor agreed to look after Mary so he could finish his route.

The carrier later checked on his customer. “She said, ‘I’m OK because of you. If you hadn’t come, I would have frozen to death,’” Cox said.

The first-year carrier soon was being called a hero by his co-workers, but Cox said he didn’t deserve the praise. “I don’t feel like I did much,” he said. “It did make me feel good to help somebody. I’m just glad I found her when I did.” **PR**



**Jeremiah Cox**