

## 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.



**Top:** Police officers and postal inspectors investigated the crime scene after a shooting that injured Greater East Bay, CA Branch 1111 member Michal Stafford (whose LLV is shown).

**Above:** Branch 1111 member Farid Ait Djebara—who was first on the scene—aided Stafford and called 911, the Postal Inspection Service and management.

# 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.

## Keeping calm in a surreal scene

As Greater East Bay, CA Branch 1111 member **Farid Ait Djebara** was delivering Express mail on July 7, he heard popping noises. "While I was going to my next delivery a mile and a half away," he said, "I saw an LLV in the middle of the intersection. It was very suspicious."

Bystanders seemed to be panicking, but Ait Djebara went to investigate. "I stopped immediately," the carrier said. "People were running left and right."

He approached the LLV and, upon spotting broken glass, rushed to the driver's side and saw that his fellow Branch 1111 member, city carrier assistant **Michal Stafford**, was bleeding. The CCA's vehicle had become caught in crossfire between two groups, with a stray bullet piercing a window and striking her in the hip.

"It was like the movies," the carrier said.

When Ait Djebara called Stafford's name, "She opened her eyes," he said. "She was very calm and wasn't moving much." The carrier called 911 as well as the Postal Inspection Service and his supervisor.

An ambulance soon arrived at the scene. Stafford received medical attention for her injuries, which fortunately were not life-threatening. The carrier is recovering from her ordeal.

Stafford and Ait Djebara have become close since this happened. "She told me she knew it was me," he said. "We are like brother and sister."

Ait Djebara was commended for his brave and thorough response, which allowed emergency responders to secure the area and enable law enforcement to preserve evidence at the scene. Police later found approximately 25 bullet casings near the scene. Officers were able to capture the two gunmen soon after.

The 12-year postal veteran said he was proud of his actions, but explained that, in Islam, "If you save a life, it's like you save humanity," Ait Djebara said. "I was chosen to be there to help her."

## It's a perfect time to save lives

Tampa, FL Branch 599 member **Chris Bazinet** had just delivered a package on Oct. 3 and was headed to the next delivery. About 20 minutes later, he reached behind him to get the next parcel when he found a glitter-and-sticker-coated card that was supposed to go with the first package. Knowing it would be special to the customer, Bazinet turned around to go back to the home.

"My route is pretty secluded," he said.

As he was driving, he said, "there was a car on fire and a woman in the front seat on the phone." Thick smoke was emanating from the vehicle, which was on the side of the road.

The carrier rushed to the car and told the woman, "Your car's on fire." She responded that it was just steam, and that it was due to overheating.

Bazinet, who describes himself as a "car guy," said that he knows the difference among various types of fires in vehicles—and this was an engine fire.

As Bazinet called 911, he noticed two children in the back seat. The carrier quickly helped the driver unfasten her

seatbelt, allowing her to escape from the car. As he attempted to get the little girl out of her car seat, the woman got her son out from the opposite side.

"I didn't know how to work [the car seat]," Bazinet said, but eventually, with the mother's help, he got the latch loose and the girl to safety.

"I needed her help finding stuff in the car," he said. "We even got the book bags out."

Responders soon arrived on the scene. "There were flames and a lot of black smoke," Bazinet said. "Another five minutes and it might have been totally on fire."

Thanks to Bazinet's actions, the whole family was able to make it out of the car. "Everybody was fine," the carrier said.

But the five-year letter carrier doesn't describe himself as a hero. Though others told him his actions might have been divine intervention, Bazinet has another theory. "It was perfect timing," he said. "It was pure circumstance."

## Carrier a one-man bucket brigade

"I saw an abnormal amount of smoke," Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member **Travis Cooper**

said of what occurred as he delivered his route on Oct. 25. The carrier had just parked his LLV for a loop and was getting his mail so he could start delivery when he noticed the plumes.

The carrier walked over to the house. "I had my phone ready to call 911," he said.

No one answered when Cooper knocked, and he did not think anyone was home because there was no vehicle outside. "I didn't see anyone around," he said.

The carrier investigated further. "I saw flames on the corner of the house," Cooper said. "I have no idea where it started." He called 911 but didn't stop there.

Cooper, an Army veteran and current Army Reservist, found a hose in the yard but could not find an outside water tap. He poured three bottles of drinking water that he had on the fire, but it did little to quell the flames. "I walked around," he said. "I couldn't find a spigot, but I found a 5-gallon bucket."

By this time, Cooper saw neighbors outside. The carrier brought the empty bucket over and asked if they had an outside water tap and if they knew whether anyone was home. They answered yes to both questions. The



man's truck was there; it had just been behind a fence so the carrier hadn't been able to see it.

Cooper asked them to bang on the door to try to get the attention of the man inside. Meanwhile, the carrier started running back and forth four or five times between the two houses with a filled bucket of water to attempt to put out the fire.

When firefighters arrived, the carrier had the fire contained. They finished off the blaze and got a statement from Cooper. "It could have gotten out of hand," he said. "The whole corner [of the house] had melted away."

Meanwhile, neighbors had gotten the attention of the occupant, who apparently worked night shifts and had been sleeping. Coincidentally, the man who was saved is the nephew of the local postmaster and the cousin of a fellow letter carrier.

Cooper denied being a hero, insisting instead that his actions were merely a civic duty. "I was just in the right place at the right time," the third-year letter carrier said.

## Fire and rescue



On April 4, Central Iowa Merged Branch 352 member **K.C. Kruse** was delivering mail on a new route as a T-6 when he noticed something unusual on one side of a duplex. "I saw smoke in the window and lights flickering," he said. Kruse opened the screen door and yelled inside. When he did so, he saw a

large amount of smoke. "I could hear a smoke detector going off," the carrier said. "I knocked, I yelled. No one was home on either side of the duplex." Kruse was unable to get into the house, so he called 911 as well as his supervisor and waited on site for the fire department to arrive. Firefighters were able to put out the fire and

attributed the small blaze to a slow cooker that had malfunctioned. "It wasn't that exciting of a story," Kruse said. Despite praise from the homeowner and the community, the four-year letter carrier doesn't think he's a hero. "I was just doing my route," he said. "I just did what anyone else would be doing." **PR**

## Help and hope for a patron

Amarillo, TX Branch 1037 member **Franklin Roberts** was delivering mail one day last August when he came across a customer who had fallen outside his home.

“He was propped up by the car,” Roberts said. “He was in and out of consciousness. He was pearl-white.”

The carrier noticed that the customer had scraped his knee but saw no blood there, which indicated that the customer’s blood pressure was not good. “I grabbed ahold of him—there was no handprint,” Roberts said. That confirmed his suspicion of low blood pressure.

“Are you with me?” the carrier asked. The customer weakly responded, “Help.”

Roberts, an Air Force veteran, said, “I’ve been in combat, so I had an adrenaline rush.” He used that rush to jump into action.

Roberts ran to his LLV and got his customer a wet towel and water, then called 911 and answered the operator’s questions. “All of a sudden, he quit breathing,” Roberts said. “I could hear the fire truck coming. I told him, ‘Hang on, help is on the way.’”

The man suddenly started breathing again. Roberts quickly moved his LLV to avoid blocking an ambulance, then ran back to the man. The customer had stopped breathing yet again. “I didn’t want to start CPR because I didn’t want to move him, because I didn’t know how bad his injuries were,” the carrier said.

EMTs arrived soon after and took the man to the hospital. The next day, Roberts was approached by the customer’s neighbor, who said that the man he had helped had had a case of blood poisoning. The neighbor added that the carrier likely had saved the man’s life.

Roberts rebuffed any accolades for



Franklin Roberts

his actions. “Heroes, to me, are the people in the service who didn’t come home,” the 20-year postal veteran said. “I was at the right place at the right time. I’m glad he made it.”

## Neighborhood watch



Jason Cousineau

On July 21, Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Jason Cousineau** was delivering his route when he noticed unattended twin toddlers. “There were two little boys walking hand in hand on the sidewalk in diapers,” he said. They went into the road and were 20 yards from a major intersection. “There wasn’t a soul on the street,” Cousineau said. The carrier began to go after them. He asked one nearby resident if he knew where they lived, but the man did not.

“I corralled one and tried to chase the other one down,” Cousineau said. When the carrier did get ahold of both twins, he alerted another neighbor. She said she would call 911 and would help watch the boys—but the youngsters got loose again. “We had to chase them down again,” Cousineau said. “I was full sprint in my mail gear. These kids were fast.” The carrier caught up to them again as police, firefighters and an ambulance showed up. After providing infor-

mation, Cousineau left the children with police while they searched for the toddlers’ parents. He found out later that the father had had a medical emergency, and that that was when the children had gotten away. Police were able to return the twins to their home. But Cousineau brushed off any accolades for his efforts. “You know when something’s not right,” the 10-year postal veteran said. “It’s part of the job. I think anyone would do it.”

## Help on the way

On Saturday, Aug. 26, St. Cloud, MN Branch 388 member **Jason Mounsdon** was about to go on his lunch break. “I was pulling out of a gas station,” he said. There



Jason Mounsdon

were two cars ahead of him and, as one car was making a left-hand turn, the car behind it rear-ended it.

Mounsdon, who also is a volunteer first-responder for a neighboring city, rushed over to the crash. “I went to assess the situation,” he said. “I made sure the scene was safe.” One bystander called 911 as another directed traffic. Mounsdon looked into the first car, and the driver was all right, so he moved on to the second vehicle. The passenger got out just fine, but the driver seemed confused and the airbags in the car had gone off. “I crawled in the back seat,” the carrier said. “He was conscious and confused a little bit. He was complaining of neck and back pain.” Mounsdon helped keep the man stabilized until EMTs could get a neck brace on him. “Once they got him on a backboard, it was up to them,” he said. Despite receiving praise for his actions, the 13-year postal veteran doesn’t think of himself as a hero. “Being a first responder, it’s not a big deal to me,” Mounsdon said. “It’s part of everyday routine.”

On Sept. 21, Cuyahoga Falls, OH Branch 1629 member **Nancy Bullock** was walking by a home on her route and heard

the dogs in the backyard. When she looked over to see if her customers were around, “all I saw was his socks and his feet behind three trash cans,” she said. Bullock had been on that route for 12 of her 13 years carrying mail and knew that her customer who lived there, Dave, had recently had surgery. “I walked over and yelled for Dave to see if he was OK,” she said, “and clearly he was not. There was a pool of blood in front of his head and he could not get up. I didn’t even know where the blood was coming from.” She noticed that the man’s glasses and cell phone had fallen into the pool of blood, and he also was sunburned from lying outside in the sun. Dave apparently had been outside for most of the morning. “Nobody heard him yelling for help,” the carrier said. Bullock called 911 as well as Dave’s wife, and then stayed with him. “I got him towels to put under his head and to wipe the blood off his face,” Bullock said. “I also got his dogs inside the house and alerted his next-door neighbor.” Dave soon had mouth surgery for his injuries. “The day after the accident, Dave and his wife, Dawn, greeted me with big hugs, thanking me and telling me I saved Dave’s life,” Bullock said. “He tells me I’m his little guardian angel.” In addition, the town’s mayor found the carrier on her route to thank her for her actions. The carrier doesn’t think

she is a hero, though. Bullock said she tries to watch out for people on her route. “It was nice to be in the right place at the right time,” she said. “I am thankful I was there to help.”

On Jan. 3, New City, NY Branch 5229 member **Robert Korba** was delivering packages to a house on his route. When the carrier knocked on the door, a woman responded. “When I turned around, I saw her husband lying there,” he said. “I asked her, ‘Is that your husband?’ She started freaking out and crying.” The man had fallen face-first on the driveway. Korba, who is trained in CPR, ran over to the man and checked his vital signs. “He had shallow breathing,” he said. The carrier could not find a pulse, so he called 911. The operator talked to Korba and told him that help was on the way. “I did CPR for about two and a half minutes before the police got there,” he said. EMTs took over and brought the man to the hospital. Korba was later told that the man had lived. When he heard that news, “It was a nice



Robert Korba



Xue Fang Springer

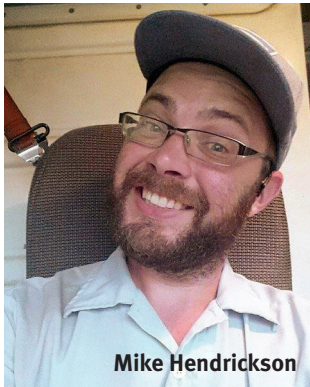
day,” Korba said. But about a week later, the man’s son found Korba on his route and told him that his father had since died because of brain damage, but that the family appreciated all that the carrier had done. “The most fulfilling part of the situation was him telling

me ‘thank you’ for keeping his father alive long enough to say goodbye,” he said. “I didn’t think I’d ever encounter that on my route delivering mail,” he said. “It was the first time I ever used [CPR]. It was quite the experience.” But the first-year letter carrier said being called a hero felt strange. “It’s just something you should do if you’re human,” Korba said. “You do what you have to do.”

“I heard, ‘Help!’” Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Xue Fang Springer** recalled about an incident on her route on Aug. 8. She had been about to enter a high-rise apartment building to deliver mail. “I hurried and opened the door,” she said. The carrier investigated further and discovered a resident in an elevator, barely conscious and struggling to breathe. “A gentleman was lying down next to his walker,” Springer said. “The elevator doors kept opening and closing.” Another man was trying to keep the doors open as Springer called 911. The customer was having trouble breathing due to an illness. The man was able to talk, though, and Springer and the group tried to keep him steady and calm. “His wife had come down and took the phone,” the carrier said. The woman was able to relay medical history to the operator. Springer stayed with the customer until emergency responders arrived to take him to the hospital. The 11-year postal veteran said she does not feel like a hero for her actions. “I just think if anyone sees that, they’ll do it,” Springer said. “I’m happy that I can help.” **PR**

## Neighborhood watch

On Sept. 22, Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member **Mike Hendrickson** was walking on his route, delivering mail. “I look a few houses up and I see a child in diapers,” he said. The barefoot toddler was walking in the street by himself. “He was having a good ol’ time. He was having an adventure,” Hendrickson said. Concerned, the carrier rushed over to him. “He couldn’t talk yet,” Hendrickson said. He looked around but didn’t see any parent close by, and said the toddler could not point to where



Mike Hendrickson

he lived. The carrier knew he needed to take action. “Come on, buddy. Let’s go home,” Hendrickson told him. “I scooped him up and started knocking on people’s doors.” The carrier did not have any luck at the first two houses. But at the third home, the boy’s father answered, and he appeared to have been asleep on the couch. “He had no idea the kid was even missing,” Hendrickson said. “I think he was in shock his kid had gotten out.” Despite being commended for his actions,

the three-year letter carrier said that “hero” was not an accurate description for what he did. “I was just doing what anyone would have done,” he said.

Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Dennis O’Toole** was walking up a driveway between two houses on Aug. 1 when, “I smelled gas really bad,” he said. The carrier could not tell which home the natural gas was coming from, so he knocked on both of the houses’ side doors. “No one was home,” O’Toole said. Concerned, the carrier called the utility company, which soon came to investigate. Crews discovered a gas leak at one of the houses and fixed it. One of the homeowners approached him a few days after, saying, “I can’t thank you enough,” adding that the leak had been discovered outside, one foot from their kitchen. Then, less than a week later, there was a fire at the other house. That homeowner contacted the post office and commended O’Toole, noting that if the gas leak hadn’t been identified and fixed, their house likely would have been destroyed. But the fourth-year letter carrier doesn’t think he did anything heroic. “I was happy I was there to help,” O’Toole said simply.

Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member **Ron Schumacher** had just rounded into a yard while delivering a loop on his route on Oct. 16 when he saw something out

of the ordinary. “There was a woman on the ground,” he said. Concerned, the carrier hurried over to the woman. “She told me her dog had tripped her and that she wasn’t able to get up,” Schumacher said. He tried to help the woman to her feet. “I could tell her legs weren’t going to support her that well,” the carrier said, and so he recruited a neighbor to help. Schumacher quickly secured the dog inside the house, and then he and the neighbor lifted the woman and got her back into her house. The 20-year letter carrier declined any major accolades for the incident. “She just said she wasn’t able to get up,” Schumacher said. “I don’t think I am a hero.”

Cedar Rapids, IA Branch 373 member **Timothy Kriz** had just finished a park-and-loop one day last June and had jumped back into his LLV. “I’m looking through the



Timothy Kriz

windshield,” he said, when he saw a couple outside on the ground up ahead. “I could tell something wasn’t right,” the carrier added. He went over to check on them. “He had tripped over the curb,” Kriz said. “He looked like he fell pretty hard and was bleeding a little bit.” The woman had been trying to get her husband up but was having trouble. “I was able to pick him up and get him in his car,” the carrier said. Kriz noticed that the man had a small cut, so he went to his mail truck to get a bandage. The carrier asked if he could do anything further, but the woman said she would take the man to see a doctor right away. Kriz later found out that the man had Alzheimer’s disease but was all right and had returned home soon after. The couple’s niece, who works at the post office, told Kriz how grateful her aunt and uncle were for the help. Despite the praise, Kriz said it made him feel “uncomfortable” to be called a hero. “We do stuff like this every day,” the 22-year postal veteran said. **PR**



Dennis O’Toole

## Always keeping an eye out

Sometimes, carriers are just in the right place at the right time—sometimes more than once. Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member **Charles Sonnenberg** knows how that goes.

On Saturday, Sept. 16, while delivering a package to a customer who the carrier knew was immobile, he knocked on the door and the customer called for him to come inside.

Upon entering, Sonnenberg found the customer on the floor, unable to get up. “I was able to help him sit up,” the city carrier assistant said. “His legs don’t work very well. He told me his legs give out sometimes.” He helped the man back to the couch and noticed that there

was some discoloring on the man’s legs.

Sonnenberg then contacted his supervisor, who in turn called local police for a welfare check. The customer refused any medical treatment from the responding officers during the welfare check, but they contacted his local family.

The next week, on Sept. 21, Sonnenberg was delivering to a retirement community. “I was putting mail in the box,” he said, when he was approached by an elderly customer. The woman wanted the carrier to help move her elderly husband, who is immobile, with the help of their daughter, from inside the home to their car. “He had lost control and feelings in his legs,” Sonnenberg said.

The carrier agreed to help but, with safety in mind, he recommended that

they call an ambulance instead of trying to bring the man down the front steps. “I didn’t want him to get more injured,” Sonnenberg said. “I helped move him from the bedroom to the couch in the living room.

The family called for transport, and an ambulance soon came to take the man. The customer was taken to a hospital for treatment, but Sonnenberg later found out that the man had died from an unrelated infection after his stay.

Still, both families were grateful to Sonnenberg for his care and concern for his customers. But he said he isn’t a hero. “I don’t do things to look good,” the second-year letter carrier and 22-year Air Force veteran said. “I do things because they need to be done.” **PR**

## Eye on the elderly



**Denese Edwards**

On Aug. 14, Central Kansas Merged Branch 1122 member **Denese Edwards** was delivering mail to the home of an elderly customer who gets very little mail and who lives at the end of a dead-end street. “That day, I actually had a piece of mail for him, thank God,” the carrier said. As she approached the mailbox, she saw the customer, Jim White. “He was lying on the ground by his pickup,” Edwards said. He was not moving. The carrier rushed

over to him and attempted to talk with the man. “I saw him breathing, but he couldn’t speak,” she said. The carrier called 911 and stayed with White until help came. “They think he had a heart attack or stroke,” she said. The customer recovered at the hospital and since then has been in a nursing home. But the four-year letter carrier brushed off any accolades. “I’m not a hero,” Edwards said. “Anyone could have driven by and seen him. Thank God I was there.”

On Aug. 16, Waterloo, IA Branch 512 member **Thomas Kinn** was delivering mail to his 93-year-old customer’s house when he saw something of concern. “I noticed she didn’t get her mail the day before,” he said, noting that that was unusual

for the woman. He checked around for clues. “I saw her neighbor across the street,” the carrier said. “He said she was usually good about calling [if she left town]. We were both alarmed.” They began knocking on doors and windows but got no response. As they stood in the driveway to figure out their next move,



**Thomas Kinn**

she called to them. “She heard us and was able to crawl to her front door,” Kinn said. They rushed back to the house and found the woman disoriented after having fallen in her bathroom three days earlier and hitting her head. “We were able to get her up and into her chair,” the carrier said. They got her some water, contacted emergency services and rendered first aid until EMTs arrived. The woman spent a few days in the hospital before returning home. The neighbor later called the post office to commend Kinn for his actions. The 24-year postal veteran brushed off any talk of heroic actions, saying that checking up on customers is “an important part of what we do.” **PR**