

## 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 202-662-2489 or at [postalrecord@nalc.org](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# 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.

## Courage under pressure

On July 6, Honolulu, HI Branch 860 member **Tiffany Ejima-Zane** was going about her route and came upon the home of her 92-year-old customer, Mr. Ikei. The man often was picked up by aides who took him to medical appointments.

That day, the carrier saw that the aide had the unresponsive man in his arms and was laying him down in the garage. Ejima-Zane rushed over to help and saw that the aide already had 911 on the line. “[The] 911 [operator] was telling us to see how far apart his breaths were,” the carrier said. “His breathing was shallow and was far apart.”

The operator advised the two to perform mouth-to-mouth rescue breathing. “I gave my customer one breath every three seconds,” Ejima-Zane said, and continued to do so for about two minutes.

The carrier said she had never been trained in CPR, but added, “I would love to take a CPR certification class in case it happens again.”

Later in the day, a family member called the post office to thank the carrier for everything she had done, as Ikei's doctor had said that their father might have died had she not performed CPR.

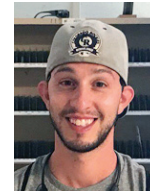
The elderly customer recovered and returned home, but he unfortunately died about two weeks later after collaps-

ing again. “The family said that, by me saving Mr. Ikei's life, he got to spend two precious weeks together with his family before he passed,” Ejima-Zane said.

But the 11-year postal veteran denied that she had performed any actions out of the ordinary. “I feel a lot of people would have done the same, I hope,” she said.

## Help on the way during work commute

On Saturday, June 16, Los Alamos, NM Branch 4112 member **Brian Abeyta** was driving to work when he witnessed something terrifying.



**Brian Abeyta**

“There's only one way in and one way out of Los Alamos,” Abeyta said.

With rocks on the left side of the road and nothing but a guardrail protecting drivers from a sheer drop on the right,

there is not much room for error on this stretch of his drive. Add fresh rain to that, and anyone would have white-knuckled the drive up the long side of the canyon.

“There is one big bend before getting into Los Alamos, and this car came down the hill too fast for those conditions,” the carrier said. “It spun out, then it hit the rock, flipped, rolled two times, landed on the hood, skidded and hit the guardrail, and that's when I thought maybe the car was going to go over.”

With traffic stopped, Abeyta's was the second car behind the accident. Shattered glass was strewn all about the road, and he could see a young woman inside the vehicle.

“I put my car in park and ran over to her,” he said. “She was halfway out of her seat belt and upside down in her seat. I reached in and unbuckled it and helped her climb out.”

While other witnesses called 911,



Honolulu, HI Branch 860 member **Tiffany Ejima-Zane** was recognized for providing rescue breathing to an unresponsive customer.

Abeyta helped the woman to the side of the road. He provided first aid for the cuts and scrapes on her hands and elbows until an ambulance arrived.

"I have a little first aid kit that I carry with me when I'm out on a route," he said. "I'm a father with three kids, so I know a few things, first aid-wise. In that situation, you just have to take the lead and run to help."

Abeyta said that the front part of the car had collapsed. "If she wasn't wearing her seat belt, she probably would have been dead," he said. "There was absolutely no windshield left. It taught me a lesson, too; I'm sometimes in a rush, but this really taught me to slow down."

He made sure the woman was loaded into the ambulance and eventually made his way back to his car and down the mountain and made it into work after taking a roundabout alternate route because the main road became closed.

The first-year letter carrier downplayed his actions, denying any heroics. "I just helped her out of her car," Abeyta said of his role.

## Hero on staff

"Toward the end of the route, I was coming around delivering, and she was lying out on the porch," Birmingham, AL Branch 530 member **Christopher Waters** recalled of seeing his patron on an extremely hot July 26.

The carrier ran over to the woman, who told him that she couldn't get up. "There was no one around," Waters said. He added that he told her, "We're going to get you up."

He moved a chair closer to her and helped get her into it. The woman had a key to her house, so they opened the front door, releasing cool air onto her. The woman was disoriented and could not tell Waters her husband's phone number.

The phone rang, so Waters answered it, and it was the customer's sister. He explained what was going on, and the sister made her way to the home within minutes.

"We need to get her into the house and get her cooled down," Waters said he told the woman's sister. The sister



**Christopher Waters**

tried to provide help and called the customer's family. Waters urged the sister to call 911, and she did.

"She still was incoherent," he said of his customer.

An ambulance soon arrived, and EMTs determined that the woman had suffered a mild heat stroke.

The customer's husband, Ralph Sumter, wrote a letter to the local postmaster praising Waters, saying, "My best wishes go out to Mr. Waters, because if he had not answered that call, there is no telling what the actual extent of the emergency would have produced. It was only fair that I share this information with you to let you know how grateful our family is for you having such a hero as part of your staff... Know that a life has been forever changed."

Waters, a 20-year letter carrier and an Army veteran, said he felt blessed to be involved. "God put me in the right place at the right time," he said. "Hero or not—I don't know. I just did what I thought was best to do."

## Help on the way



"Through the door slot, I see a hand sticking out," Staten Island, NY Branch 99 member **Mark Wiesner** said while he was delivering his route on June 15. The carrier initially

thought the woman wanted him to hand her the mail, but "she started yelling that she needed help and that she was going to die." The customer had fallen and was trapped underneath 12 pieces of drywall that had been stacked for a home-improvement project inside her home. She did not have access to her cell phone, but was close enough to the front door that she decided to wiggle her fingers through the mail slot and call for help when she heard the letter carrier approach.

Once Wiesner heard her, he opened the front storm door, and the woman explained the situation and told him that the back door was open. The carrier quickly ran there and was able to get inside the home. The drywall had fallen across her hips and pinned her to the wall under an immense amount of pressure. Wiesner lifted the drywall off the woman and called 911. The woman had been home alone and her husband wasn't scheduled to be home until hours later that night. The carrier

stayed with the woman until an ambulance arrived to take her to the hospital, where she spent five days before returning home to recover. "I want it to go on record how Mark Wiesner possibly saved my life and, at the very least, prevented me from having permanent damage," the customer wrote to the post office. The first-year letter carrier said, "I guess if I wasn't there, she would have been really hurt," but added that he didn't expect attention for his actions. **PR**

## Keeping an eye on the neighborhood

Corpus Christi, TX Branch 1259 member **Jeff Gentry** was delivering on his route the afternoon of July 30 when two neighbors, Mr. Cooper and Mr.



**Jeff Gentry**

Waterman, approached him. The residents had seen a suspicious vehicle in the neighborhood, and three men had exited and put on hoodies. The neighbors asked the carrier if he had seen the suspicious men, but Gentry hadn't.

"Have you called police?" the carrier asked them. The residents said they had, but officers didn't have enough information to go on—and the neighbors had lost track of them.

As Gentry continued on his route, he informed a woman tending to her lawn as well as a group of pool maintenance workers pulling up to a home. They said they'd keep an eye out.

Meanwhile, one of the suspects

emerged from between two houses.

Cooper confronted the man.

The suspect told the resident that he was asking the homeowners if they had seen his dog. "I say, 'It takes three of you to ask a couple if they've seen a dog?' and they start running for the car over here," Cooper told KIII-TV, the local ABC affiliate. The resident started chasing the suspect.

Gentry noticed what was going on and quickly positioned his truck to block the man from getting into his car, but he kept running and tried to climb a fence, in the process ditching jewelry he had.

A neighbor called 911, and the carrier helped the others hold the suspect until officers arrived on the scene. "He gave up," Gentry said. "He didn't want to run anymore. He was tired."

Gentry gave police his contact information and continued on his route. Officers soon called him and asked if he could identify a suspect, so he drove back to the scene. "That's the kid I caught," he verified.

He started back on his route when he passed by the pool workers. He checked in with them, and found out that they had caught a second suspect, who had

come outside of a house with his arms loaded with stolen goods.

Neighbors told KIII-TV that another car was involved and police were able to find the third suspect, along with a gun that had been thrown into a pool. Inside the car, police also found cell phones and other stolen items. Officers arrested the three teenagers, who were believed to be responsible for several burglaries in the area.

"Thank God no one got hurt," Gentry said.

Sandi Hoot, another neighbor who had seen what was happening, had gotten into her car to help chase the other two thieves. She told KIII-TV that Gentry was the real hero. "He...was holding them down until the cops got there," Hoot said. "It was a scary thing. My cars have been broken into four times in the past month."

Despite receiving praise in the media, Gentry doesn't believe he's a hero and instead credited his Army experience. "I've always been taught to go forward, not backward," the 20-year letter carrier said. "I would want someone to look out for my house. If I take care of my customers, they'll take care of me." **PR**

## Eye on the elderly

On June 20, Scranton, PA Branch 17 member **Randy Nichols** was nearing the end of his route as he approached the home of an elderly customer he had spoken with that week. "She wanted to send a package to one of her relatives," he said, and he had brought her a box the day before. The carrier told her he would pick up the parcel that day. "She wasn't waiting for me so I knocked

on the door," Nichols said. He thought it was strange that she didn't answer, but he decided to finish delivering the short block and then returned to the house. When he knocked a second time and she didn't answer, he became concerned. Nichols tried the front door, but it was locked, so he went around to the back of the house. He almost didn't see her because she was slumped over in a

chair on her porch. "She was having a seizure," he said. "She's a very good friend of mine and it was alarming to see her in that situation." The carrier checked her out and proceeded to call 911. He ran quickly to neighbor Steven Eboli's house to tell him what had happened, then returned to the customer and remained with her until emergency personnel arrived. Eboli called the post office the

next day to tell management that because of Nichols's efficiency and care, the woman's life might have been saved. The woman was hospitalized and soon returned home to recover. Nichols, a 32-year carrier who has had the same route for 30 years, said that everyone knows and loves the customer, and that he watches out for everybody on his route. "I check on a lot of people," he said. **PR**

## Fire and rescue



**Pedro Gonzalez**

“I looked up in the sky and saw black smoke,” Las Vegas, NV Branch 2502 member **Pedro Gonzalez** recalled of delivering his route on the afternoon of Aug. 2. The carrier ran over to the home and saw that two trash cans that were only four feet from a house were engulfed in flames. Gonzalez went to the front door, which was on the side of the home, and banged on it repeatedly. “I was getting absolutely no answer,” he said. In the meantime, the trash can fire was spreading to furniture that was next to it, as well as to a tree. “The branches of the tree were leaning against the garage,” he said. Taking matters into his own hands, Gonzalez located a garden hose and began to spray the fire. A man soon came out of the home, and the carrier asked the woman to call 911 while he called his own postal su-

pervisor. Gonzalez was able to put out the fire before it neared the garage. “The tree was toasty,” Gonzalez said. He later received praise from his customers. The 15-year letter carrier and Army veteran said his military experience had prepared him for events such as these. “You just spring into action,” Gonzalez said. “You don’t think about it. You just do it.”

New Haven, CT Branch 19 member **Susan Casagrande** was delivering mail on May 2 when she noticed members of a family outside a home. “I saw a couple of daughters looking at the house and then I saw the smoke,” she said. Casagrande quickly ran over. Her customer, Jack, had been burning leaves on his lawn with a propane tank and a torch, and the fire had spread. “He inadvertently caught a bush on fire,” she said. “It burnt the siding and a window.” While the man called 911, his wife, Betty, struggled to connect a hose underneath the porch, so Casagrande rushed to help her pull the hose through the lattice work, and then the two

women began spraying. The carrier continued to help the couple control the blaze, and they were able to put it out before firefighters arrived. “They were a little shaken, but the house was fine,” the carrier said. The customers credited Casagrande with saving their home, but the 31-year postal veteran said her actions weren’t a big deal. “I just helped out,” she said. “I would help any of my customers.”

In 98-degree weather on Saturday, June 30, Cleveland, OH Branch 40 member **John Lamparyk** was taking a short break from his route in his LLV. “A passerby knocked on my window and said, ‘Is that supposed to be like that?’” he said, and pointed to a house nearby that was under renovation. Lamparyk saw a fire on the porch of the home, answered “No!” and immediately jumped out of his vehicle and ran to the house as he called 911. “The flames were tickling the porch ceiling,” he said. Lamparyk searched the yard and saw that the next-door neighbor had two 50-foot hoses connected. He thought the



**Susan Casagrande**

hoses would reach, so he ran to turn on the water, then ran back to get as close to the porch as possible, which was about 10 feet away, and began spraying as much water as he could onto the flames. Neighbors soon wandered out of their home. “They had been in the back yard and smelled smoke,” the carrier said. He was able to put out the blaze before firefighters arrived. Fire inspectors found that the cause of the fire had been a rag that had varnish on it combusting from the day’s intense heat and catching a nearby cardboard box on fire. Because the house was under renovation, there was fortunately no one living there at the time. Lamparyk said that firefighters told him, “There was nothing to stop it—it would have engulfed the whole structure.” The 20-year postal veteran brushed off any accolades for his actions. “I just think anyone in that situation would have done the same thing,” Lamparyk said. “It was lucky I was there at that time.” **PR**



**John Lamparyk**