

## 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.

## Reuniting a kidnap victim with her family

"Behind this tree, there was this young lady, crying," Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member **Ivan Crisostomo** recalled of delivering mail one day in June.

The carrier stopped to check on the girl, 16-year-old Crystal Allen. "She started to point to her arm, saying: 'They were putting things in me. They were putting things in me. They are coming to get me,'" Crisostomo later recounted to the local Fox TV news affiliate.

"Don't worry," he assured her. "Nobody is going to get you. I'm here for you."

He helped Allen to call her mother, Stacy Ohman, who in turn called 911.

"I couldn't even understand her, she was so upset," Ohman told the local ABC-TV affiliate. "She gave the phone to Ivan and he instantly kicked into gear and told me that he would save my daughter."

Crisostomo stayed with Allen until emergency responders arrived and had her sit in his postal truck.

Fox reported that Allen had allegedly been "drugged, tortured and abused" for three months before she escaped. Ohman told KOVR-TV, the local CBS affiliate, that her daughter met a "friend" who had lured her into

a world of drugs and sex trafficking. "I was kidnapped, and held captive, and abused," Allen told CBS.

Authorities eventually pieced together more details of the case that she had shared with the carrier, including the teen's account of fleeing from the vehicle of abductors who were looking for her when Crisostomo came to her aid. She had managed to grab a cellphone on her way out.

"I just cried all the time and prayed that I'd get to see my mom again," Allen told Fox. "They told me that they were taking me somewhere to hurt me and I kind of just thought I'd grow the balls and jump out of the car."

Allen was taken to a local hospital and was soon reunited with family at home.

"He stepped up where a lot of people would have continued driving down the road, and he made a huge, positive impact in this young girl's life," sheriff's deputy David Cuneo told CBS Sacramento.

Crisostomo told KOVR that he was happy that Allen was safe. "The way I see her, she has a wonderful future ahead," he said. "She's doing so well. I'm happy. I'm really happy."

Allen and Ohman later thanked Crisostomo in person at a Postal Service event where he was honored for his heroism. "Ivan himself is a hero for saving me," Allen told Fox, "even though he doesn't think it."

"I was very happy to see her," the carrier said. "The mother and father were very grateful."

Crisostomo's heroics received media attention worldwide, appearing in outlets such as the *New York Post* and CNN; *The Independent* and *The Mirror* in the United Kingdom; and *El Comercio* and Andina news agency in Peru. He said the media coverage of him was far beyond his expectations.

The 20-year letter carrier said he had just wanted to help Allen. "I don't see



Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member Ivan Crisostomo (above and top l) received worldwide media attention for helping to reunite a teenager (top r) who had been kidnapped with her family.

myself as a hero,” Crisostomo said. “One thing was for sure: I was not going to abandon her in that situation.”

## ‘Superhero neighbor’ to the rescue

On the evening of June 1, Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Theresa Jo Belkota** was preparing dinner after returning home and heard screams of “Call 911!” coming from the home of her neighbors, who were also her cousins.

The carrier ran out the door and saw that her cousin’s 10-year-old son, Gavin, had been run over by a riding lawn mower and his foot was severed. The boy’s father, Jason, had been mowing and saw the other two children in front of him, but hadn’t seen Gavin as he began backing up. “It was a horrific, horrific accident,” Belkota said. “No one was to blame.”

The boy was lying on the ground and his parents were in a panic. Gavin’s mother, Jackie, also yelled for Belkota to call 911 when she saw her.

The carrier ran outside and knew what she needed to do to stop the bleeding, so she took charge and asked Jackie to call 911 instead. She then took off her shirt to wrap the boy’s leg; she applied pressure to the femoral artery at the top of it to limit blood loss until medical assistance arrived. “There was tissue just hanging there,” she said. “He had no big toe.”

The carrier instructed Jason to search the yard for the severed foot or any other

body parts. Belkota then instructed one son to get ice and another to grab a blanket. “He might get cold,” she said of Gavin. “I was afraid he’d go into shock.” She then had Gavin recite the Lord’s Prayer again and again to distract him as his parents stayed on the line with the 911 operator.

A medevac helicopter and a police officer with an ambulance soon arrived. The officer had a tourniquet and helped Belkota apply it. She grabbed Gavin from underneath as well as above to make sure that pressure was continuously applied, Belkota explained.

The helicopter had to land in a golf course nearby, so once they had Gavin stabilized, they put him in the ambulance to take him to the medevac.

Her quick actions and decisiveness have been credited for saving the boy’s leg and possibly his life.

Belkota, who said she had no medical training, attributed her quick thinking



Theresa Jo Belkota

to watching an episode of the TV show “Law and Order: SVU” in which a child bled out of his femoral artery in less than a minute. “I never thought I’d have it in me to do something like that,” she said of her actions. “It was a miracle I was even there.”

Gavin was in the hospital for a few weeks and had his foot amputated three inches above the ankle. “He’s healing well and being fitted for a prosthetic foot,” Belkota said, as well as undergoing occupational therapy.

The boy’s family gave Belkota a shirt that reads, “Superhero neighbor,” but the carrier said it’s weird to be called a hero. The 23-year postal veteran said she attributes “all of this to divine intervention and divine providence. I’m just a mailman. I’m just a little speck of dirt on this planet called Earth.”



Tommy Daniels

## Helping someone in need

On April 5, Dallas, TX Branch 132 member **Tommy Daniels** was delivering his route when he came upon customer Linda Garza, who had fallen in her front yard.

The carrier ran over to Garza to help. “Her head was busted on the rocks,” he said. “She was kind of out of it. She couldn’t get up.”

Garza explained that she had been watering her plants and, as she was

## Fire and rescue

One day in June, Fort Myers, FL Branch 2072 member **Steve Weir** was delivering a parcel to the condominium of a customer who happened to work in Weir’s post office. “I went to the

door and smelled smoke,” the carrier said. “I banged on the door.” Weir continued knocking loudly until the customer responded. “He was in a daze,” Weir said. “You couldn’t even see in, it

was so smoky.” The customer had been cooking food and had fallen asleep. After being woken by Weir’s knock, he ran to turn off the stove and open the door and windows to ventilate the home. The

next day, the resident told Weir, “Man, you saved my life.” The 24-year postal veteran said that moments like this are part of being a carrier. “It’s just something that happens,” Weir said. **PR**

getting ready to turn off the faucet, had tripped and fallen backward onto the edge of her garden rocks. She had called out for her husband inside the house, but he hadn't heard her.

Garza could not reach the water spigot and had begun to get wet and muddy. She asked Daniels to turn off the faucet.

Daniels asked Garza if he could help her up, but she said she wanted to wait for her husband because of her knee replacements. The carrier then knocked loudly on the front door to

try to get the husband's attention. The man soon came outside and helped Garza stand up.

Daniels became concerned when he noticed the woman's head bleeding profusely, so her husband called 911. "I rendered aid while we waited for the ambulance," Daniels, an Air Force veteran, said.

The woman received three staples on her head and was treated for an arm injury.

"Is there any kind of recognition you have in the post office to recog-

nize this wonderful person for helping a person he didn't have to but went all out of his way to assist someone?" Garza later wrote to the local postmaster. "I believe we need more people that do the right things in life. You have an awesome person working for you."

Daniels said it felt strange to be called a hero. "It's just trying to help someone out in need," the 12-year USPS employee said. **PR**

## Help on the way



Dyrrol Washington

On Saturday, May 12, Bux-Mont, PA Branch 920 member **Dyrrol Washington** was delivering his route when he noticed a young woman in the front seat of her car with her head leaning against the door. The carrier thought the situation was strange, but continued delivering the block. When he looped back around, the vehicle was still there. "Something just told me that it didn't look right," he said. Following his intuition, Washington approached the vehicle, and said, "Hello? Hello?" He got no response. A neighbor soon pulled up and came over, saying that the woman

had been there for a while. "We started looking around," he said. The back windows were tinted, but when Washington got close, he noticed a toddler in the back seat of the vehicle, not crying—just sitting and looking around. Washington called out to the woman again, though she did not respond. "We tried to open the door and we banged on the window," the carrier said. He attempted to notify the homeowner of the situation; however, no one answered the door. After repeated attempts to wake the woman, the neighbor called 911. Soon, the woman's boyfriend came over and said, "She's just asleep" and "Why'd you call the cops?" before shouting, "Wake up! Wake up!" at the woman. She suddenly snapped to attention. "She gets out of the car, stumbling," Washington said. When police responded, the carrier continued on his route. He hasn't heard an update on the situation, but was commended by his post

office for his caring actions. "It's sad that things like this happen. I'm glad I stopped," the fourth-year letter carrier said. The baby didn't deserve that. I just wanted to make sure everything was all right."

**H**arrisburg, PA Branch 500 member **Justin Falduts** seems to always be in the right place at the right time for a certain customer with a disability. On May 25, he was going about his route when he heard his customer, Ellen Duffy, yelling for help. "Ellen, are you OK?" he called out. She responded that she was not. Falduts noticed that the door was unlocked, so the carrier asked if it was OK to enter, and she said yes. Duffy's chair lift had apparently malfunctioned, and she had been dangling half out of her seat over a set of steps in a full upright position. "She was holding on for dear life," Falduts said. "She was in serious pain."

The carrier promptly called 911 and then was able to stabilize his customer long enough to keep her from falling until help arrived, as he was afraid to move her. "I was just trying to stay with her and keep her mind off of it." The woman now is home and has recovered after a brief hospitalization. This was not the first time the carrier helped Duffy. In March 2016, he called for emergency help when Duffy had called out for assistance on his route after having fallen. He secured a key from management and guided paramedics to her apartment. At the time, Duffy had suffered extensive injuries to her leg that required surgery. "She's my buddy now," Falduts said. But the 19-year letter carrier denied that any special heroics were involved. "Anyone would have done the same thing," he said. "I'm just glad I could help." **PR**