

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. 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.

Concern for 'family' saves the day

On May 31, Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 member **Tonya Rutledge** was at the post office pulling down her route at her case, which was right by the door. "Someone said, 'Something's wrong with Pete,'" she said. "I ran outside immediately."

Fellow Branch 2184 member **Jintal Patel**, who was acting as a 204-b, also heard that an employee was possibly having a heart attack in the parking lot at the dock and rushed outside.

Peter Duncan, a city carrier assistant, was sitting on the back bumper of his LLV in distress. "He said he was having chest pains and his arm was numb," Patel said. "I went out there and told him, have a seat, take a deep breath, we'll call paramedics."

Rutledge called 911 to request emergency services and stayed on the phone with the operator. "I was touching him to see if he was sweating or cold," Rutledge said. "I told him, 'You're going to be OK.'"

Meanwhile, Patel asked Duncan if there was anyone else they could contact for him. "We called his parents," he said.

The two carriers stayed with Duncan until EMS arrived on scene, at which point Rutledge went to open a complicated gate at the post office for the

ambulance to get through.

The injured carrier now is fully recovered and back to work.

"I was just doing part of my job," Patel, a five-year letter carrier, said.

Rutledge concurred. "I didn't think I did a whole lot," the 24-year postal veteran said. "I was just concerned about my fellow co-worker. We're one big family. I am my brother's keeper."

Letter carrier helps gunshot victim

While delivering mail on his route on July 25, Burlington, IA Branch 222 member **Robert Johnson** was startled when a man ran up to him covered in blood, screaming that he had been shot.

"There was blood all over his face and shoulders," the carrier said. "I told him to sit down and I would get him an ambulance," Johnson continued, but the man was incredibly agitated. "He told me he had to keep going because he had been shot."

The carrier was stunned, but after he looked at the back of the man's head, which was bleeding severely, he realized the man did indeed have a gunshot wound. Johnson scanned the area to make sure they were not in imminent danger, and then called 911.

Johnson then tried to persuade the gunshot victim to stay with him until the police and paramedics arrived, since he was concerned by the amount of blood the man was losing from his injury. But the victim wouldn't stay put: "He walked off, and I told the dispatcher which way he had gone."

The victim was located and transported to the hospital for medical treatment, and now is on the road to recovery. Johnson declined any praise for his action. "I'm not a hero, I just called 911," the five-year letter carrier said. "He was hurt pretty bad; I just hope he's doing OK."



Jintal Patel (l) and Tonya Rutledge

Help on the way



Jayden Troskowski

On Saturday, Aug. 3, Albany, NY Branch 29 member **Jayden Troskowski** was nearing the end of a park-and-loop on a route he was filling in on when “I heard a woman screaming from behind me,” he said. He realized she was across the street. “Once she noticed me,” he said, “she yelled to me, explaining she just walked into the house to find her mother face-down on the floor, and she’s not breathing.” The woman said that the phones in the house weren’t working and asked the carrier to call 911 and also to get her sister, who lived two houses down. Troskowski did so, and he and the sister both ran back to the house, where they approached the elderly woman on the ground. “She was blue. She wasn’t breathing,” the carrier said. “I used to be an EMT, so I rolled the woman onto her back and began CPR until fire and police showed up 10 minutes later.” Later that day, he was texted by EMTs he used to work with that they had been able to get the woman breathing again; however, two days later, the

carrier was told that the family had decided to take the woman off life support. “They were grateful the entire family could be there for her to say goodbye,” the first-year letter carrier said.

On May 8, Greater East Bay, CA Branch 1111 member **Robert Doppler** was driving on his route when he saw a woman across the street from where he was delivering. “I saw her walk to her mailbox,” he said. The 81-year-old customer, who has Parkinson’s disease, had gone to the curb, but the mail hadn’t yet been delivered. She could see Doppler down the road and decided to wait. Having a hard time standing, she went to sit on the electrical box in her yard, but lost her balance and fell forward, hitting her head and face. She was unable to get up, call for help or stop the bleeding on her own. Seeing this, Doppler took action. “I went over there to see if she was all right,” he said. “She was bleeding from her head.” He called for an ambulance and stayed with the woman until help arrived, trying to block her from the sun’s harsh rays in the process. The woman was expected to recover. “You might say, ‘Oh, you were in the right place at the right time,’ which would be true,” the woman’s family wrote to Doppler. “But that alone



Robert Doppler

doesn’t make people step up to help someone who’s badly hurt and can’t help themselves.... You are a hero. We can’t thank you enough.... On Mother’s Day, we will hold our mom a little tighter and thank God for you.” The three-year letter carrier appreciated the kind words, but said, “I feel like any other carrier would have done the same thing for a customer.”

On June 21, Charlotte, NC Branch 545 member **Art Watley Jr.** was driving on his route when he heard a woman crying out for help. The carrier quickly parked and secured his vehicle and proceeded toward the voice. “When I got closer to her house, I heard her in the back yard,” he said. The customer had gone to check on her plants but had slipped and then fell. “She was lying in between plants and a couple shrubs. She was very distraught,” Watley said. He found the woman lying on the ground, unable to get up. “She had a medical alert pendant on and pressed it,” he said. A neighbor also had heard some of the commotion and came to help. “We helped her up and into the house,” Watley said. He and the man stayed with her and kept her calm until EMS arrived. When the carrier noticed that the life alert had transmitted a slightly different address than where they were, he ran to

flag down the ambulance and direct it to his customer’s house. Once the woman was in the hands of paramedics, Watley continued on his route without telling anyone what had happened. The neighbor later called the post office to commend the 22-year letter carrier for his actions. Watley, a Marine Corps veteran and current Air Force Reservist, chalked up his actions to “perfect timing,” adding, “If someone’s in need, I’m always there.”

Youngstown, OH Branch 385 member **Terry Helsel** was walking on his route on Saturday, June 8, when he passed one of his regular customers, Delores Staples. She had been talking on the phone but then dropped it and collapsed. The carrier rushed over, and realized that Staples had been eating a peanut butter sandwich—and now was choking. Understanding the severity of the situation, Helsel leapt into action. Despite having no prior medical training, he repeatedly performed the Heimlich maneuver on her until her airway cleared. “I just did it on instinct,” the five-year carrier explained. “I just did what I needed to do, and I had to do something.” Even more serendipitously, Helsel’s quick thinking meant that he potentially saved the mother of one of his fellow letter carriers—Staples’s daughter, Alexis Stewart, is a full-time carrier at the branch. **PR**



Art Watley Jr.

“[The truck] ran over his leg. It just happened so fast. It was the most shocking thing I ever saw.”

—Christopher Paolera

Letter carrier or guardian angel?

Boston, MA Branch 34 member **Christopher Paolera** was delivering packages on July 11 when he saw a po-



Christopher Paolera

lice officer on construction detail in front of an apartment complex. He then noticed that a city dump truck was backing up close to the officer, with no audible warning.

“It ran over his leg,” the carrier said. “It just

happened so fast. It was the most shocking thing I ever saw.”

The police officer’s right leg was pinned under the tire. “I ran over to the truck and pounded on the door,” Paolera said. The driver had not been aware, but quickly stopped the vehicle.

“Get the truck off me,” the officer pleaded to the carrier. Paolera said he was scared to tell the driver to back off, because he didn’t want the man to bleed out, but did so. He helped the officer as the driver moved the vehicle forward and off of the man.

The carrier realized that he did not

have his cell phone on him, so he used the officer’s radio to call for help, saying, “Officer down.” He stayed with the officer and kept him calm until multiple police cruisers began arriving.

The officer called Paolera a few weeks later to thank him, saying, “All I could think of was, today was my day to die and then you showed up.” The man received two rods and four pins in his leg, but he was recovering well.

The 30-year letter carrier said “there was no thought process at all” when deciding to jump into action. “I’m so happy a tragedy could be prevented,” Paolera said, but added, “I think anyone would have done it—anyone at all. It’s humankind.”

Alert carrier finds missing toddler

“I was just in the right place at the right time,” Wausau, WI Branch 215 member **Nathan Klopotek** explained about his timely intervention on July 18.

The carrier was walking his usual route when he heard a customer “out hollering her kid’s name,” he said.

When he asked if anything was wrong, the woman told him that she

Eye on the elderly

On Saturday, June 8, Youngstown, OH Branch 385 member **Brian Baber** saw a 91-year-old woman walking down a main road on his route. He recognized her at once—the woman’s daughter, **Anna Glover**, had been his parents’ letter carrier before she retired. More importantly, Baber knew that the woman had Alzheimer’s and wasn’t

supposed to be outside without her husband. “And there she was, walking down a busy street,” he said. The carrier immediately pulled over his postal vehicle and walked toward her, but she didn’t recognize him. “She told me she was waiting for a ride from her brother,” Baber said. He convinced her to wait on the porch with him instead

of in the street, and then contacted the post office. They got in touch with Glover, but by the time she and her husband **Roosevelt** (also a retired letter carrier) had gotten dressed, Baber already had handled the situation. After he knew that the woman was safe and settled with her daughter, the carrier left to finish his route. The next day, Glover

stopped by the post office to thank him. But Baber downplayed his role in the situation—he repeatedly stated, “It wasn’t nearly as dramatic as it sounds.” The 33-year postal veteran continued, “I’m just glad the bosses gave me the time to sit and wait with her. But I think anyone in the neighborhood would have done the same thing.” **PR**

had been in the bathroom when her 2-year-old son managed to escape from the house.

Klopotek remembered that he had heard crying earlier on his route, so he hopped back into his LLV to return to the place where he thought he had heard the sound.

When he pulled down the street, he found the little boy right away. “I saw him running down the middle of the road,” Klopotek said.

He picked the boy up and drove the child back to his house. By the time

the carrier returned with the missing child, the police and other neighbors had mobilized to help search.

The police were still talking to the mother. “The mom was very, very happy,” the carrier said.

Klopotek rebuffed any idea that he had been especially heroic. “I felt like anyone would have done it,” the three-year carrier said.

But one person did give him full credit: the little boy told his mom that “the mailman helped me find my way home.” **PR**



Wausau, WI Branch 215 member Nathan Klopotek received recognition at his post office for helping reunite a missing child with his family.

Neighborhood watch



On July 23, Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Dustin Brown** had just finished a walking loop and was getting back into his vehicle when he spotted a toddler walking down the street. “He was wearing nothing but a diaper,” the carrier said. “There were no other parents or kids around.” Brown kept tabs on the boy and began to follow him as he turned a corner. He then pulled up

next to the 3-year-old boy and asked where his mom and dad were. “He was kind of hard to understand,” the carrier said, but the youngster mentioned something about a park. Gaining his trust, Brown convinced the boy to come to his postal vehicle with him, and then he called police. The mother had been out looking for the child, and she soon was found in the neighborhood. As she came to pick up her son, she thanked the four-year letter carrier. Brown said being called a hero for his actions was “a stretch,” adding, “I hope anyone else would do the same thing.”

On Saturday, July 6, Mason City, IA Branch 471 member **Melaine Dix** was performing her LLV inspection when a letter carrier accompanying her noticed a young child named Tatum in the middle of a highway near the post office. “Cars

were swerving around him,” Dix said. “He only had underwear on.” She stopped her vehicle inspection and rushed to the boy while witnessing two vehicles narrowly miss hitting him. “My instinct was just kind of to run down and get him,” she said. “He came to me willingly.” Dix stopped

further traffic and walked Tatum out of the busy highway and toward his house. It was not the first time the carrier had come across Tatum, so she knew where he lived—about two blocks down on her route. “I knocked on the door and couldn’t get an answer,” Dix said. At this point, a clerk came to check on the situation. The clerk knew where Tatum’s aunt lived, so she drove the carrier and Tatum to the woman’s home. Unfortunately, there wasn’t an answer there, either. They called 911 and met with a police officer back at Tatum’s home, where he eventually was reunited with his mother. “I don’t know if it was [because of] my motherly instincts,” Dix, a seven-year carrier, said of her actions, but added, “I think anyone would do it.” **PR**

