

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.

Carrier helps save a life when there's no way out

"I had just finished a relay and was driving to my next park point," Ashland, WI Branch 42 member **Chris Metropulos** said of delivering on Oct. 9, 2018.

The carrier looked in his rearview mirror and saw smoke. He initially thought it may just have been from a particular customer's boiler system, but "it quickly got super thick," he said. Metropulos parked and hurried over to the house, where he saw a woman at the second-story window screaming for help.

By that point, the fire was bursting through the roof of the home. The carrier asked if anyone else was inside, and she said no. "She was in shock," he said. "When I saw the flames, I knew I couldn't go in. There was not enough time to get a ladder. I instructed her to stay where she was."

Emergency personnel had not yet arrived, so Metropulos asked a man who appeared from behind the house, and looked to be sooty from the smoke, to help him catch the woman. The carrier and the man stood side by side, and Metropulos yelled to the woman to jump and that they would catch her.

The two men locked elbows to help brace for her. The woman dangled from her window and pushed off the house, and the two safely caught her from about 20 feet below. Seconds later, the window she had been at burst into flames.

When a car pulled up, Metropulos asked the driver if they had called 911. The driver said they had.

The carrier made sure that the woman was safe, and when he heard the sirens approaching, he continued along his route.

Emergency responders soon arrived to battle the fire and treat the woman and the man, both of whom had suffered burns in the incident. The man who had helped the carrier was also a resident of the house. The *Ashland Daily Press* reported that area residents had complained of illicit drug activity at the site and that numerous individuals had fled the scene following an explosion, though Metropulos said he hadn't seen any of that when he got there.

"It was pretty scary the next day when I looked at the house," he said of the scene. "There really was no other way out."

But don't try to call him a hero. "We see things all the time on our routes," the 32-year letter carrier and Navy veteran said. "Anybody would have done it, but no one was around, so it was me. I just happened to be there."

Going the extra mile for a customer

Athens, GA Branch 588 member **Patrick Daniel** was delivering on his route on Sept. 8, 2018, to his elderly customer, Joseph Cardisco. "Every once in a while, he meets me at the mailbox," the carrier said. "We spoke, I handed him the mail, and I moved on."

Cardisco then made his way back



Ashland, WI Branch 42 member **Chris Metropulos** helped catch a woman who he convinced to jump from a burning building.



Patrick Daniel

up his steep driveway. “I always look back to make sure he’s OK,” Daniel said. This time, though, as Daniel checked his rearview mirror as he drove away, he noticed that Cardisco had fallen down.

“I parked my LLV, jumped out, and ran down to Mr. Cardisco to assist him up out of the street,” the carrier said. “He was sort of bloody and bruised up. He had a bad bump on his head.” The customer’s fall also had dislodged his hearing aid and broken his glasses.

After getting Cardisco back on his

feet, Daniel recruited a neighbor who is a nurse to help assess his injuries. The two got Cardisco into his garage and found the man’s wife inside the home. “She had no idea it had happened,” Daniel said.

The carrier and the neighbor encouraged the wife to take the man to the hospital, which she did.

Knowing that the situation was in good hands, Daniel continued on his route and checked on Cardisco the next time he was on the route. “We have become good friends,” the 30-

year letter carrier and Navy combat veteran said, explaining that they trade war stories.

Daniel also suggested that the family’s mailbox be put up on the front porch instead of at the end of the hilly driveway to prevent falls, which they did.

Despite praise from his thankful customer, Daniel denies that his actions were heroic. “I just want to make sure he’s OK,” he said. “I was doing something I’d do for anyone. You see someone in need, you help.”

Help on the way

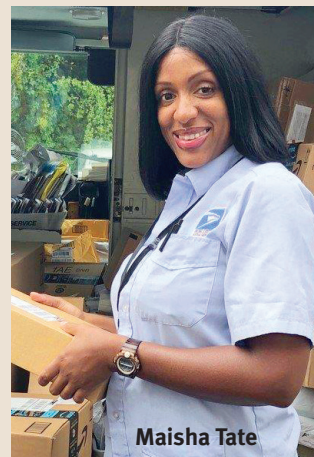
While driving back to the post office after finishing his route on July 25, 2018, Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Garrett Rhodes** was stopped at a red light, waiting to turn left. He saw young kids weaving their way among the stopped cars. Most of the group had made it through, but he saw a boy lag behind. “A lady came through and turned right, and she didn’t see the kid.” The boy was struck. “I pulled my vehicle into a parking lot and ran

across the street,” Rhodes said. A nurse who had been passing by had already stopped and was administering aid. The carrier said the kid was “skinned up pretty bad” and was bleeding from the mouth. Rhodes tried to assist the nurse. “I asked if someone was calling the police,” he said. “I didn’t provide a procedure, but I did want to jump out and make sure that the kid was OK. He was talking and responding.” Rhodes stayed with the child and waited for EMTs and police to arrive. The second-year letter carrier denied that he had performed any heroics in the incident, rather that stopping was “something I felt was my duty as a citizen,” he said. “I want to be a part of helping someone.”

“My customer was out doing lawn work,” New Jersey Merged Branch 38 member **Maisha Tate**

said of delivering mail on Aug. 22, 2018. As she circled back around on her route, she noticed Mr. Kecherson sprawled out on the front steps. The carrier ran over to the man and tried to talk to him, but he was unconscious. “I tried to lift him, but I couldn’t, so I put his head on my lap.” She called 911 and was speaking to an operator when a neighbor wandered over to help Kecherson. They kept trying to talk to the man.

“He was making noises, but wasn’t coherent,” Tate said. He also had a monitor on him that kept beeping. The emergency operator said Kecherson most likely was having a diabetic episode and needed sugar. They urged Tate to see if the neighbor had juice, but they unfortunately did not have any. Police soon responded and took Tate’s place caring for Kecherson. The customer had indeed had a diabetic



Maisha Tate

episode, and he spent a few days in the hospital. Upon his release, Kecherson stopped in to the post office to bring flowers and commend Tate for her heroic actions, which he said saved his life. “I’m thankful he’s OK,” the 12-year postal veteran said. “These things happen all the time. You don’t think anything of it, just because it’s your nature to do it.” **PR**



Garrett Rhodes

The eyes, ears and nose of the community

Northern Kentucky Branch 374 member **Kevin O'Day** was nearing the end of his route on Aug. 8, 2018, when, he said, "I turned the corner and I thought I smelled smoke."

The carrier previously had been a firefighter, so he said his nose is trained to discriminate among different smells. The smoke was coming from a local woodworking business that is serviced by another letter carrier.

At first O'Day thought it might simply be the exhaust for the business, but

just to be sure, he went to check it out. Using his firefighting training, he first touched the door and door handle; neither felt hot, so he decided to continue on his route.

As he turned away from the business, O'Day saw smoke billowing out of the top of the building. This time, he ran inside and saw the employees gathered on the showroom floor. "Your building is on fire upstairs," he told them. "You've got to get out of here."

All of the employees began evacuating, and O'Day helped the owner, Melyssa Kirn, get her three dogs and some supplies to safety as he called 911.



Kevin O'Day

Firefighters arrived quickly and put out the fire, which apparently had been started by an electrical short in a machine. There were no injuries, and the business was operating four days later.

"We're blessed that he was just around the corner," Kirn later told the post office about O'Day. "It's kind of a miracle that [the fire] didn't get worse."

The four-year letter carrier said he was just providing a humane service. "I was at the right place at the right time," O'Day said. "Any normal person who had an eyeball out would have done the same thing." **PR**

Eye on the elderly



Martin Navejas Jr.

While on his route on Aug. 14, 2018, Arvada, CO Branch 4405 member **Martin Navejas Jr.** was delivering mail to a mailbox next to the front door at an elderly customer's house. "There was a woman standing by the door," the carrier said. "I smiled and handed her the mail. She tried to get my attention, but she couldn't speak. I figured something was wrong." The woman motioned for him to come

inside, and she gestured to her oxygen machine. It appeared that the oxygen tank was turned off, so Navejas tried to turn it on. However, the machine would beep and then stop running shortly after the button had been pressed. The customer was still trying to speak but couldn't. Worried, the carrier called 911. "I tried to comfort her while I was giving the dispatcher all the information," he said. An ambulance soon arrived and paramedics said that the woman might be having a stroke. "They thanked me for calling them and reacting to the situation quickly," he said. Navejas went back to his route when he saw that his customer was in good hands. A few weeks later, the woman's nephew told him that she had since died, but that the family was grateful for his help. "I didn't do anything," Navejas, a second-year letter carrier,

said. "It was the paramedics that did all the work."

While delivering his route on Sept. 11, 2018, Erie, PA Branch 284 member **Eric Elmquist** noticed that things seemed off at customer Ralph Bower's house. "The mail started building up in his mailbox, which wasn't like him," the carrier said. He knew that the man lived alone, and saw that his car was still in the driveway.

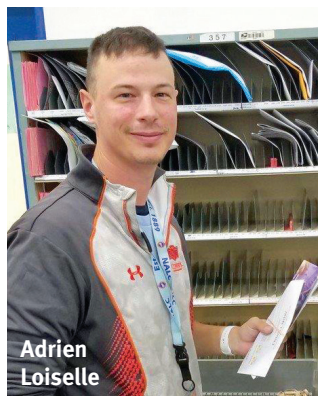


Eric Elmquist

"Something wasn't right," Elmquist said. He knocked on the door, but received no answer. Concerned, the carrier knocked on the door of a neighbor's house and asked if she could check on Bower. The woman's husband worked for the fire department, so she quickly called him. Soon after, the neighbors found Bower lying on the bathroom floor, where he had been for almost five days, unable to get up after having fallen. The neighbors called 911, and an ambulance arrived to take Bower to the hospital. "He's made a full recovery since then," said Elmquist, who has been with USPS for 19 years. The neighbors and EMTs from the local fire department came to the post office to commend Elmquist for his efforts. The Army veteran said he was just glad Bower was OK. "I was worried about him," Elmquist said. **PR**

Neighborhood watch

While driving his route on Oct. 1, 2018, Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Adrien Loiselle** detected a strong odor of natural gas as he approached a house. “It was really, really strong,” he said, “almost overwhelming.” He could hear the woman’s dog barking, and he saw lights on inside the house. The city carrier assistant knocked on the front door but received no answer. He called his supervisor, who suggested he call 911. Loiselle did



so, and reported that he suspected a gas leak. The dispatched fire and rescue squad arrived at the home just minutes later. “Within 10 minutes, they were digging up the yard, so there was definitely a gas leak,” Loiselle said. The customer later stated that she had woken up with a headache and nausea and had called in sick to work that day. The woman told the post office that the ending could have been very different had Loiselle simply walked

away. She credits the carrier for not only saving her life, but the life of her dog and possibly the neighbors’ lives as well. “I think I did what any of the other carriers would have done,” the first-year letter carrier and current Army National Guard member said. “Our job is to deliver the mail, but we’re only human.”

On Aug. 28, 2018, Youngstown, OH Branch 385 member **Kelli Carlson** was delivering mail at the end of her route on a busy main road when she noticed an unattended toddler playing in a front yard. “All she had was a diaper on and [she was] carrying a flip-flop,” the carrier said. Carlson delivered to one last box and, when she turned around again, the youngster was in the street. The carrier immediately pulled to the side of the road and picked up the child, preventing oncoming traffic from getting near her. She headed toward the home where she had first seen the child. “I went to the house and knocked on the door,” Carlson said. She could hear voices inside. A woman answered, and the carrier said, “Is this your baby? She was in the middle of the street.” The grateful mother said that she had been doing laundry and wasn’t sure how her daughter had gotten out. When Carlson was sure that the situation was under control, she contin-

ued on her rounds. The post office received multiple calls from neighborhood residents praising the 15-year postal veteran’s actions. “I’m not sure I’m a hero,” Carlson said, adding that she was just glad she could help the little girl.

Tacoma, WA Branch 130 member **Dave Walker** was delivering mail to the home of Dan and Nancy McDonald, who had been on vacation for weeks. As he distributed mail one day in early October 2018, “I heard a beeping sound, but didn’t think too much of it,” he said. But the next day, an odor became apparent as he put the mail in the front door slot. “I got a big whiff of gas,” he said, and he again heard the beeping from inside the home. Walker was concerned, so he immediately walked about four blocks to a fire station and explained the situation. Firefighters and police immediately responded. “They went and checked it out, but they didn’t detect any gas,” Walker said. As they did, the carrier went to a next-door neighbor, explained the situation, and the neighbor contacted the McDonalds. The bad smell apparently had been due to a large possum, which was living in the crawl space under the house and was removed. But something still seemed wrong afterward, so the family, which had returned to their home, called the gas



company, which came out to the home and, this time, discovered a gas leak and fixed it. The beeping Walker had heard had been the carbon monoxide detector. “My husband and I feel strongly that Dave Walker went above and beyond his call of duty,” the McDonalds wrote in a letter to the local postmaster. “He took the time and the effort to make sure that our home was not in any kind of danger. This incident could have ended in tragedy. We would like Dave Walker recognized as being an exceptionally caring employee and an excellent representative of the U.S. Post Office. We are blessed to have him as our mail carrier.” Walker, a 12-year letter carrier and a Marine Corps veteran, brushed off any accolades for his actions. “All I did was notify the fire department,” he said. **PR**