

## 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.

## Watching out for cross-craft co-workers

On Saturday, April 6, Louisville, KY Branch 14 member **Jeffrey King** was working at the post office when he heard a woman from the rural side of the station say, "Does anyone know CPR?"

King thought this was simply for a safety test and was rushing out to start his route, but realized that it was a serious situation when the woman said, "Curlee has collapsed." King had worked with rural carrier Gary Curlee for 26 years, and he was lying on the floor of the post office, unconscious and not breathing.

"I dropped my mail and ran over there," King said. "Curlee was curled there in a heap."

Curlee's face and head had turned dark purple. The station manager, James Pat Webb, noticed that he had food in his mouth and thought he was choking. Webb tried to remove the food from his mouth; he got enough out to open the airway, but not all of it.

"As a medic in the Army, I've seen a lot of battle wounds," King said. "I grabbed him by his wrists." King then got help to drag the man to the workroom floor so he could better assist him.

Webb was holding Curlee's head, helping keep his airway open, but he had no heartbeat. King gave him a rescue breath to fill his mouth with air and then began chest compressions.

Clerk Debra Carver appeared and said, "Jeff, let me help you—I was a nurse."

King began mouth-to-mouth breathing and alternated with Carver, who did chest compressions. They continued for 25 minutes until EMTs arrived to take over.

The paramedics instructed the postal employees to continue their efforts while the paramedics assessed the situation. After evaluating the impact of the breathing and compressions, the EMTs said they would take over. They tried to shock the man with paddles before hooking up IVs, putting Curlee into an ambulance and taking him to the hospital.

"His heart restarted 45 minutes later after he collapsed," King said, adding that doctors said Curlee had experienced a "sudden cardiac death" when the electricity in his heart quit.

Curlee's family was told he'd die by midnight; he didn't. He was pronounced brain-dead by 6 a.m. But two days later, the man came out of his coma, asking what had happened.

Curlee is now home and continues to recover. "He's made a miraculous recovery," King said. "Curlee is a walking, talking testimony about coming back from the dead."

King expressed that helping their co-worker was truly a team effort, but that they are not heroes. "I didn't save his life," he said. "I believe we did not fail Curlee, but I believe it's God that does the saving."



Louisville, KY Branch 14 member Jeffrey King (left) and clerk Debra Carver (right) were credited with saving the life of their co-worker, rural carrier Gary Curlee, by giving him CPR after he collapsed on the post office floor.

## Keeping cool in the face of fire

Rockville, MD Branch 3825 member **Daniel Colon** pulled up to a home in his mail truck to deliver mail on May 7. As he opened a mailbox, the carrier saw smoke rising nearby. Then, “I noticed there was a loud pop,” he said.

Examining the situation more closely, he saw that the smoke was emanating from an SUV in the driveway; then flames erupted. “It started to spread pretty fast to the house,” he said.

Colon got out of his postal vehicle and carefully went around the fire to the front door, where he knew the customer had a smart doorbell. He rang it, which sent an alert to the cell phone of homeowner Kani Bassey, who had left her home 15 minutes earlier. Colon then called 911.

At the door, the carrier could hear the woman’s crated dogs and pet ferret inside. After hanging up with 911, Colon ran back to his truck to get out of the way of the growing fire. “It all kind of happened really fast,” he



**Daniel Colon, a Rockville, MD Branch 3825 member (right), received media attention after helping to save a customer’s home from further damage when he spotted an SUV on fire in the driveway (top).**

said, adding that going to the door was scary “because the truck was blazing.”

Bassey arrived about 20 minutes later, by which time local firefighters were extinguishing the blaze. The three pets were alive and uninjured. When Colon saw that the situation was in good hands, the five-year letter carrier went back to his route.

Bassey and her four children lived out of a hotel while their home was being repaired.

“He takes his job very seriously,” Bassey told WJLA-TV. “And for that I’m extremely appreciative. Thank you so much for saving the rest of our house, and the pets, and just being there when he was.”

Colon brushed off any accolades



for his actions, saying, “I just did what any other mail carrier would have done.” **PR**

## Neighborhood watch

“I heard a baby crying,” Northeast Florida Branch 53 member **William Compton** recalled. It was March 28, and he had just made a U-turn on a dead-end street on his route. He looked at the patch of woods next to him and went in to see if he could find something. That’s when he noticed the toddler. “I started to look around to see if there was a mother or something,” the carrier

said. The 3-year-old was lost. “She had been bitten by mosquitoes. It was a scary thing,” Compton said. He brought the little girl to his postal truck, where he called police and then his supervisor. “She would not stop crying,” he said. “I gave her cookies to calm her down.” She was soon sitting calmly as they waited for help. Police arrived and discovered that the toddler apparently had gotten out of

the house when her brothers came out to play and while their grandmother was asleep. Compton continued to wait at the scene until postal inspectors arrived to take a report as well. “The child was safely returned to her family,” he said. Compton didn’t think his actions were a big deal, though. “I do my job every day,” said the 40-year carrier and Army veteran who served in Vietnam. **PR**



**William Compton**



## Help on the way



Cecilia Villegas-Robey

One day in March, Sun City, AZ Branch 6156 member **Cecilia Villegas-Robey** was delivering her route when she found a customer, Marie, sitting in her car. “She just did not look right, very weak, lethargic,” she said, but added, “She was well enough to tell me she wasn’t well.” The carrier offered to help, and the woman said that she couldn’t move and would like help getting inside. Villegas-Robey gently helped Marie out of the car and into her home. “She couldn’t stand very well, couldn’t walk very well. She had no sense of balance,” the carrier said. Once inside, she sat the woman down in her recliner. “I asked her if I could call 911,” Villegas-Robey said, but the woman instead asked the carrier to call her friend to come to the house. The customer later called the post office to say that, without Villegas-Robey’s help, she would have been in dire straits because of her medical issues. The 14-year letter carrier brushed off any mention of accolades. “I just see myself as any other person who would help out

another human being,” Villegas-Robey said. “I would do it for anyone.”

On June 3, Little Valley, NY Branch 2481 member **Dante Linyear** was walking his route when he noticed a postal clerk he knew who lived in the neighborhood speaking with his neighbor. The neighbor went back to mowing his lawn, but then started screaming. “His head hit the sidewalk,” Linyear said. “I dropped my mailbag and ran over to him.” The city carrier assistant began to assess the man’s injuries. “He was foaming and bleeding from the mouth,” he said. “He was fading in and out. I knew enough to keep him talking. I was just letting him know someone was there with him.” Linyear shouted out for someone to contact 911, and the clerk heard his call and did so. The carrier asked another neighbor for a blanket, which he put under the man’s head to make him more comfortable until paramedics arrived. An ambulance soon arrived to take the man to the hospital. EMTs said that the man had had a seizure. The customer spent a few nights in the hospital before returning home. The man and his wife later thanked Linyear for his actions. “I just tried to do the right thing as a citizen,” the first-year letter carrier said.



Beth Toomer

Fort Dodge, IA Branch 645 member **Beth Toomer** was delivering mail on the morning of June 11 when she heard a man inside his home. “I heard him say, ‘The mail is here,’” she said, adding that it was strange, since the man lived alone. The carrier yelled through the open living room window to see whether he was all right, but the man frantically screamed for help in reply. She notified him that she was coming inside and received permission in response. “I found him lying on his bathroom floor,” she said. “He had a pretty good gash on his noggin.” The man had fallen in his bathroom and cut himself severely enough that he had lost a large amount of blood and also had bruised his ribs. The man told Toomer that he had been lying on the bathroom floor since about 2 a.m. and had been yelling for help the whole time. The first-year carrier called 911 and waited with the man for police to arrive. Toomer called her actions a “right place, right time kind of deal,” adding, “By the grace of God, I heard him hollering.”

On July 31, North Little Rock, AR Branch 3745 member **Robert Murphy** was serving as a City Carrier Academy instructor when he was approached by a new city carrier assistant. “Hey, Bobby, there’s



Robert Murphy

a girl in the bathroom and she’s not breathing,” she told him. Murphy rushed to the restroom. A rural carrier student, Suzanne, had experienced a medical emergency and was lying on the floor of one of the stalls. “She was purplish-blue,” he said, and was making noises. Another rural carrier came inside the room and said, “We need to give her CPR.” Relying on the skills he had learned in the Air Force, Murphy jumped into action. “You don’t think about it,” he said, but admitted being a bit scared and having “the realization that, what if she didn’t come out of it in your hands?” Murphy said that he and the rural carrier rotated back and forth, speaking to the woman and giving chest compressions. They continued performing the life-saving procedure until emergency personnel arrived about 20 minutes later. Suzanne was transported to the hospital and was expected to make a full recovery. “[EMTs] said if we hadn’t done CPR... she wouldn’t have made it,” Murphy said. But he doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I think we all would have done the same thing,” the 16-year carrier said. “I was glad I was there at the right place at the right time.” **PR**