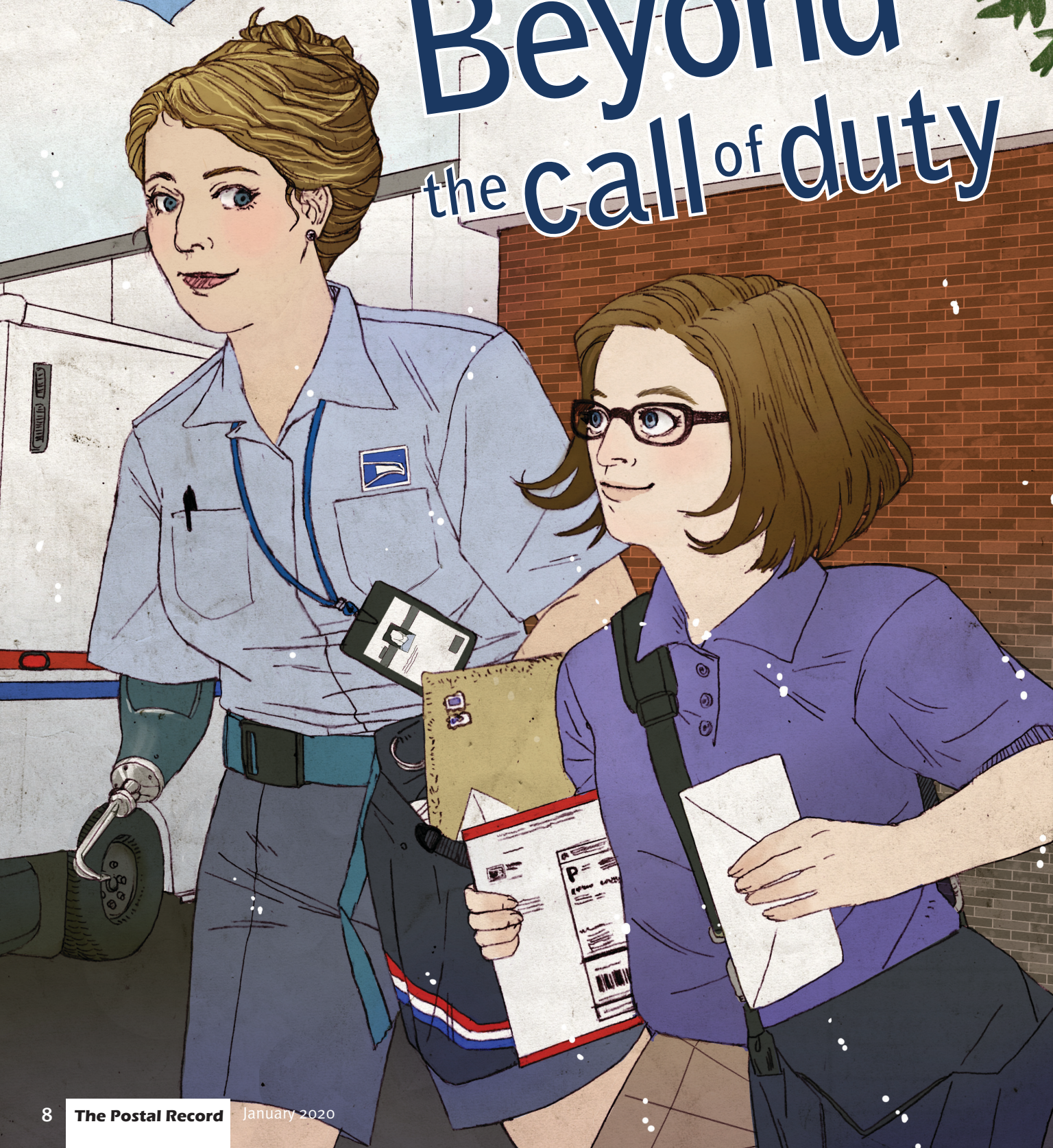


Beyond the call of duty



Letter carriers deliver community service year-round

Letter carriers set an example for their community every day by their hard work, dedication and compassion for their customers. Sometimes carriers take extra steps to show others what service to the community means.

In this issue of *The Postal Record*, we bring you a few stories of carriers who go the extra mile for others. Some encourage people with difficult challenges to live life to the fullest. Some give blood to save lives. Some bring joy to their neighbors or

patrons by helping them fix problems. Whatever they do, these carriers remind us that we can all find ways to bring happiness and fulfillment to our communities.

We know that for every story in this issue, there are many more, because NALC members and branches help those in their communities year-round in a variety of ways. If you have a story to share with us, please contact *The Postal Record* by phone at 202-662-2851, by email at postalrecord@nalc.org or by letter at 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001.

On a route for a day

Melissa Tilton had some help on her route one day last August—Cincinnati, OH, resident Grace Flannery, a young woman with Down syndrome looking for a job in the mail field, cased the mail with her and went out with her to deliver it.

Tilton, a four-year carrier and Cincinnati Branch 43 member, served as Flannery's job coach that hot summer day. Though it was just one day in the life of a letter carrier to fulfill Flannery's keen interest in mail delivery, Tilton showed Flannery how to do every task necessary to deliver the mail.

"She did every part, which is fantastic," Tilton said. "Her accuracy was fantastic and she had a great attitude. She was very careful, very thorough, and she did a great job," Tilton said. "I loved her passion, and her people skills are really, really good.

"Some of the customers came out on

their porch to get the mail from Grace," Tilton said, and this gave Flannery a chance to greet patrons, a task she handled with aplomb.

Flannery also got a sample of the hot weather letter carriers often face. "She sweated right there with me," Tilton said, "and she didn't complain."

The postmaster chose Tilton to help Flannery because she has a prosthetic right arm and could relate to Flannery's challenges. After her arm was amputated due to side effects from medication for an infection, Tilton could no longer perform her job as a nurse. The Postal Service gave her a chance at a new career. Even with her right arm gone, Tilton made it through 18 months as a CCA to reach career status.

Tilton is thankful to the Postal Service for giving her the opportunity, and she hopes some of it rubbed off on Flannery.



Melissa Tilton (l) helped Grace Flannery be a letter carrier for a day.

“I told her from the beginning, ‘Grace, you can see by looking at me that I’m not the same as everybody else in here, so I’m going to carry mail differently from [the way] the mailman who comes to your house carries mail. But I’m able to, because the Post Office said, ‘Here’s someone who wants to work,’” Tilton said. “Go with it, and smile, and work hard—that’s all it takes.”

For Flannery, who wore a postal

uniform for the day, her time spent as a letter carrier was more than a wish fulfilled—she is working on developing job skills and finding a permanent occupation with the help of job coaching. Flannery’s goal is to work in a company mailroom.

“I want to do this again,” Flannery said after her day as a letter carrier. “I feel great, I feel proud and I feel confident.”

Giving his blood 58 gallons and counting

Brian Fronheiser has been donating blood since 1979.



Brian Fronheiser has given the gift of life in the form of donated blood steadily for decades, and it has added up to more than 58 gallons.

The retired member of Allentown, PA Branch 274 began donating blood in 1979 as an Army paratrooper serving in Alaska. When he left the Army and joined the Postal Service in 1982, Fronheiser continued the tradition.

“It just makes you feel good as a person,” he said. Donating blood is in Fronheiser’s blood, so to speak—his late father also gave blood frequently, and his brother has given even more than the carrier has. Fronheiser usually donates blood platelets instead of whole blood. Platelets are a component of blood separate from red and white blood cells that can provide life-saving treatment, especially for people with certain diseases such as leukemia or those undergoing chemotherapy. The primary function of platelets is to form blood clots, which stops the body from bleeding too much from an injury. When platelets are low, serious or life-threatening bleeding can occur.



Unlike whole blood, which requires months between donations, an individual can safely donate platelets as soon as 10 days after the last donation. Fronheiser takes a trip to the Miller-Keystone Blood Center in Bethlehem, PA, every two weeks to give. In platelet donation, blood is drawn from the donor into a machine that separates and extracts platelets and then returns blood cells to the donor's bloodstream. This process makes giving platelets longer than drawing whole blood—a platelet donation session takes about two hours.

Having survived cancer, Fronheiser understands the dire need for blood donation and what it means for recipients. He urged other letter carriers to take advantage of the Postal Service's

policy, outlined in the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)*, providing up to three days of administrative leave time for blood platelet donation for full-time employees.

“Hopefully, people will take advantage of that,” he said.

“His generosity has saved countless lives in the community,” said Debra Nalbandian, donor recruitment manager for the Miller-Keystone Blood Center. “His donations directly impact the well-being of cancer patients, trauma victims, premature infants and burn victims,” she said.

Fronheiser said the donations don't make him feel sick or sluggish. “It's just the opposite,” he said. “You feel good for doing it for a good cause.”

MILLER-KEYSTONE BLOOD CENTER

Do you know someone who is in a desperate battle with cancer?

- You can help save their life and other victims by donating **platelets**.
- Platelets** aid in the clotting process to prevent or stop bleeding and are vital in saving the life of a cancer victim.
- The demand for **platelets** is growing dramatically.
- Platelets** must be transfused within 5 days.
- Platelets** can mean the difference between life and death. There is no way to obtain these life-saving blood products except through the generosity of healthy donors like you!

Please inquire about how you can become a platelet donor today!

Two times ten turkeys

Though he is a retired carrier, **Sandy Lleo** can still lift a few pounds, including Thanksgiving turkeys he distributed to people in need in his community.

Lleo, sergeant-at-arms of South Florida Branch 1071 and a Navy veteran, hatched a plan in November to deliver Thanksgiving turkeys to those in need. He found a donor in the community, who provided 20 turkeys. Lleo split them between two Miami human service non-profit groups.

He took 10 turkeys to Camillus House, an agency that provides humanitarian services to homeless or poor people. Camillus House serves more than 12,000 men, women and children each year, helping with housing, food and other basic needs.

He delivered the other 10 turkeys to Lotus House Women's Shelter, a non-profit group providing housing, food and



health care assistance to area women and children in need. “Their eyes actually watered, they were so amazed,” Lleo said.

Lleo helps Miami's hungry eat in other ways. For several years, he and some fellow branch members also have volunteered as food preparers at an annual Christmas celebration for underprivileged children held by a local picnic ground company, and he is a long-time NALC food drive volunteer.

“We receive all year long,” he said, “but this time of the year, we have to give.”

Sandy Lleo drops off the turkeys at Camillus House (l) and Lotus House (r).

Hot and cold

Looking out for patrons in extreme weather

We've all heard it before: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

Those words have long been associated with the Postal Service, and letter carriers often go above and beyond on their routes for their customers, including Pocatello, ID Branch 927 member **Brett Hochhalter**.

Whenever there is a surprise snow shower, chances are good you will find the 21-year letter carrier at a customer's house, either at the beginning or end of the workday, grasping a snow shovel.

Hochhalter has had the same 50-block route, which covers about eight miles, for 18 years and has been doing the extracurricular shoveling for about the last 15 of those. "Last year, I did three every day when it snows," the carrier said.

If it has snowed overnight, "I do it on my way to work," he says. "Every morning, I'll do a couple [of paths]. I've always got a snow shovel in my truck." Occasionally, a customer will leave a shovel on the porch.

If it snows during the day, Hochhalter will shovel once the workday ends, after he's gone home and switched out of his postal uniform. Last winter, a man who lived on his route came outside and told Hochhalter, "I never even knew that was you." The carrier explained that was because he "would go home and change."

He has said that he has had to deliver warnings about city code for failure to clear walks during inclement weather. He dislikes doing that, and never wants anyone on his route to receive a citation for something he feels he could easily help with.

He regularly shovels the driveway of a 95-year-old widow on his route. "I've

done hers forever," the carrier said. "I'll always do her house."

The woman's son lives in California, so he tries to watch out for her. "I'd hate for the woman to fall," he added. "She can't do it herself."

Other than hers, which driveways he shovels depends on whom he sees and on what people's needs are. He will try to do any elderly customers' drives, including a brother and sister who live together on his route, and those where the residents work later into the evening. Last winter he cleared the home of a single mother with three children. Hochhalter was so careful and discreet in his actions, though, that the carrier said, "I'm not sure she even knew I did it."

His secret was out, though, when someone from the *Idaho State Journal* drove by last February while he was in action. That was "the only reason I got the accolade," he said. The carrier didn't really want to be the subject of a story, but finally agreed to speak with a reporter in the hopes he could inspire others.

He soon was approached at a local restaurant by a woman who had seen the story and wanted to help. "There's a lot of people everywhere who do care," said Hochhalter, who also spent a dozen years serving in the military—two years in the Army and 10 years in the Air Force.

The carrier said that the results of his actions were widespread. "This helps everybody," he said, including "people who are walking to class at [Idaho State University], the homeowner and then me delivering the mail."

Hochhalter hopes to encourage younger people to do the same thing in their communities. He said that several carriers in his post office shovel on their own routes.



Christina Zahnter (l) with Lovie Weekly



Brett Hochhalter delivers mail to a patron on his route in Pocatello, ID.



One thing Hochhalter says he definitely tries to avoid is commenting, “I hope we get a light year.” Whenever he says or thinks that, Pocatello has a tendency to get walloped by storms, he added with a laugh.

So why does he shovel snow, year after year? “Just to help people out,” he said. “I’ve never done it for attention. It’s not about me. It’s about other people who need help.”

From hot to cool

As we all know, letter carriers also deal quite frequently with the heat.

Kansas City, KS Branch 499 member **Christina Zahnter**, a first-year carrier, recalled delivering on her route one morning last July during a triple-digit heat wave in the Midwest. She said that local TV stations had been urging people to “Check on your neighbors.”

That day, Zahnter went to deliver to a woman, Lovie Weekly, who is confined to a wheelchair. The customer normally opens the door to get her mail from the carrier so she doesn’t have to go all the way to her mailbox.

When the woman opened the door that day, “a bunch of heat came out,” Zahnter said.

She asked the woman if she had air conditioning, but the woman told her, “No, honey, that broke years ago.” Weekly hadn’t fixed it, and was trying to get by with some small fans.

Determined not to let her customer suffer, Zahnter told her she was going to work on the problem.

Despite not being on the non-permanent hold-down route that long, the carrier has had the opportunity to get to know the community. Zahnter later told people at a local barber shop and a couple of the other neighbors, “We’ve got to get this lady an air conditioner.”

A neighbor named Rick Strunk, upon hearing of Weekly’s situation, told Zahnter: “She’ll have it before the night’s over with.”

Strunk called his church pastor, who, as luck would have it, had an unused window air unit sitting in storage and gladly donated it. Strunk brought the A.C. over to Weekly’s house and began to install it.

“As soon as I got off work that day, I went by,” Zahnter said. “They were plugging it in.”

The woman soon was crying out of gratitude. “It makes me feel overwhelmed,” Weekly later told the local Fox News affiliate. “I’m thankful, very thankful.”

Why did Zahnter help her customer? Simple answer, she said: “Because it was hot outside.”

She added, “Wouldn’t everybody?”

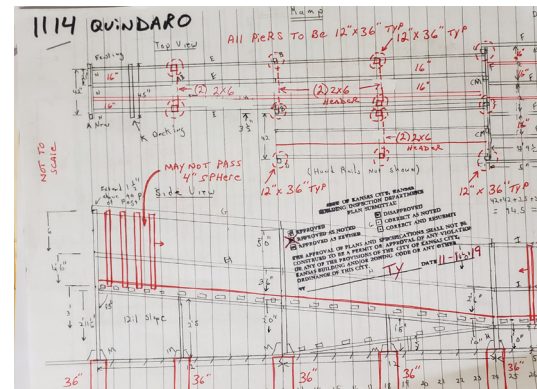
And the carrier’s assistance didn’t stop there. When Zahnter mentioned to the neighbors that Weekly did not have wheelchair access from her house, they collectively began to brainstorm how to build her a ramp as well.

When Weekly’s children come to take her to doctor’s appointments and other places, “they have to carry her down the stairs,” Zahnter said.

The carrier spearheaded an effort to get community organizations to donate money and materials, and Zahnter received permission from the local historical society to build the ramp, since Weekly’s house was zoned as historical.

“My daughter’s in the ROTC program in high school. They’re going to build it,” Zahnter said, adding that they also have received a building permit from the county, which waived the fee.

“We’re good to go—just waiting for a good day to start it,” the carrier said. She hopes that this will happen this



The plans for the ramp to Weekly’s house

Retired letter carrier Bob Avila now teaches people to play golf.



winter, and says that she has received offers from fellow letter carriers to help build it.

Her customers have reacted positively to her efforts. “I’ve gotten hugs from them,” Zahnter said. “You get to meet the people. You do what you can.

“I care about the community and I live in the community,” she added. “They’ll look out for me if something happens to me out there. It goes both ways.”

Paying it forward

Both Zahnter and Hochhalter said that it’s easy to make a difference on your routes, and they had advice for

carriers wanting to get started.

“Talk to people. Get to know your customers,” Hochhalter said. And if you see something that needs getting done, “just go out there and do it,” he added.

Zahnter concurred. “I’d encourage them to pay attention,” she said. “That’s all it takes. Kindness and compassion, paying it forward. Sometimes all they want is a hug.”

The carriers encouraged fellow NALC members to help in their communities in whatever way they’d like. “Everyone needs help at some point in their lives,” Hochhalter said. “If we can help others, there’s good in our lives.”

Teaching golf and goodwill

“You’re very calm, methodical, patient,” someone once told Greater East Bay, CA Branch 1111 member **Bob Avila** about his demeanor when he teaches people to play golf. Avila took it to heart, and now he uses his skills to introduce his favorite pastime to kids with special needs, free of charge.

“It’s very rewarding,” Avila said, “and I get to play golf while I’m teaching.”

Avila started carrying the mail in 1988 and took up golf a decade later (he now lives on a golf course). He discovered a gift for teaching, so he took up golf instruction, especially for young beginners. At group lessons and tournaments, he often ran into people with special-needs family members. Soon, word went around about his teaching demeanor and Avila became the go-to guy for teaching golf to children with special needs. He has taught more than a dozen of these students, who range in age from 10 to 16.

What’s different about teaching golf to a youngster with special needs than to other students? “The enthusiasm of hitting a good shot, the excitement of being out with mom and dad, or a friend,” Avila said. Many have seen golf on TV or watched from the sidelines and enjoy the thrill of doing something they had thought was out of their reach.

“I always make it really fun for them,” the carrier added. “With my special-needs kids, it’s all about bonding with their mom or dad or family member.”

Unlike some sports, golf allows everyone to go at their own pace, he said: “The game is self-satisfying—everybody has a different game, and you can take it wherever you want.” The experience goes beyond the students with special needs and extends to the whole family, he added. “If you get mom and dad and sister and brother out there, what a great outing that is,” Avila said. **PR**