

# Going above and beyond

## Carriers step up when needed most



Agnes Small

**A**mericans know that letter carriers often go above and beyond the requirements of their jobs, to the benefit of their communities. That dedication has shone brightly as the COVID-19 pandemic has gripped the country. Even as letter carriers face their own stress as essential workers at risk of contracting the coronavirus—many with families at home, isolated from work or school—they are serving their communities by helping their customers cope with the crisis and are serving their country by helping blunt the curve of the virus.

This month, *The Postal Record* brings you a few examples of letter carriers going out of their way for their customers, as well as stories of thankful postal customers who went the extra mile to show appreciation, in some instances by organizing celebrations of their letter carrier all along the route. We know that these few examples represent many more carriers who have gone beyond the call of duty.

For 26 years, **Agnes Small** has delivered on a route in San Juan Capistrano, CA, that includes a retirement community. When the pandemic began, it forced the residents into strict isolation.

“The seniors really took it seriously,” she said. “What I saw in my customers was a genuine fear.”

The Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 steward offered to help link some of the seniors to the outside world by

buying groceries for them.

“It was the least that I could do,” Small said. “I was already out.”

A few of the senior customers gave her shopping lists, and Small bought and delivered the items after finishing her workday.

“You just do what you think is right,” she said.

On her route in Arvada, CO, **Tiffany Buskirk** noted the familiar signs on front lawns congratulating a prospective high school graduate in the house. Most graduation ceremonies and many family celebrations were canceled because of the pandemic. Buskirk, a former vice president of Arvada Branch 4405 and an NALC Leadership Academy graduate who has carried mail since 2003, decided to give the graduates some additional recognition.

“What could I do to put smiles on their faces?” she wondered, adding: “I wanted to give them something positive and encouraging.”

Buskirk decided to write each graduate a warm letter of congratulations.

“I don’t know your name, and you probably don’t know mine, but I guarantee you recognize the vehicle I drive around the neighborhood,” she wrote. “This little note is from me, your letter carrier, Tiffany. I saw the yard signs of the 2020 graduates and wanted to give you all a little something.”

Her note continued: “Congratulations. You’re a star in the making. This is only the beginning.”

Several of the students or their

Opposite page: Kyle West and the flyer he posted for his patrons

parents have sent thank-you notes or thanked her in person as she passed on her route.

“I just wanted to...spread happiness,” she says.

Doe’s Eat Place is a homey restaurant on **Andy Derrick’s** mail route in Little Rock, AR. Derrick, a member of Little Rock Branch 35, often stops in to have lunch. In late March, restrictions on working, shopping and dining imposed by the state to slow the spread of COVID-19 began to empty the restaurant’s tables. On one of his visits to Doe’s Eat Place, Derrick realized that the restaurant and its employees were bound to suffer financially.

“There were more employees there than customers,” he told the local ABC TV affiliate, KATV. “It didn’t sit right.”

When he paid his lunch bill for \$12.09, Derrick gave a generous tip—well more than the cost of the meal—to each of the restaurant’s 22 employees, to make things a little easier for them.

“It’s my community,” Derrick said. “I deliver to them. I know all of them. Just trying to support them because they support me.”

“We need to see that right now,” Doe’s Eat Place owner Katherine Eldridge told KATV. “When everything looks so gloomy and uncertain, we need to know that there are people out there that are doing good things to help us out.”

Derrick said he wished he could do more, adding: “But we’ll get through this and go back to normal and I can come back and get my fish on Fridays.”

With mostly elderly, low-income people depending on him for deliveries on his route in Colerain Township in suburban Cincinnati, OH, **Kyle West** already knew that his job was essential. But when the COVID-19 pandemic

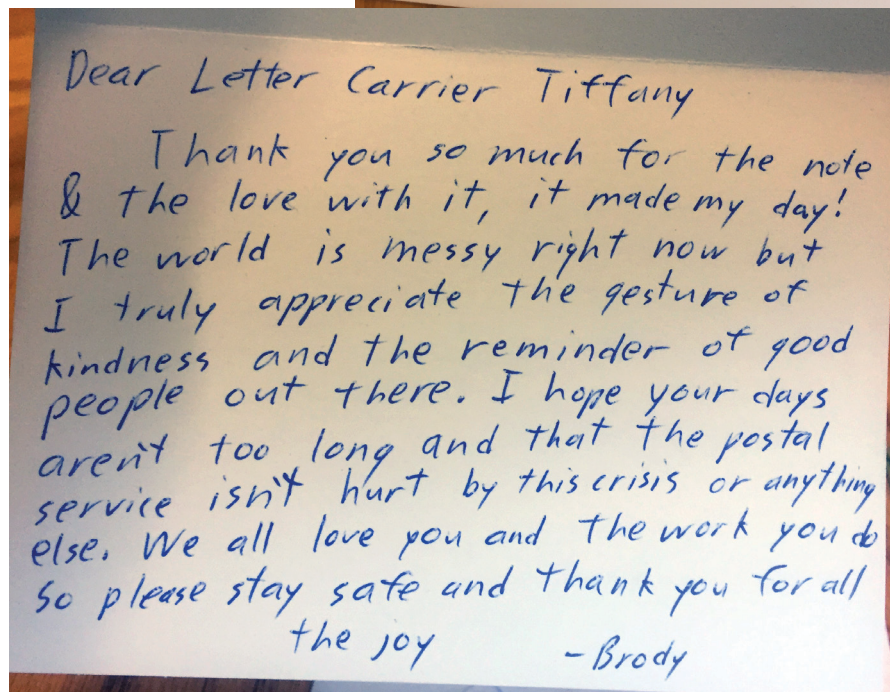
forced many seniors to stay home, the Cincinnati Branch 43 member wanted to do more than deliver mail as an essential worker.

When a patron on his route asked for help getting toilet paper, West, who is about three years into his letter carrier career, went above and beyond his job to serve his customers. West printed and distributed a note to about 400 of his patrons he knew were elderly: “If you are at risk and need help getting essential items, let me know. I will do what I can to help.” He signed the note with the name his customers all know him by: “Mailman Kyle.”

About 30 customers on West’s route responded with requests for help, but what surprised West was that even



Tiffany Buskirk (above) received many thank-you notes (below) for her messages to 2020 graduates.





Andy Derrick's generous tips were appreciated by the staff at Doe's Eat Place.

more responded by offering to donate items. His customers left toilet paper, cleaning supplies and hand sanitizer at their doors for West to distribute to others in need.

"Everything I dispersed was given to me by other customers," he said. Once word got out in local media about West's inspiring actions, community members began bringing items to his post office as well.

West, who has served his current route since October, said that being cut off from personal communication with his elderly customers who self-quarantined was another hardship on them, because they enjoy his daily visits. But it was difficult for him and his fellow carriers, too.

"It's hard for all of us as well, not being able to talk to our customers," he said. "That's one of the big parts of our day—being able to see all our favorite people."

West's selfless actions earned him a trip to the White House in May. He received a message from White House staff, he said, "and the next day, I was in DC. It was wild." President Donald Trump introduced and praised West at a media event.

"Customers often tell us during difficult times that seeing us out every day gives them a sense of normalcy in their lives. The gratitude we are receiving from our customers is greatly inspiring," West said at the White House event. "I'm very proud to work for the Postal Service and

to deliver for our country."

As letter carriers continue to serve by doing their jobs in difficult circumstances, often going above and beyond the call of duty, their customers are showing gratitude. Carriers are finding thank-you notes, cards and letters from children in mailboxes. Postal patrons are leaving masks, water bottles and other essentials for their letter carrier. And in some towns, entire neighborhoods are organizing special demonstrations of gratitude.

In Half Moon Bay, CA, neighbors organized a special surprise appreciation day for San Mateo, CA Branch 1280 member **Jose Cisneros** for his efforts not only during the pandemic, but throughout his letter carrier career.

Neighbors all along his route treated Cisneros to cheers and music. He found many mailboxes decorated with balloons and signs expressing gratitude.

"I feel happy to be appreciated," Cisneros told the *Half Moon Bay Review*. "I just try and treat people the way I would want to be treated."

Postal customers on **Mary Lou Rowe's** route in Huron Township, OH, showed their thanks with signs along her route.

Neighbors decorated their mailboxes with colorful streamers and handmade signs of support for Rowe and USPS.

"It brightened my day," Rowe, a member of Lorain, OH Branch 583, told the *Sandusky Register*.

Greater East Bay, CA Branch 1111 member **Sal Garcia** was greeted with signs of gratitude at dozens of homes on his route in Fremont, CA, most made by children staying home from school during the pandemic.

"We value and respect your service. Thank you," read one sign made by a youngster. Touched by the gesture, Garcia took pictures of every sign.

"It felt really good," Garcia told San Francisco's local ABC affiliate, KGO-TV news. "I took pictures of them because I did feel something. I'm appreciative of the way they responded."

In nearby Berkeley, CA, neighbors on the route that fellow Branch 1111 member **Kerry Jones** has served for 24 years surprised him with signs of appreciation and gratitude. Neighbors put the messages on windows, doors, benches, sidewalks and, of course, mailboxes, so that Jones couldn't miss them.

"After all these years, I thought you couldn't surprise me, but you did," Jones told his patrons via local news website *Berkeleyside*. "Some of these [signs] have made me close to tears."

Whether it's letter carriers going beyond for the communities they serve or those communities recognizing the value and dedication of their carrier, such episodes provide bright spots in the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There are so many letter carriers who are helping their communities in extraordinary ways during these difficult times," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "We wear the postal uniform with pride as we do more—often, far more—than what is asked of us. The appreciation our customers have shown us is proof that our efforts have meaning." **PR**