

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 leads fire evacuation, saves 40

On March 12, Michigan City, IN Branch 455 member **Dixie Manns** arrived at one of her regular delivery stops, a building that housed mostly elderly residents. When she walked in, "I heard the fire alarm going off," the six-year carrier said.

Looking around, she saw an elderly man standing in his doorway. "I asked the guy if he had burned some popcorn, but he said, no, it was a paper towel," Manns recalled. "But when I walked into the apartment, it was a grease fire." The man was moving slowly and did not respond when Manns urged him to evacuate; knowing that they did not have time to waste, Manns picked him up, despite her small stature, and carried him out of the apartment into the hallway.

The carrier knew that the woman living across the hall was on oxygen, so she rushed over to warn her about the fire. While dialing 911, she also started banging on residents' doors and telling everyone to leave the building. During the commotion, she noticed that the elderly man she had carried was still not exiting with the other residents. Worried that he would be trampled if there was a rush to the exits, Manns picked him up again and carried him outside.

Manns then went back into the building, determined to make sure that all those inside had evacuated. "By the time I got upstairs," she said, "it was pitch black [from the smoke]." She continued to knock on doors until police and firefighters arrived.

All in all, Manns may have saved 40 people with her warnings before emergency personnel arrived on the scene. "I don't feel like I was a hero," Manns said. "I just feel like I did what needed to be done."

She added, "I knew those people would be in trouble if I didn't help. I was just doing what I felt anyone should do."

Quick thinking from carrier helps avert fire

Milwaukee, WI Branch 2 member **Nathan Sies** was delivering to an apartment building on his route on March 5 when he noticed that "the smoke alarm was going off," he said. "And it smelled like burnt popcorn." The building houses several disabled residents, so the carrier was especially concerned and decided to investigate the situation. In the hallway, Sies passed two residents, whom he warned about the burning smell. One of the residents called 911.

While dropping off his deliveries, the 18-year carrier and Air Force veteran noticed a large FedEx package standing against the wall. "I moved the package away from the wall," he said, "and saw that it had been propped up against a heater. The back portion was charred." As Sies watched, the charred portion of the packaging caught fire.

Sies carried the parcel out of the building, while one of the

residents grabbed a fire extinguisher and put out the fire. In a letter to the post office, the police officer who arrived at the scene praised Sies's actions: "You have several [people] who are wheelchair-bound in this complex. If Nathan had not taken action, the results could have been disastrous."

Carrier awareness aids rescue from burning home

On Feb. 14, Wilmington, NC Branch 464 member **Anthony Watson** was delivering to a house on his route when, he says, "I saw that the front deck was on fire."

Once he realized that the fire was likely to engulf the whole building, the five-year carrier called 911. Watson also checked to make sure that there were no cars in the driveway, and was relieved to see that the homeowner's car was gone.

The carrier then went to the back of the duplex to deliver mail; by the time he reached the front of the building again, Watson said, "it had reached their roof."



Anthony Watson

When police and firefighters arrived a short time later, Watson watched as the officers opened the door. He was startled when an elderly woman rushed out of the house with her clothes on fire. After she dropped to the ground and rolled, she was taken to the hospital, where she was treated for burns.

As the carrier later found out, the woman was a relative of the homeowner and had been staying with her for a few weeks—and, according to police, Watson’s timely call had likely saved her life. Firefighters also were able, because of his call, to extinguish the blaze before it spread to the neighboring house.

Watson, an Army veteran, played

down his key role in the situation’s positive outcome, stating, “I just did what anyone would have done.”

Carrier alerts homeowner to ‘major’ gas leak

When Buffalo-Western NY Branch 3 member **Michelle Danner** was walking between two houses on her route on Feb. 14, she smelled a strong odor of natural gas coming from one of the houses.

“I know the lady who owns the house,” the city carrier assistant explained, “and I know that the house next door is actually owned by her parents, so when I saw her father work-

ing in the yard, I stopped and told him” about the odor.

Danner completed the rest of her loop, and when she went past the house again, she could tell that someone had been investigating the situation; there were fresh footprints in the snow between the two houses, right where she had smelled the natural gas.

“I went back to the office,” she said, “and I later found out that when the gas company came to check, [the company representative] told the owner that it was a major leak.”

Danner added, “I’m glad I was able to save someone’s house and maybe their life. I can’t imagine a situation like that happening to me.” **PR**

Help on the way

Jose Colon Sr. was delivering on his route on the morning of March 13, the Cincinnati, OH Branch 43 member recalled, when he heard screaming coming from the garage of one of the neighborhood homes. The 26-year carrier and Air Force veteran ran toward the source of the noise and found his elderly customer lying on the floor of her garage. The woman had fallen and was unable to get up. Colon called her daughter but was unable to help his customer in the meantime because of the aggressive behavior of her dog. After completing his deliveries in the neighborhood, Colon came back to the house, by which time the customer’s daughter had subdued the dog and called for an ambulance. As it turned out, the customer had broken her femur and underwent surgery. She was

confined to a wheelchair while in recovery, but Colon said she was “doing well.” The customer and her daughter later called the post office to thank the carrier for his help—that was the first that his co-workers had heard about the situation, because Colon felt that he had simply done the right thing and did not want any credit or praise for his



Jose Colon Sr.

actions. “I just wanted to get her help,” he said. “That’s all I was concerned about.”

On April 29, retired letter carrier and Buffalo-Western NY Branch 3 member **Douglas Fordyce** noticed that his neighbor’s mail and newspapers had been building up in the mailbox. He described his neighbor as “a kind of recluse,” and was used to not seeing her for periods of time, but he knew that this behavior was out of the ordinary for her. Looking around, he also saw that her garage door had been left open, but her car was still there. Knowing in his gut that something was wrong, Fordyce knocked on the neighbor’s door, but received no answer. His letter carrier instincts kicked in, and he called emergency services for a welfare check. The responding police found the woman in distress—piles

of her accumulated things had tumbled down on top of her and pinned her to the floor. “She had been lying there for a couple of days,” Fordyce said. An officer told Fordyce that if he had not alerted authorities, it was doubtful that the woman would have survived another day. Fordyce attributes his actions to the years he spent delivering mail. “It comes naturally after all those years,” he said. “I carried for 30 years, and I would be up at someone’s door every day,” he said. “You are always looking out for your customers, and that doesn’t change once you retire.” In praising Fordyce for his actions, Buffalo-Western Branch President **David Grosskopf Jr.** said, “Even in retirement, letter carriers are serving and saving their communities!” **PR**