

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.

At the scene of a fire, a carrier takes control

On July 31, 2019, while Hazelwood, MO Branch 5847 member **Mark Luebbert** was delivering his route, he turned a corner and noticed that smoke was coming from a house on the street. He pulled up his LLV to investigate further and saw one of his customers sitting in his SUV as several feet of flames shot out of the hood of the vehicle.

Luebbert ran up to offer his assistance. "It wasn't really that bad of a fire at the time," he recalled, so he told the man to back the car down the driveway and get it out of the carport before the garage caught on fire. However, the man seemed very confused—he told the carrier he couldn't get the car to start but was incapable of communicating whether he had called 911. Once the carrier ascertained that the man had not called emergency services, he made the call himself.

"As I'm on the phone [with the dispatcher], the ceiling of the carport caught on fire," the carrier said. It burned so rapidly that Luebbert had to manage the situation quickly, especially since he heard barking and realized that the owner's two dogs were trapped in the house. The carrier told the customer to go in and rescue the dogs, but the customer emerged from

the house with a small fire extinguisher instead. The fire was getting big enough that Luebbert realized they had to get away from the house, but the owner went back into the carport with a hose to continue trying to put the fire out.

"By now, the whole house is engulfed in flames," Luebbert remembered, but he didn't want to abandon the man who had gone inside the burning building. The 911 dispatcher told the carrier that he could try to rescue the owner if he thought he could pull him out. "The front door was already hot to the touch," Luebbert said, but he entered the house again and physically yanked the man out of the doorway. The carrier added, "I can't even describe how hot it was; we were surrounded by flames."

As they ran down the driveway, a police officer pulled up—he was surprised by how fast the fire was burning and asked the carrier to run to the neighbors to make sure they weren't home and in the path of danger. While the officer and Luebbert were running from house to house, they noticed that the owner was trying to get back inside the house again. They stopped him once again, just before the SUV that had originally caught on fire exploded. "The carport basically split in half," the carrier said.

At this point, firefighters had arrived, and police officers asked Luebbert to leave for his own safety. The homeowner survived without any injuries; sadly, both dogs perished in the fire.

When asked about his extraordinary bravery, Luebbert disclaimed, "I had no time to think, I just acted. I feel like anybody would have done the same." The 12-year carrier continued, "[Letter carriers] are in your neighborhoods every day... we know when something is wrong and will assist in any way we can. A house can be rebuilt, a man's life cannot."



Candis Wolff

Carrier sniffs out dangerous gas leak

On Nov. 25, 2019, Waterloo, IA Branch 512 member and CCA **Candis Wolff** was delivering mail to one of the last houses on her route. As usual, she walked around the side of the house to reach the mailbox, but this time, "all I could smell was [natural] gas" coming from the home, she recalled.

Alarmed, the CCA returned to her truck to call her supervisor, who in turn contacted the energy company. In the meantime, Wolff was concerned about the house's occupants. She walked back up to the home and started knocking on doors and calling out, hoping to arouse anyone inside.

When she did not receive a response to her knocking, she returned to her route and went back to the post office. However, she still felt uneasy about the situation, and so the CCA went back to the house after clocking out. "I was just worried that somebody was in the house sleeping, and wouldn't get out in time," she said.

When she got back to the house, Wolff was relieved to see an emergency

technician from the energy company. “He told me that the leak had been very bad, and that if the tenants had come home and lit so much as a cigarette, the whole block probably would have gone up,” she said. He thanked her for probably saving the house and the residents’ lives.

The situation was very personal to Wolff, as her sister and two of her sister’s children had died in a house fire in 2018. Since then, the one-year carrier and her husband have given away many smoke and carbon monoxide detectors to families in need, to prevent similar tragedies. For Wolff, the most important takeaway from the situation was “just knowing that if somebody had been in [the house], they would have been OK.”

Carrier rouses homeowner from burning building

Rochester, NY Branch 210 member and CCA **William**

Blish was out delivering mail on July 12, 2019, when he heard a smoke detector going off inside a resident’s home. “I thought it was odd,” he said, so he started knocking on the door to make sure everything was all right. When he looked closer, he saw smoke coming out of the house and called 911.

A neighbor who also had noticed the fire came over and expressed con-

cern that the homeowner might still be inside. Together, the neighbor and Blish managed to rouse the owner, who had been asleep inside the house, and waited for the fire department. When firefighters arrived, he continued on his route.

The carrier underplayed his heroic actions, stating, “A lot of crazy stuff happens on the routes in the city. You just have to learn how to handle everything that comes your way.” **PR**



William Blish shakes hands with his station manager during a ceremony to commemorate his heroic action.

Eye on the elderly

While doing his usual delivery at the home of one of his elderly customers on Sept. 4, 2019, Mon-Yough, PA Branch 332 member **Ross Trunzo** noticed that the mail had not been picked up from the previous day. Since this customer, an older woman who lived alone and “usually came out with a walker,” typically picked up the mail and greeted the carrier, he became concerned. When a second day passed without the woman getting her mail, he decided to check up on her. He contacted the neighbors and asked if they had seen her recently. They had not, and they became worried about her welfare as well. Together, the carrier and the neighbors knocked on the door—and when no one

answered, they contacted the police. After the police arrived, they opened the door and found the woman unconscious in her bathroom. She was rushed to the hospital, where she made a full recovery before moving to an assisted living facility. The neighbor later wrote to Trunzo, expressing her thanks and passing along the gratitude of the woman’s family for his determination to make sure that his customer was safe. The 27-year carrier was modest about his intervention, and stated that he was simply happy that everything had turned out all right. He added, “As letter carriers, we are the eyes and ears of the elderly.”

For several Saturdays in a row, Garden Grove, CA

Branch 1100 member **Melissa Williams** brought the mail of one of her customers directly to the elderly woman’s door. The customer had broken her leg and hip and lived alone, so the carrier wanted to make it easier for her to get her mail, rather than leaving it in the woman’s curbside box. On Friday, Oct. 11, 2019, Williams decided to take the mail up a day early, since she knew she would not be working that Saturday. But when she approached the customer’s door, she saw that it was ajar. “I thought it was odd,” the carrier recalled, so she went into the house to make sure her customer was all right. After she entered, she found the woman lying on the floor. She ran over to the customer, who

was disoriented and unable to speak. Williams called 911 and waited with the woman, keeping her as comfortable as possible until emergency services arrived. At the hospital, it was discovered that the woman had had a stroke; she had been lying on the floor for about 16 hours. The woman’s son was not due for a check-in for a few days, so her predicament could have been deadly. Thanks to the carrier’s actions, the customer was discovered in time to receive the medical attention she needed, and able to make a full recovery. Williams was thankful that her intuition helped save a customer. “As letter carriers, we know when something’s not right,” she said. “It’s just lucky I was there.” **PR**