

Heroes all



Philip Dine

Acrochety copy editor I once worked with delighted in admonishing reporters over their writing. You wrote, for example, that a new record had just been set—and he'd demand to know what the "new" added. By definition, if you set a record it's new, he'd thunder. You don't set an old record. Write that someone had set an all-time record, and he'd tell you that an "all-time" record can't be set until all time has expired. Send him a story about someone setting a new, all-time record, and you wouldn't want to be in his vicinity.

He also scorned use of the word "unprecedented." Pretty much everything that happens already has happened on God's green earth, he'd tell you; an equally bad recession, just as heavy a snowstorm, a worse case of political corruption, and so on.

He was not only irritable; he was the copy desk chief, so his word ruled.

Nonetheless, the period we are going through now certainly qualifies as unprecedented. We are under attack on both public health and financial fronts, an entire country—in many ways, almost an entire world—under siege.

One aspect of this, however, is...well,precedented. Once again, letter carriers are rising to the occasion, displaying courage and commitment and creativity as you serve others in this dangerous situation.

Our cover story paints a broad picture of what you are doing, what it means to folks both isolated and fearful, and the responses from the public. You are fulfilling a unique dual role—helping protect public safety by allowing people to remain at home and still get needed supplies, while also keeping commerce and the economy going.

Given my job, I'd like to focus on how letter carriers are helping mitigate the existential threat this crisis poses to the Postal Service. If we don't effectively counter that threat, none of the valuable services letter carriers provide to Americans—not only now but also in normal times—will be possible. So, communication has never been more important.

I have watched President Rolando's indefatigable efforts to get the message to the public—and to elected officials—about the valor of letter carriers and the imperative of including the Postal Service, in meaningful fashion, in federal relief plans. That media effort has been joined at NALC Headquarters by Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Paul Barner, Director of City Delivery Christopher Jackson, Chief of Staff Jim Sauber and others—many others, in fact.

Around the country, letter carriers have delivered the message through letters to the editor and in other ways, making sure folks know what letter carriers are doing under difficult circumstances and understand the impact this crisis could have on the public's beloved Postal Service—absent action in Washington.

From Montana's Julie Quilliam to Chicago's Mack Julion, Wisconsin's Howard Pope to Indiana's Ronnie Roush, Idaho's John Paige to New York's Charlie Heege, to Detroit's Benjamin Dixon and Sandy Laemmel, and many more, your efforts have reminded Americans in big cities and small towns of what is at stake.

And then there's the Motor City's Kelly Mathaw, whose appearance on *Live with Kelly & Ryan*, the most-watched morning TV entertainment show in the country, gave millions of Americans a glimpse, through the words of a relatable and humble letter carrier, at the services provided and the challenges faced by you during this crisis.

These are just a few examples of such efforts. Meanwhile, there's a bigger reality here—each of you, by providing an essential service at a time that it is more needed than ever, and doing so under arduous conditions, is stepping up to the challenge. With much of the population under stay-at-home orders, many stores closed and services unavailable, you are providing invaluable help to folks from coast to coast.

At perhaps no time in our nation's history has the term "hero" more aptly described America's letter carriers.

Also stepping up to the challenge, once again, is Tom Riley. Last month's magazine featured the retired letter carrier, Air Force veteran of the Vietnam theatre, college professor who teaches the history of postal services over the past 6,000 years, and author of a dozen books including on the U.S. Postal Service and the contributions of letter carriers.

After learning that a friend and active letter carrier had contracted the coronavirus, Riley decided to donate \$1.50 from each book sale of *We Deliver* to the Postal Relief Fund. Since we provided no contact information last month, here it is: email tomrileyauthor@gmail.com and website tomrileyauthor.com; publisher phone number, 800-876-6103, website Heritage-books.com and mailing address Heritage Books, Inc., 5810 Ruanan St., Berwyn Heights, MD 20740.

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