

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.

Neighborhood evacuated as fire spreads

Pittsburgh, PA Branch 84 member **Erin Pennington** was delivering packages in a neighborhood on her route on July 6, 2020, when she noticed an unusual odor in the air. "It smelled like wires burning," she recalled. The two-year carrier looked around, but she couldn't see any smoke coming from the nearby row houses.

As Pennington continued to make her deliveries, she turned down an alleyway that ran behind the houses. It was at that point that she saw the source of the smell. "It was the back corner of a vacant house—about three feet of [the house] was on fire," she said.

The carrier immediately leaped into action. She spotted a neighbor coming out of a nearby house, and Pennington asked them to call 911. Then, she "raced up to the front to evacuate the other houses," she said.

Pennington rushed from door

to door, knocking on the neighboring houses and telling the occupants about the fire. At one house, the carrier could hear dogs barking, but the homeowner was slow to respond. Eventually, a woman appeared; she had been sleeping upstairs and had been roused only by Pennington's shouts. "She grabbed her dogs and their leashes and ran out of the house," the carrier said.

The fire quickly spread through the houses, including into the bedroom of the woman who had evacuated just in time. Before the fire department arrived, three houses were engulfed in flames. In total, seven houses were damaged, but nobody was injured.

The carrier was modest about her role in the situation. "I did what I hope anyone would have done," she said. "I just thought, 'I need to make sure that everyone here is safe.'"

Despite suspected bomb, carrier keeps calm

While delivering on her route on Feb. 5, Fort Collins, CO Branch 849 member **Carla Barnett** struggled to open one of the curbside mailboxes on her route. When she did manage to get the box open, she noticed something suspicious immediately. "It was a little piece of pipe," she recalled, "with wires coming out."

The mailbox was in front of an AutoZone store, so she went inside to ask the employees about the device. When they said that they did not recognize the object as an automobile part, the 12-year carrier became increasingly concerned. Barnett conferred with her supervisor, and they decided that they needed to contact the police, given the possibility that the object was a pipe bomb.

Due to safety concerns, police met the carrier down the street from the mailbox; after officers saw the pictures she had taken of the device, they decided to call in a bomb squad.

Barnett said, "I didn't think it was a

big deal, until the police told me they weren't sending in a human" to investigate. Instead, officers used a robot to approach the mailbox. Fortunately, after looking at the pictures taken by the robot, the bomb squad was able to determine that the device was an advanced capacitor for a car, and not an explosive.

Police later took donuts into the post office to thank the carrier for her quick thinking, and recognized her on their Facebook page. "[Barnett] did exactly the right thing by contacting law enforcement," they wrote on the department's post. "Her diligence and concern for public safety were admirable in such an intense situation."

Carrier provides comfort to injured woman

"It was at an apartment complex," San Antonio, TX Branch 421 member **Julio Dominguez** recalled about delivering his route on April 23, 2020. "I had just driven in when I saw a woman lying there [in the street]."

Curious, but initially not overly concerned, the 27-year carrier got out of his truck and walked over to the woman. "I thought she was sleeping," he said. However, as he approached her, he saw that her legs were covered in scrapes and bruises. When the woman began stirring, he realized that she had been unconscious, not asleep.

Dominguez swiftly called 911 to report the situation, and sat next to the woman

as she slowly regained consciousness. He said, "I could see that she was more injured" than the visible wounds on her body demonstrated. The carrier was so



Julio Dominguez



Erin Pennington

Eye on the elderly

While on his route on Sept. 11, 2020, Boston, MA Branch 34 member **Tom Zulon** went into the screened porch of Agnes Keady's home to deliver her mail. Keady's mailbox is on the outside of her house, but the 28-year carrier made a special accommodation so that his elderly customer did not have to walk outside every day. He had a warm friendship with Keady; in addition to seeing her on his route most days, Keady's son had worked as a postal clerk for many years. Zulon was horrified by what he found on this visit to the house. "Her feet were lying at the edge of the [screen] door," he recalled. She had collapsed hours before and was barely conscious. "Her color was so gray, I was scared," Zulon said. "She was going into shock." Zulon recalled seeing an ambu-



Tom Zulon

lance in the neighborhood dropping off a patient, so he raced outside hoping to catch the EMTs. "Everything lined up, and they were still on the street," he said. "I went banging on the window of the ambulance and said, 'I've got a customer that collapsed on her porch!'" The EMTs rushed over to the house, while the carrier managed to obtain contact information for Keady's family from a neighbor. Zulon informed her family about the situation; meanwhile, Keady was taken to the hospital, where doctors determined that she had broken her hip. She since has gone to a rehabilitation center, where she is recovering. Zulon says he is grateful that everything worked out to help Keady. "Your instincts and adrenaline just kick in, and you want to help anyone," he added. "You just do what anyone would do."

In August of 2020, Toledo, OH Branch 100 member **Robert Giles** was walking on his route when he saw two of his customers, an elderly couple, in an unusual situation in front of their house. "[The elderly man] was under his car like he was looking at something," Giles recalled, but as the carrier walked closer, he "could see he was trying to stand up." The



Robert Giles

man's wife reached to help him, but as she grasped his arm, she also fell to the pavement. Seeing their distress, "I put the mail back in my bag and ran to help," the four-year carrier said. Giles helped the woman to her feet first; then, with her assistance, he carried the man into their house, as he still seemed unsteady on his feet. "We got him settled," Giles said, at which point he found out that the man had been trying to bring their garbage cans in. "I put the garbage cans away for them," the carrier said, and then he continued on his route. The couple later called the post office to thank Giles for his help. Giles, an Army veteran, said that he talks to the couple regularly, and he was simply happy that his timing allowed him to assist them. "I was glad I was in the right place at the right time," he added.

On Jan. 6, New York, NY Branch 36 member **Vincent Jines** noticed that one of his customers, Dorothy Arato, had not picked up her mail from the previous day.

man's wife reached to help him, but as she grasped his arm, she also fell to the pavement. Seeing their distress, "I

Jines has delivered on the same route for 20 years, and knew that this was odd for the elderly woman, who usually greeted him every day. He knocked on the door, but after receiving no response, thought it was possible that Arato had gone to visit family. The next day, however, her mail was still untouched. "I thought, 'No, this isn't good,'" the 22-year carrier said. Jines went to a neighbor's house and asked if they had seen Arato recently; the neighbor told him that she hadn't seen her for a few days. After hearing Jines's report about the uncollected mail, the neighbor decided to call Arato's son, who drove to the house to investigate. When her son went inside the house, he found his mother lying on the floor, where she had been for several days. Arato was taken to the hospital, where it was determined that she had broken her hip. She is now recovering at a rehabilitation center. Arato's family wrote a note to the Postal Service commending the carrier. "If Vincent didn't take action, the outcome could have been much worse," the letter said. "It is encouraging and wonderful to know that there are people like Vincent out there." **PR**

intent on soothing the woman that he didn't ask her what had happened to her. "My attention was all on her," he explained.

When a police officer arrived on the scene, however, he immediately figured out what had happened. "[The officer] looked up straight away, and he saw an open window" at an apartment

four stories above the scene, Dominguez said. The officer asked the woman if she had fallen from the window, which she was able to confirm.

The woman was taken to the hospital, and has since made a full recovery.

Dominguez said that he was pleased to be able to help, but brushed off his contribution as a part of the job. "It's

what we do," he said. "It's second nature, really." **PR**

Correction: In the December 2020 issue of *The Postal Record*, Eric Beu and Mark Simone were erroneously listed as members of Branch 40. They are members of Oklahoma City, OK Branch 458.