

Heroes redux



Philip Dine

Last month, in this space and in the magazine as a whole, we wrote about heroes. Letter carriers, that is, wearing their second uniform in service to our country. That theme was natural, given the timing of Veterans Day.

This month, in this space and in the magazine as a whole, we write again about Heroes. Letter carriers, that is, who've gone above and beyond, showing courage and compassion as they improve—or even save—the lives of people in their communities. That theme, too, is natural, given the recent selection of our 2021 National Heroes of the Year.

If this sounds like a recurring theme, it is.

We have letter carriers who, every day, somewhere around the country, display vigilance, bravery and ingenuity as they help postal patrons on their routes, sometimes making split-second decisions as they rescue residents from houses or cars on fire, provide critical help to someone with medical needs, find a missing child or stop a crime in progress.

Our Heroes of the Year represent all letter carriers who regard taking care of their customers and their neighborhoods as an integral, if unwritten, part of the job.

We also have tens of thousands of members who have served in the military, and who through their sacrifices have protected our nation and the freedoms we too often take for granted, and who apply that same sense of mission on their mail routes.

Beyond that, letter carriers have provided invaluable public service the past couple of years, as essential workers who have allowed tens of millions of Americans to shelter safely at home in this pandemic.

But your work doesn't require a pandemic to render what you do heroic—even in ordinary times, you help unite communities and bind this vast land, precisely as the Founders envisioned when they placed your craft in the Constitution. You bring joy to youngsters and grandparents in the form of cards and letters, you are a lifeline to the isolated, you allow small-business owners in rural areas to realize their dreams, and you never go through the motions as you bring your professionalism and dedication while delivering every day, everywhere.

If all that weren't enough, legions of you have stepped up to change the national conversation about the Postal Service, thereby helping our employer survive both the artificial financial crisis and the related assaults by those who would exploit it. You have done this by communicating the truth and the

facts to the public, the politicians and the press.

Indeed, we could write about letter carrier heroism and valor every month—and in one way or another, we often do.

This month, *The Postal Record* highlights the extraordinary feats of letter carriers from the Big Apple to small cities in Oregon and Indiana, from the Midwest's Cincinnati and Pittsburgh to New York's Great Lake communities of Buffalo and Rochester.

Rochester's Ramique Hill exhibited extraordinary bravery by going toward danger when he heard gunfire in a house and saw blood on the porch. He restrained the assailant and saved the life of a badly injured police officer.

After spotting a fire, Dixie Manns evacuated residents of an elderly housing complex in Michigan City, IN, saving many lives in the process.

Kevin Bystrak and Jody Kotowski of Buffalo helped make an elderly Korean War veteran more comfortable during a summer heat wave by donating and installing an air conditioning unit and getting his house cleaned. Kevin, who was deployed to Kuwait during the Iraq War, was prompted to assist a fellow vet.

Pittsburgh's Erin Pennington was instrumental in getting residents out of row houses threatened by a spreading fire.

Kyle West of Cincinnati, aware that many of his postal patrons were having a difficult time in the early days of the pandemic, found creative ways to help them. His efforts were notable enough to be recognized at the White House in the spring of 2020.

Ray Hacker, of North Bend, OR, donated a kidney to a former schoolmate in desperate need. The Navy veteran said that the chance to save a life far outweighed any personal risks.

New York's Michelle DeCosta displayed situational awareness in helping alert a neighborhood about an unnoticed fire.

Of course, to a person, these Heroes were humble about the recognition. Please read full accounts of their actions on pages 14-21.

To each of them, and to all of you who fill the ranks of the NALC with heroes and heroism of one form or another, we thank you, we salute you and we wish you wonderful holidays throughout this month.

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