

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.

A second glance saves lives

In early April, Phoenix, AZ Branch 576 member **Delilah Benavidez** was driving on her route when “I looked to my right, and I saw smoke coming out of the other side of the neighborhood,” she recalled. Judging by the location of the smoke, the eight-year carrier thought that it must be coming from a nearby field. She decided to drive closer to see what was going on. “I wanted to make sure that no one had lit anything on fire, because it was a very hot day,” Benavidez said.

However, when she got closer, she realized that the flames were coming from a customer's back yard. Benavidez drove up to the resident's home, parked and got out to warn them about the fire. When nobody responded to her knock at the front door, she walked around the house to see the size of the fire, and was horrified to find that a whole section of the house already was in flames.

Benavidez rushed back to the front door and began pounding on it. “I can hear them inside, but I think they

think they have a package,” she said. “So I started screaming, ‘The house is on fire! Get out!’ ”

She could tell from the screams inside that the customers had heard her warning—within moments, they were at the front door, including the young girl in the family. “She comes up to me right away, because I give out lollipops,” Benavidez said. Scooping up the child, the carrier rushed across the street and placed her safely in the care of a neighboring family.

Benavidez then crossed the street again; given how rapidly the fire was burning, she was concerned about her postal vehicle potentially being in the path of the flames. As she moved the vehicle, she noticed that the house next door also had caught on fire. The carrier quickly went up the door of that house to alert the woman who lived there. Thanks to the warning, the elderly woman was able to evacuate in time.

It took six fire trucks to extinguish the fire, which destroyed both houses and killed the family's dog. However, all of the residents were safely evacuated from their homes. Despite her fears, Benavidez said, “I was more scared for my customers.”

The carrier added that she was relieved that she had decided to follow her gut and investigate the smoke.

“I would have felt horrible if I didn't check,” she said.

Carrier's quick decisions save customer's life

“I was coming up the other side of the street for curbside delivery, when I heard someone talking on the other side of the street,” Sun City, AZ Branch 6156 member **Darin Chew** recalled about his route on Dec. 26, 2020, when “I heard [Patti Clark] say, ‘He fell and hit his head, and he's not getting up.’ ” The 24-year carrier continued on his route, listening intently, until he heard her say, “He's not breathing.” At those chilling words, the Marine Corps veteran leaped into action.

Clark's husband, Lee, had been pumping air into his tires when his wife went inside to get something. When Patti came back outside, however, her husband was lying on the pavement underneath the car, unconscious. Patti quickly called 911, which was the phone call that Chew had overheard.

“I heard her say, ‘The mailman's running over,’ ” the carrier recounted. Lee's body was partially under the car—Chew figured that he must have rolled after falling to the ground, but Lee's position made it difficult to determine how bad his injuries were. “I reached under [the car] and felt for a pulse, but I got nothing,” Chew said. He managed to pull the man out from under the car. “Then I tipped his head back and started doing chest compressions,” the carrier said.

Chew hadn't performed CPR since his military training, but he was determined to keep Lee alive until paramedics arrived. “I felt like I could just give him a fighting chance until someone with medical training



Sun City, AZ Branch 6156 member Darin Chew (l) sits with customer Lee Clark. Chew was recognized for his role in performing CPR on Clark during the customer's heart attack.

Eye on the elderly

Edgewater, FL Branch 5951 member and city carrier assistant **Christopher Hill** was delivering mail in August of 2020 when he spotted one of his elderly customers lying on the ground outside her house. “I saw her covered in blood,” the three-year carrier recalled. “I thought she had been robbed.” He rushed up to the door and spoke to her; despite her injury, she was still conscious. “I picked her up and took her in the house,” Hill said. Once inside, he shouted for the woman’s brother, who was out in the back yard, to call 911. While they waited for the paramedics to arrive, “I tried to keep her calm, and I prayed with her,” the carrier said. The customer was taken to the hospital and spent a week in the intensive care unit; it was later determined that her heart had stopped, which caused her to fall and

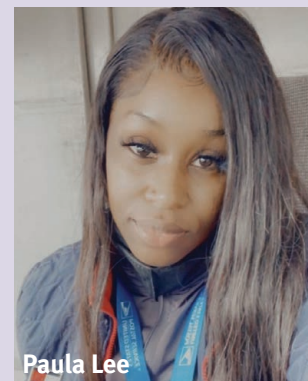


Christopher Hill

hit her head. The woman has since recovered and returned home. Hill described the experience as “scary,” but said that his former job as a police officer gave him the experience and training to keep calm in the situation. “I was just concerned about her,” he added. Her family later wrote a letter to the Edgewater post office to thank Hill for his actions and attention. “Our

mere words cannot express our deep appreciation,” the letter said. “We thank God for sending her an angel at the perfect time.”

On April 30, Greater East Bay, CA Branch 1111 member and city carrier assistant **Paula Lee** saw one of her customers watering his lawn while she made her afternoon deliveries. After the carrier delivered the mail to his home, she moved on to the next house. However, as she was walking, “I heard a big scream” from behind her, Lee recalled. “I looked back and didn’t see anything,” she said, so she made her final deliveries on the street and then walked back to her vehicle. As she walked past the man’s house, she looked at his front door. “He was lying on the front porch, with the mail scattered all around him,” Lee said. “And his



Paula Lee

head was completely gushing blood.” The carrier rushed over to help. She happened to have a dry cloth with her, which she held to his head to help stop the bleeding. While holding the cloth with her right hand, “I took my left hand and called 911, so he could get medical attention,” she said. Emergency operators were able to walk her through additional first aid steps until paramedics arrived. At the hospital, the customer told his family, “The mail lady saved my life!” The man received 18 stitches, but he has since recovered. During his recuperation, his wife regularly updated Lee about his condition. “His wife and son really were very appreciative of me,” Lee said. “I never was in a position to help someone else before—it was just an instinct that I needed to help this customer and make sure he was OK.” **PR**

could come save his life,” he said.

He continued doing chest compressions until EMTs reached the scene and took over. Lee was defibrillated three times before his pulse was restored. Paramedics credited Chew’s medical attention with saving Lee from possible brain damage, due to the length of time he was without a pulse.

Lee was placed in a medically induced coma at the hospital and later underwent heart surgery, but has since completely recovered. He was extremely grateful to Chew for helping save his life. “He put [the story] in the newspaper here,” Chew said. “He wants everyone to know.” Patti also called the post office to thank Chew for his actions in helping her husband, calling him “a miracle from God.”

The carrier, however, was modest about his role. “I was just glad I happened to be across the street,” he said.

Carrier gives first aid to gunshot victim

On April 8, Little Rock, AK Branch 35 member **Sherri Baker** was helping out on another route, delivering mail at an apartment complex. The 22-year carrier was walking across the crowded courtyard outside the apartment building—“There were about 30 people out there, including kids,” Baker said—when she noticed a young man walking slightly ahead of her. “I could see the guy walking about 15 to 20 feet away from me,” she recalled. “And then I heard someone yelling, ‘Look out!’”

A car had pulled up in front of the building, and several men got out of the vehicle. As Baker watched, “they shot him twice in the back.” When the victim fell to the ground and rolled over, he was shot multiple times again, this time in the

front. The shooters then fled the scene.

Despite the chaos that immediately broke out, Baker rushed to help. “I did CPR and everything I could,” she said. “I’m trained to do CPR—it’s something everyone should learn.”

She also called 911 and followed the operator’s instructions. Police and paramedics arrived shortly afterward and took over. Unfortunately, the victim was pronounced dead at the scene. Baker, along with other witnesses, was later interviewed by police, but at press time the suspects had yet to be apprehended.

The story, including Baker’s actions, was covered by many media outlets, including local Fox and ABC affiliates. The carrier, however, rebuffed any praise for her role. “It’s not even a hero thing,” she said. “We have to look out for everyone on our route. We’re not just carrying mail; we’re looking out for everyone.” **PR**

Help on the way

“I was on my route in the morning, and [was] headed to a cluster box outside a set of condos,” Madison, WI Branch 507 member **Richard Griffin Jr.** recalled about his eventful day in November of 2020. “I happened to look over to my right, and I saw a lady in the fetal position on the grass,” he added. At first, the six-year carrier thought that the woman was exercising—there were other people around, and nobody else had seemed to notice anything out of the ordinary. But then Griffin glanced again, and this time, “something made me stare a bit,” he said. “She wasn’t working out, and the position she was in seemed weird.” As he walked toward her, he grew increasingly disturbed; it seemed that the woman had not moved since he had first seen her. When he finally was close enough to see her face, the carrier realized that his gut instinct had been correct. “She looked to be suffering from a seizure,” he said. “Her eyes were glassed over.” Griffin rushed to her side and started asking her questions to determine her level of awareness. The woman was conscious but could not speak. The carrier quickly called 911, then stayed with her until paramedics arrived. Once the woman was in the ambulance, Griffin continued on his route. “I’m just glad that I noticed her,” he said. “I don’t know what would have happened otherwise.”

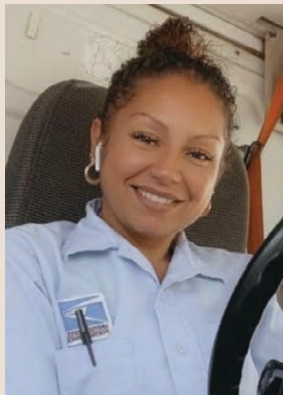
On May 6, Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Marlene Cruz** had just finished delivering mail to a hardware store on her route. When she walked outside, “I saw two men—one was standing and talking on the phone, and the other was sitting down on the ground,” the four-year carrier said. When she looked closer, the man on the ground appeared to be in medical distress. “I asked the man standing up, ‘Is he OK?’” Cruz recalled. “He said, yeah, he was fine, but [the other man] was purple.” The man on the phone began speaking in Spanish, but Cruz, who speaks the language, could tell that he was not talking to a 911 operator. She decided to call 911 herself. While dialing, she approached the man on the ground. “I touched him, and he was cold,” she said. “He was sweating and pale.” When Cruz reached an emergency operator, she was instructed to position the man on his side and make sure that he wasn’t choking. “Then, [the operator] said, ‘We need you to start CPR,’” she said.

Cruz, who had no medical training, was rattled: “I was like, what?” However, she was determined to help the man, so she followed the operator’s instructions and performed CPR until firefighters arrived on the scene. The emergency workers, suspecting a drug overdose, administered Narcan and then took the man to the hospital. “Everything happens on my route,” Cruz said, but she added that this incident was particularly scary: “You don’t expect to walk into something like this.” The carrier said that she had borrowed experience from her previous job as a 911 operator to keep calm under the pressure of the situation. “I just did what I thought was right, and followed directions,” Cruz added.

In August of 2020, “I was pulling out of the parking lot when I saw that all the traffic had stopped,” Milwaukee, WI Branch 2 member **Kara Dahl** recalled. When she looked ahead to see what had caused the traffic jam, “there was a FedEx truck on its side—people were starting to

gather around it.” Observing the scene, the two-year carrier noticed that the FedEx driver had managed to get out of his truck. “He was sitting alone, and he looked to be in really bad shock,” Dahl said. “He was FaceTiming his wife, but he kept dropping the phone.” She got out of her vehicle and went to check on him. After making sure that someone had already called 911, she stayed next to the driver and tried to keep him calm until the ambulance arrived. “I didn’t know how bad his injuries were,” she said. “There was blood coming out of his ear, so I was worried about a head injury.” Dahl was also able to comfort the man’s wife over the phone. When the driver tried to hang up on his wife to call his supervisor, Dahl urged him to stay on the line. “I called my office, and had my supervisor call the FedEx supervisor,” she said, allowing the driver to stay in contact with his family. She then waited with him until paramedics reached the accident scene. The driver was taken to the hospital, where

doctors determined that he had suffered a concussion. The man has since completely recovered. “His comments several days later were that in the midst of the stress and disorientation, he just remembers what a calming influence Kara was,” Menomonee Falls Post Office Supervisor Gail Gephardt said. “He was so grateful for her presence that day.” **PR**



Richard Griffin Jr. (l), Marlene Cruz (c) and Kara Dahl (r) all assisted members of their communities who were experiencing medical emergencies.