

## 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](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, 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.

## Military instincts help prevent shooting

The incident began early in the morning—“around 1 or 2 o'clock”—on June 5, Louisville, KY Branch 14 member **Joshua Williamson** recalled. The three-year carrier had spent the night celebrating his birthday with a group of friends at a pub, and the group decided to step outside for a moment.

Once outside, “I saw a guy running from the bar up the street,” Williamson said, “and then he turns and comes back at me.” The carrier said that he didn’t know what had agitated the man, but he soon became embroiled in a verbal altercation. Once the other man’s friends arrived on the scene, both groups were able to de-escalate the situation, and the man left.

Williamson went back inside the bar. “A few minutes later,” according to Williamson, he sensed that the man had returned. “I see his silhouette in my peripheral vision,” the carrier said, “but [I can tell that] he’s holding a gun.”

Williamson said that his actions were immediate and instinctive. “I dove at him, grabbed the gun so it was pointing up and he couldn’t shoot anyone,” he said.

His friends, who hadn’t seen the gun, initially thought that Williamson had decided to escalate the fight. “I swung him around,” the carrier said, “and they finally saw the gun.” His

friends immediately stopped trying to pull Williamson away from the attacker and helped grab the man. Together, they were able to pull him to the ground and disarm him.

After a bystander called 911, Williamson and his group waited for police to arrive. The man was arrested at the scene and later charged on several counts, including menacing and terroristic threatening.

“I knew action needed to be taken,” the carrier told local Fox affiliate WDRB-TV. “It had to be the military training. You know, I spent three years active duty [in the Army]—Fort Bragg.” The police report noted, “...had [the assailant] not been stopped, someone would have been seriously injured or killed.”

Williamson added, “If I can prevent a mass shooting, like I said, I’d do it a hundred times over.”

## Carrier aids lost kindergartner

On Aug. 17, 2020, Fort Wayne, IN Branch 116 member **Donna Kessler** was driving on her route when she noticed a young girl walking down the sidewalk alone, wearing a pink backpack. “It seemed very peculiar that a child that small” was out by herself, the two-year carrier recalled thinking. When she finished delivering to a cul-de-sac, she looped back around and kept an eye out for the little girl.

When she drove past this time, “I looked at her, and I could tell she was crying,” Kessler said. She swiftly pulled up next to the child and got out of her vehicle.

When the carrier asked if she was lost, the girl, Daisy, said yes, but was unable to give Kessler her address or phone number. “I asked her if I could look in her backpack,” Kessler said; upon opening the bag, the carrier was able to find a phone number for Daisy’s mother.

When her mother didn’t pick up right away, Kessler texted her to let



Joshua Williamson

## Help on the way

In early March, West Warwick, RI Branch 2158 member **Juana Palacios** was on her route when she happened across a customer lying on his lawn. “I saw him on the ground, and I knew something was wrong,” the five-year carrier recalled. “He was kicking and shaking.” She rushed over to his side and discovered two more worrying symptoms: He was foaming at the mouth and cold to the touch. Palacios promptly called 911, and then stayed next to the man until paramedics arrived at the scene. The man was taken to the hospital, and has since fully recovered. After the patron returned home, the carrier said, “he came to me and said, ‘Thanks; I wouldn’t be alive if you hadn’t called 911.’” Palacios was subsequently recognized for her actions in a ceremony at the post office, led by the fire chief and several members of the town council. The story also was reported in *RI Central*. The carrier said that she was taken aback by all the praise but considered it fortunate that she had been able to help the customer. “I cover five different routes,” she explained, and the regular carrier who covered that neighborhood usually passed by the

man’s house earlier in the day. “I felt like it was God who sent me,” Palacios added.

On March 10, Rochester, NY member **Pamela Race** was driving down a road on her route when she noticed a truck coasting toward her from the opposite direction. “It was coming toward a brick building, but it wasn’t stopping, so I knew something was wrong,” the 16-year carrier recalled. As it approached, she tried to look through the vehicle’s tinted windows, but couldn’t see a driver. Just before it reached the building, the truck slammed into the guide wire for one of the street’s telephone poles. Race immediately pulled over and went to the nearest building, where she asked if anyone recognized the vehicle. “I thought there was nobody inside [the car], that somebody had just forgot to put it in park,” she explained. When the carrier approached the truck, she was horrified to see an unconscious man slumped over in the driver’s seat. She was unable to open the locked door, Race said. “I knocked on the window, trying to wake him,” she continued, but got no response. She quickly called 911, and emergency responders arrived

on the scene shortly thereafter. The man was taken to the hospital, where he recovered. Police later told Race that the man had overdosed while driving, and her prompt actions had likely been crucial for his survival. The carrier took the praise in stride. “I would help anyone that needed help,” she said. “But it feels good that I helped save a life.”

Lake Charles, LA Branch 914 member **Alvin Drake** was delivering mail to a neighborhood on his route last year when he heard screams coming from one of the houses. “I’ve known the couple [who live in the house] for years,” the 34-year carrier said, so he dropped the mail in their box and rushed up to the front door. “I heard the gentleman yell, ‘Please don’t leave, please don’t leave,’” Drake recalled. The carrier entered the home, and the man told him that his wife had fallen in their bathtub and was unable to get out. The carrier went to the bathroom, where he knocked and announced himself as the mailman. The woman asked him if he could come help her. When he entered, “she was lying down on her back in the bathtub,” Drake said, “and she said, ‘I just need to



**Alvin Drake**

get myself up.’” The carrier was able to get her safely into a seated position in the tub, but “I didn’t want to help her out, in case something was broken,” he explained. He called 911 and asked for emergency services to be sent to the house. A neighbor came over to check on the couple. Once Drake explained the situation, the neighbor stayed with the couple while the carrier continued on his route. Emergency responders arrived and were able to get the customer out of the tub. “I was just glad I was in the right place at the right time—thank God I was delivering at that time of day,” Drake said. “I have an elderly mother, and I would hope someone would do the same to help her, too.” **PR**

her know about the situation. “I said, I’m a mail carrier, and I found your daughter Daisy,” the carrier said. The mother quickly called her back—she was at work, and was confused as to why her daughter was not in school.

The mother explained that it was Daisy’s first day of kindergarten, and that she had been supposed to stay at an after-school program with her brother. “No one knew she was not

where she was supposed to be—even the school didn’t know,” Kessler said.

The carrier agreed to wait with Daisy until her mother could come pick her up. “I gave her a tangerine, and a neighbor who’d come out brought us water, and we just sat there” and chatted, Kessler recalled. The little girl was “in good spirits” when her mother arrived about 20 minutes later, and the carrier was able to continue on her route.

Daisy’s mother texted the carrier later that night expressing her gratitude for her attention and assistance, saying that “after speaking with [Daisy’s father], she realized how serious it could have been.” The mother also later stopped by the post office to thank Kessler personally.

“As mail carriers, we do so much,” Kessler said. “We monitor the homes and neighborhoods [on our route] every day.” **PR**

## Eye on the elderly

On July 2, Elkhart, IN Branch 820 member **Michael Kelly** noticed that an elderly man on his route hadn't collected his mail from the day before. The 26-year carrier decided to ring the doorbell and make sure the man was all right. "He kind of mumbled [through the door], but I thought he said he was fine," the carrier said. The next day, Saturday, Kelly saw that the man still hadn't collected his mail. "I rang the doorbell again, and said, 'Jerry, are you OK?'" he recalled. Peering through a window, he was able to see that a kitchen chair was lying on the floor, as if it had been knocked over, and that the customer's cane was lying next to it. Kelly promptly

called 911. When firefighters got inside the home, they found the customer lying on the floor in front of his door; he had been there for almost 48 hours. The carrier later visited him in the hospital, where the man was being treated for dehydration and some friction wounds. Kelly said that he didn't want the praise that had come his way for his actions, but added that he was grateful for the good outcome. "I was going on vacation the next day, and probably nobody would have checked on him until I got back," the carrier said. "It felt great [to help]."

Dayton, OH Branch 182 member **Tyler Stidman** was driving to a park point

on his route in November of 2020 when he saw one of his older customers outside the building with his two daughters. "I was pulling up to the condos when I noticed he had fallen while walking on his walker," the eight-year carrier said. One of the daughters is disabled, and Stidman could tell that the other daughter was having a hard time getting



**Tyler Stidman**

her father back on his feet by herself. The carrier swiftly parked and got out of his vehicle, and then went over to help. "I assisted with getting him up, and then getting the walker and getting him off of the grass," Stidman said. Together, they were able to get the man safely situated inside. The daughter then profusely thanked Stidman for coming to their aid. But the carrier, who said that this was the "fourth or fifth time" something like this had happened while he was out delivering, shrugged it off as a normal part of the job. "Anyone who saw it would do the same thing," he added. "I just happened to be at the right place at the right time." **PR**

## Customer Connect hits \$3 billion

Since 2003, the Customer Connect program has allowed USPS to use a natural sales lead force—letter carriers—to expand its business.

Through Customer Connect, thousands of carriers have successfully leveraged their interactions with business customers to encourage them to use the Postal Service, rather than rely on private delivery and mailing services.

Carriers who notice packages going out from businesses through competing carriers such as FedEx or UPS, or who have conversations with business managers about the cost of shipping, submit leads to USPS sales staff. Since USPS visits businesses at least six days a week and offers many flat-rate shipping options, it often can beat competitors on price and service.

USPS announced last year that Customer Connect had produced sales leads worth a total of \$3 billion in annualized revenue in the program's 18-year history.

In a USPS video, NALC President Fredric Rolando praised letter carriers for their contributions to the success of USPS through Customer Connect. "You are often the only connection many of our customers have with the Postal Service," he said. "Your advice and recommendations are highly valued."

"The Customer Connect program takes advantage of what letter carriers do best," said NALC Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr., who oversees the program for NALC. "They go to every address six days a week, and they know their customers."

While carriers don't complete the actual sales—USPS sales staff follow up on the leads that carriers give them—the letter carrier is at the heart of the process because customers know and trust them, Peralta said.

“Customers see what we do every day of the week, and the excellent service we provide,” he said.

Letter carriers also use their keen sense of observation to notice when a customer has shipping needs that the Postal Service could meet better than the other guys, Peralta added.

“Just as we see people in distress and come to their rescue sometimes,” he said, “carriers notice when a business needs better service at a better price.”

Customer Connect leads don't have to involve packages—a business struggling to attract customers might take advantage of the inexpensive and effective advertising mail that USPS offers.

The Customer Connect program was tested in several cities in 2002 and, after promising results, was rolled out nationally in the fall of 2003. Less than a year later, carriers already had generated more than \$10 million in leads.

Each year, *The Postal Record* reports on some of the leads that letter carriers generate for Customer Connect. Here are a few recent highlights:

Dallas, TX Branch 132 member **Kathy Brown** secured a sales lead that generated more than \$1 million for the Postal Service. When she saw a FedEx trailer parked in a company's lot, Brown said, it piqued her interest. The business was a logistics company that she regularly delivered to on her route. “I saw the trailer, and I inquired, ‘Can we get some of that business?’” Brown recalled.

The carrier knew one of the sales representatives, so after getting the company's information, she made sure to follow up on the lead. The sales representative met with the owners and was able to convince them to switch some of their shipping. “[USPS] got their business for the smaller packages,” Brown said. “We have better prices.”

Brown said that her personal connection to the business helped convince the customer to listen to the sales pitch. “I show that I'm concerned, that I deliver,” she said. “You have to show that you can walk the walk.”

Lima, OH Branch 105 member **Ned DeLong** has twice been named the top Customer Connect carrier for his district—but reaching that accomplishment has only pushed him to work harder. In addition to working as his branch's health and safety officer, DeLong serves as the Lima Customer Connect coordinator, helping motivate and instruct his fellow carriers on how to generate potential sales leads.

“When it comes to finding a lead, make it simple,” the 17-year carrier said he tells newer carriers. “It's a business. Get a business card.” This strategy has produced many leads for carriers, including some that have generated millions in revenue for USPS.

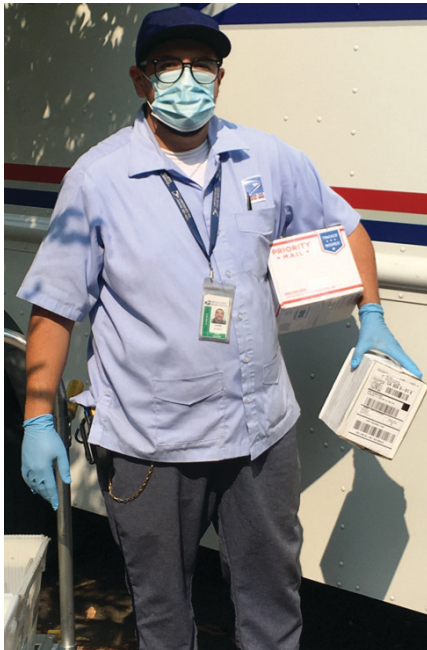
One of DeLong's key tips for other carriers is to reach out to customers at the beginning of the year. Many delivery services raise rates in January and February, he said, but USPS “has a competitive rate, with no surcharges.” Once he's made his pitch, DeLong then passes the customer's specific needs along to the sales team to close the deal.



Kathy Brown



## Customer Connect (continued)



Juan Ayala

Despite his busy schedule, DeLong says that he views his work as essential for keeping USPS in business. “I’m driven to keep [the Post Office] going—I love this place,” he said. “If you do nothing, then nothing’s going to happen.”

Last November, the Eagleville, PA, post office honored two Norristown, PA Branch 542 members whose leads resulted in a total of almost \$900,000 in new revenue for the Postal Service. **Drew Ritchie**, a 26-year carrier, had recently submitted two leads through Customer Connect that brought in a combined revenue of more than \$600,000.

One lead was for a golf apparel company that was looking to eliminate surcharges and enhance customer delivery expectations. Ritchie’s second lead was for a cleaning supply company that was unhappy with the service provided by another shipper and was seeking better rates and improved shipping times.

The carrier said that if he sees packages from another shipping company sitting inside a store, he asks the owners if they would consider switching. “I’m not shy,” he said. “Just don’t be afraid to ask.”

Meanwhile, 33-year carrier **Donald Felice Jr.** submitted a lead for a company that sells exfoliators and body sponges. The lead resulted in a shipping deal worth more than \$287,000. The company, Clean Logic, had recently moved to a storefront on Felice’s route.

“I saw they had a huge warehouse in the back,” the carrier recalled, and he wondered if USPS could pick up the company’s shipping business. When the store opened, he went in and talked to one of the owners. “I asked if

they were interested in talking to the Postal Service,” Felice said, “and she gave me her business card.” He then passed the information to the sales team, who closed the deal.

“I have a great rapport with customers,” Felice explained about his sales tactics. “They see me in uniform, and I talk to them and make a personal contact.”

In the four years he has been delivering for USPS, Santa Ana, CA Branch 737 member **Juan Ayala** has been a star when it comes to finding sales leads for the Postal Service. Since 2016, Ayala has submitted 28 leads for a total of more than \$1.3 million in new revenue.

As a city carrier assistant, “I was delivering on a business route,” the carrier noted, and he got to know his customers well. When doing his sales pitch, Ayala kept it simple. “I had an idea of what the customers wanted—they wanted to know, ‘What can the Post Office do for us?’” he said.

One of the carrier’s most recent leads came when he noticed competitors’ trucks at the loading dock of one of his customers—a company that makes espresso machines. “They had just moved in,” Ayala said. So when he went in with his deliveries, “I told them, ‘We can save you money on flat-rate boxes,’” the carrier said, adding, “I just told them to give us a chance.” Ayala’s lead is estimated to have generated more than \$555,000 in new revenue.

The efforts of letter carriers in this regard are invaluable, President Rolando says.

“Their firsthand knowledge of their customers and the trust they bring to their jobs each day make letter carriers a natural source of sales leads for the Postal Service,” he said. **PR**