

The spirit of the season

Letter carriers give of themselves year-round. Whether through donations to those in need, service to those who need help or lending hope to others, carriers make the world a better place. During the holiday season, though, the love that letter carriers spread throughout their communities shines through particularly strongly.



In this issue of *The Postal Record*, we bring you some of the special moments this time of year delivers—and some of the ways letter carriers keep the joy alive throughout the year.

However and whenever they spread happiness, letter carriers give of themselves—and they find that the rewards are even greater than what they give.

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Branch adopts a family each year to share joy

Each holiday season, Cherry Hill/Haddonfield, NJ Branch 769 adopts a family in need and makes its Christmas special. It's been a branch tradition for a decade or more, Branch Vice President **Michele Galda** said.

The branch rotates among its three postal offices each Christmas to find a suitable family, Galda said. "We go to the local schools or the local churches and ask if a family needs help." Sometimes a letter carrier who knows a family in need makes a nomination. In some years, the branch adopts more than one family. A few years ago, the carriers helped the family of a city carrier assistant in the branch who was a struggling single mother.

For 2022, the branch found a father of two who had lost his wife to cancer. The branch members devoted money, time and love to ensure that the children had a great Christmas.

Every year, the branch makes sure that the children in the families they adopt get what they want from their Christmas wish lists. The branch asks the parents for a list and posts it at each office. Postal employees either buy gifts on the list or donate money to buy them. This year, their fundraising effort raised more than \$1,000.

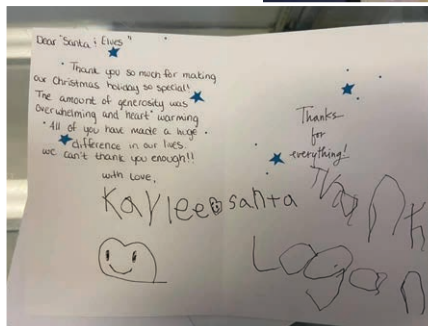
A quartet of Branch 769 carriers usually does the shopping for gifts on the list that were not donated directly: Galda, Branch Secretary-Treasurer **Jennifer Schwartz**, and carriers **Melonie Shellcross** and **Loraine Rigler**. They use left-over funds to buy gift cards for the parents. The carriers wrap the gifts and deliver them, with dinner from a local restaurant, to the chosen family a few days before Christmas.

Galda said the annual tradition brings a tear to her eye because she grew up in a struggling family with four sisters and a brother, so she knows what these families are experiencing. "I get a lot of joy from it," she said. "I like to give back to unfortunate families because I know what it was like." **PR**



Left: Two of the kids Branch 769 has provided gifts to and the thank-you note the branch received

Below: More gifts to be given away



Keeping kids happy for the holidays



Right: Anthony Picariello
Above: The mailbox Picariello sets up for children's letters to Santa



Anthony Picariello does his part to ensure that children enjoy what are probably the two favorite holidays among young folks: Halloween and Christmas.

Branch 157 carriers in Philadelphia, PA, where he has delivered the mail for 27 years, know Picariello as “Stitch.” He got the nickname as a young child when he had open-heart surgery, and then earned a reputation as an accident-prone boy. Years later, his own newborn daughter had surgery at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), followed by 24 days of recovery time in the neonatal intensive-care unit.

After that experience, he teamed up with another carrier to collect Halloween costumes for children in the oncology unit of the hospital. The daughter of the other carrier, who has since left the Postal Service, had died of cancer at CHOP on Halloween, her favorite holiday, a few years ago. Since that carrier left the job, Picariello has carried on the work of bringing Halloween to the kids at CHOP.

“At the hospital, they set up a make-shift store,” he said. “A lot of the cancer patients, the kids can’t leave and their families pretty much live there.”

The in-house costume store allows the children to choose their costumes without parents having to worry about logistics. “The kids get to pick out their

costume and trick-or-treat at the hospital,” Picariello said.

Picariello set up a box in the Bustleton Post Office, where he works, to collect donated costumes from postal employees and the community, and he also gathered cash donations to buy more. For Halloween 2022, the effort yielded 337 costumes of all kinds and sizes; many more were bought with the cash donations.

Once Halloween is over, many children’s thoughts soon turn to Christmas. For the last two years, Picariello, who has two young children of his own, set up a special mailbox in the post office lobby for letters to Santa, and answered each one.

At a table next to the box, he offered children little gifts such as stickers and candy, and included templates and pens to make writing to Santa easy. He personalized each response from Santa to match the child’s wishes—though he was careful never to promise that a child would get the gifts requested. He fancied up the letters from Santa with a special North Pole wax seal and sent them by mail.

When word got out about the mailbox, he was swamped with letters—151 last Christmas. But that didn’t slow Picariello down. “I was up until 2 or 3 in the morning almost every night writing back to them,” he said. **PR**

Sharing the bounty

Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 has a good problem: too much generosity from its members. The branch ended up with more than enough money to support its Christmastime charitable activities, so it looked for new ways to help the

community, Branch President **Richard Wilson** said.

The branch had long supported Toys for Tots, the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and the Bethesda Mission in Harrisburg, along with adopting families to bless with Christmas gifts.

But donations from branch members seem to keep growing—last year, the branch raised nearly \$2,000 for holiday charitable support, its high point thus far. “Since we had so much money coming in from the branch, all due to member donations,” Wilson said, “we started picking up a couple of retirement homes.”

One of the nursing homes has since closed, but the branch has delivered special gifts to residents of the other one—The Gardens at Gettysburg—every year for nearly two decades. Responding to requests from the nursing home, the branch brings joyful packages all

year to delight residents, including bingo prizes, candy and calendars. The branch brings several 50-pound bags of birdseed for the bird feeders outside the residents’ windows—enough to last through the winter—and carriers even fill the feeders sometimes.

“The residents are happy to receive such wonderful gifts each year,” the nursing home’s activity director, Donna Thorpe, said.

“Everybody doesn’t have family and [some] can’t provide for themselves,” Wilson said. “This gives us an opportunity to make somebody have a smile on their face.” **PR**

Making the Halloween parade special

Larry Scrubbs Jr. fits right in with the letter carrier’s spirit of giving back to his community. As a supporter of the annual Halloween parade in his hometown of Baton Rouge, LA, Scrubbs helps to pass on the delights of the holiday to all of the community’s children.

When he’s not on his route in Port Allen, just across the Mississippi River from downtown Baton Rouge, Scrubbs volunteers with the 1031 Consortium, a community organization that stages the town’s annual Halloween parade. With this being the Gulf Coast of Louisiana, it is no ordinary Halloween parade—the event involves floats, marching bands, a Halloween court with a king, queen, prince and princess, and elaborate costumes. Scrubbs works on the side as a DJ, and a gig with the 1031 Consortium—he played music on a float—led to his involvement.

Since then, Scrubbs has served on the board of the organization and as a volunteer. In addition to the parade, the group spreads Halloween joy by donating costumes and providing treats to ensure that everyone has access to the fun, including kids in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

“[We] do costume drives for kids who can’t afford costumes, and trick-or-treating initiatives for certain neighborhoods,” Scrubbs said. To bring the spirit of Halloween to a new generation, the 1031 Consortium is making trick-or-treating accessible for all. “The average price of a Halloween costume is \$40 to \$45,” he said, “and with things being the way they’ve been, some parents can’t afford that—especially if you have a house with multiple children.”

The carrier’s love for Halloween extends beyond the parade—he likes to play scary characters in the annual 13th Gate haunted house in Baton Rouge, which has been ranked top haunted house in the nation by *Hauntworld Magazine*. “I love dressing up and doing goofy stuff,” he said. His roles have included butchers and zombies.

Scrubbs recently began putting his love of acting to use as a volunteer for the 225 Theatre Collective, a non-profit troop that brings theater to the community. Part of its mission, Scrubbs said, is “to broaden what theater looks like, because so many times you don’t really see a lot of people of color. It’s all-inclusive theater for everybody.” **PR**



Larry Scrubbs Jr. at the Halloween parade



Scrubbs gets into character

Carrier donates kidney to friend



Richmond Henderson

In the spring of 2021, Richmond Henderson received a phone call from Yvonne Collins, a friend he had grown up with in Lewisville, TX.

She had been battling lupus—an autoimmune disease that can produce inflammation and pain in any part of the body and can cause organ damage—for about a decade, and the time had come that she needed a new kidney. Hers were failing and she had been undergoing hours-long dialysis treatments multiple times a week for years.

Collins’s family launched a search for a donor and reached out to Henderson. Would he be willing to get tested?

For the Dallas, TX Branch 132 member, it was a no-brainer.

Henderson soon got tested. Some of it, such as blood work, a tissue type test and weight checks, were done locally. As luck would have it, he and Yvonne were a match.

The carrier soon traveled to Houston for some more extensive in-house testing to diagram his anatomy and see how his kidneys are aligned. “Some people might have one smaller or larger, but mine are pretty much equal size,” he said. Organ sizes from donor to recipient have to be comparable for the best long-term outcome.

Although most people have two kidneys, the National Kidney Foundation says that people with just one kidney can live normal, healthy lives.

The transplant surgery was initially scheduled for late 2021, but things kept getting pushed back due to Collins becoming ill, and because of COVID-19 concerns, Henderson said.

The two friends, along with the help of the hospital coordinator and Henderson’s postal supervisors, eventually settled on Feb. 11 at the Houston

Methodist J.C. Walter Jr. Transplant Center, and the carrier checked in for pre-op on Feb. 7.

Even though this was his first surgery, “I was pretty cool, calm and collected the whole experience,” Henderson said, which was a little different than his family’s reaction.

“It was understandable,” he said of their apprehension, adding that “they all had justifiable concerns of somebody going under the knife.”

Prior to the surgery, most communication between the two took place through the surgery coordinator, but he did talk to Yvonne throughout the process “to keep an eye on each other and check in,” the carrier said.

For the four-hour transplant procedure, surgeons used a three-prong machine that had a camera and tools to move past the abdominal wall to make an incision and remove the organ, a process Henderson found fascinating. “The doctor is at a computer screen with a camera and almost like a huge remote control,” he said.

“I got to see her before and after the surgery,” Henderson said of Collins. Hospital staff rolled her into his room. Though she was dealing with some pain, her surgery went exactly as hoped.

“I woke up with pure joy in my heart seeing Yvonne getting rolled in next to me, realizing the magnitude of the moment,” he said.

Henderson called himself “relaxed and blessed” post-operation. He stayed in the hospital for two days and then recuperated at his aunt’s house in Houston for two weeks before getting the “all clear” from his doctors at a two-week checkup. Soon after, he headed home to the Dallas area.

Henderson, a city carrier assistant who began delivering mail a year and a half ago, had unfortunately not been with the Postal Service long enough to be eligible for the Postal Service program that provides administrative leave for those who donate organs.

Instead, several carriers in his station stepped up to donate leave for his recovery, which he combined with his own accrued leave to stay home for six weeks. “It was very special for them to do that,” he said of his co-workers.

The carrier was eager to get moving and was quickly back up to speed at work after hitting the gym to prepare during his recovery. “It was trying to figure out what I could handle,” he said, adding that he tried to simulate walking, carrying and lifting. “It was like I had never left.”

The carrier makes sure to drink one to two gallons of water a day to stay hydrated and watches his diet, but otherwise feels that he’s back to normal.

“It was special for me to realize that I had a purpose to help out a friend,” he said.

Collins has been doing well post-transplant with her quality of life improved, and she and her family have been appreciative. “She’s healthy and gaining weight,” Henderson said, adding that the kidney is working as it’s supposed to.

She’s monitoring her health closely, but “other than that, she’s driving, walking [and] working,” Henderson said.

His co-workers have all been supportive, and Branch 132 President **Kimetra Lewis** called the carrier’s act noble as well as “a selfless sacrifice and precious act of love.”

The carrier has no regrets about his experience and simply wanted to help out a friend. “She needed a donor, and I considered it, and we were matched,” he said, “and from there, it took off.”

Henderson would encourage anyone to consider organ donation. “If you’re healthy enough [and] in the position to do so, I would definitely recommend blood donation, organ donating, any form of that,” he said. **PR**

Sharing a postal love

Carlene Simmons and young Lainey Estrada have something special in common—they share a love for the letter carrier job. Lainey is a little girl on Simmons’s route in Alice, TX, and every day she waits for her “mail lady,” as she affectionately calls the Corpus Christi Branch 1259 member, to show up. According to Lainey’s mom, she loves everything from the truck to the outfit to the mail being dropped off.

With Halloween approaching, Lainey’s mother informed Simmons

that Lainey wanted to dress up as a letter carrier. “I got this idea,” Simmons said. “I had an old shirt and shorts, and they told me that her grandma could fix the clothes to make them smaller for her. I gave her a baseball cap, too.” Upon giving Lainey the shirt, her parents took a photo of them, posted it on Facebook—and it went viral.

The eight-year carrier was shocked by the attention. “It’s funny to me, because I don’t do limelight stuff,” she said. “This is just what I do. It’s noth-



Carlene Simmons and Lainey Estrada





ing fancy. I'm a mom, I'm a grandma, I'm just out here doing my job."

When Simmons delivered to Lainey's house on Halloween, the little girl was wearing a store-bought letter carrier costume. Her parents had saved Simmons' generous gift for when Lainey grows up and may want to wear it in its original size. "They bought a costume online, and she had a satchel and everything," the carrier explained. "My heart just melted. She's so cute. She's just this little sweetheart of a girl."

"We're out here every day on the street; you see people every day," Sim-

mons, who also served in the Army, added. "I've seen pregnant moms, people giving birth, graduating, moving away, passing. I've been invited to weddings and *quinceaneras* [Spanish for a girl's 15th birthday celebration]; people treat me like family. They stop me on the street and say, 'Hey, you need a drink,' or 'You need some snacks.'"

She noted that her uncle was a letter carrier for more than 30 years in Montana. The job runs in her blood, and with her gift to Lainey, she may have had a hand in passing the love for her craft to a whole new generation. **PR**



Levan "Van" Singletary

Happy surprises for child with cancer

As Levan "Van" Singletary was going about his rounds delivering mail on Dec. 20, 2021, a customer, Jamie Hayward, approached him on his route.

The woman's 6-year-old son Jacob—who since March 2020 had been battling stage 4 kidney cancer that had spread to his lung—was excited about the mail and his biggest dream was to become a letter carrier one day. She asked if there might be an opportunity for him to see the inner workings of the post office through a tour prior to his seventh birthday on Dec. 24. That was the only thing he wanted.

The Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member had delivered the route in Laguna Niguel for decades and had known Jacob's father, Jared, for years, but rarely saw Jacob and his 5-year-old sister Ava.

"I would see them in passing playing, but not very much, because I think

a good majority of the time after age 4, he was in and out of the hospital," the carrier said.

With the holiday season in full swing amid security concerns due to the ongoing pandemic, Singletary was initially unsure of what he could do.

"I felt like it was something that could happen, and should happen," the carrier said. "I immediately got in touch with my supervisor [and] postmasters. I set up the following day for them to come in and do a tour of the post office."

The family came to the post office on Dec. 21. "He got to put a piece of mail in the case. He was all excited and overjoyed with that," Singletary said. "He had his own homemade postal satchel made and was carrying it around." The carrier also gave Jacob a miniature LLV toy.

While the Haywards were at the station, "The family shared the story

with my entire office,” the carrier said, adding that Jacob’s plight moved everyone.

“It was during the pandemic time; it was really tough,” Singletary said. “It was a good, emotional uplift for each and every one of my co-workers. Everybody’s tired, everyone is worn out, and we just needed a story like that to help motivate us through the rest of the holiday season.

“And from there, the postmaster just felt like we could have done more,” Singletary said.

So management got to work planning a larger event for Jacob on Jan. 24. “The post office put together a media day,” Singletary said. “They brought in a postal vehicle, made him an honorary postal carrier, all of the upper management in the Postal Service showed up for a photo op, and it just took off from there.”

The parents were forewarned, but it was a total surprise for Jacob. The youngster was gifted a mini ride-on electric LLV, a postal uniform and his favorite treat of chocolate doughnuts, and got a custom stamp for the event. (Ava wasn’t left out—Jacob’s younger sibling was part of all the fun and also received some Minnie Mouse presents.)

His parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and neighbors were there to cheer the birthday boy on. “This is so sweet of you. I don’t know what else to say,” Jacob told the USPS representatives in gratitude.

The event received a lot of media coverage and began to go viral on social media.

Because the time period coincided with the end of the Combined Federal Campaign’s giving period, Singletary explained that they wanted to draw attention to organizations like Children’s Health of Orange County children’s



Singletary delivers an electric LLV to Jacob Hayward

hospital, where Jacob received hours of chemotherapy and radiation and more than 50 transfusions as part of his cancer treatment.

Jacob had recently been in isolation for five weeks while having a bone marrow transplant. To keep up his spirits, a mailbox was set up outside of his hospital room to have letters sent and delivered to him.

The Haywards wanted to do something to bring their son joy on his birthday, and Singletary helped them to deliver. “It’s just a moment where they got the opportunity to uplift their child who has gone through so much,” the carrier said.

And Jacob’s ecstatic reaction to the surprise couldn’t have been better, Singletary said: Jacob put his hands on his cheeks like Kevin McCallister in “Home Alone” and “was like, ‘this is awesome!’ ”

Singletary was happy to play the role of facilitator to provide a special birthday for his young patron.

“It was good giving back to the community that has given to me all these many years,” the carrier said. “I’ve been on the same route for 34 years, so I have that interaction with a lot of my customers out there. I felt it was a small thing [to do]. I just made it happen.”

Singletary recently received news from Jamie that Jacob has been declared cancer-free. He’s doing well and back in school full time, and after his big surprises, he loves the mail more than ever—thanks to his letter carrier.

“What he did will be something we remember for the rest of our lives,” Jared told local media. **PR**