

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.

Keeping cool in a crisis

"I was driving on my route" on May 19, 2021, New Haven, CT Branch 19 member **Michael Pietrandrea** recalled, when he noticed a man standing on a cherry picker alongside a building. "The guy was about 75 feet away, so I couldn't really make out what he was doing [at first]," the city carrier assistant (CCA) said. "He was holding his forearm with his other hand."

As Pietrandrea drove closer, he could make out more details—and those details were terrifying. "I could see his pants were covered in red," the carrier said. "His arm was gushing blood."

Pietrandrea quickly pulled his vehicle over and got out. The injured man shouted at the CCA to call 911, which Pietrandrea did. As the man came down the lift, the carrier and another passerby took a beach towel and wrapped it around the man's arm, which was still bleeding profusely. "He was saying, 'I'm OK, I'm fine,' and I [said], 'Dude, you're not fine—you need to go to the hospital,'" Pietrandrea said.

The carrier stayed with the man, Serge Roussel, and kept him calm until paramedics arrived. Roussel explained that he had been power washing the building when he had cut his arm on his equipment. Although Roussel did not know it at the time, he had just missed severing an artery.

Roussel was taken to the hospital and

treated for his injury. After being released, he bumped into Pietrandrea a few days later and thanked him for his assistance.

Pietrandrea denied the need for any praise, and said that he was just reacting in the moment as best he could. "I just had to help this guy out, make sure he was OK," he said.

Despite the carrier's modesty, Roussel enthusiastically described Pietrandrea as "my hero." He added, "He saved my life. He is a good, brave man. Thank God he was there!"

Carrier's alertness helps prevent fire

On April 21, 2021, Sioux City, IA Branch 69 member **Mark Dunlap** was making deliveries on a block when he heard something unusual. "I could hear a low-pitched alarm," the CCA recalled.

Looking around for the source, he spotted one of his customers crossing into a neighbor's yard; it appeared that the man had heard the same thing. As Dunlap approached the other house, the beeping got louder. "[The customer] said, 'Does that sound like a smoke alarm?' And I said, 'Yeah, it does,'" the carrier said.

Concerned about the welfare of the homeowner, who Dunlap knew was an elderly woman who lived by herself, the carrier went up to the house and knocked



Sioux City, IA Branch 69 member **Mark Dunlap** (l) is recognized for his heroic behavior by branch vice president **Trent Bertrand**.

on the door. "I wasn't getting an answer, so I started calling out her name," Dunlap said. "Then I opened the screen door, and I could smell smoke."

With this confirmation that something was on fire inside the house, Dunlap and the neighbor became even more determined to get inside and make sure that the homeowner was all right. They checked the back door, but it also was locked. Eventually, however, they discovered that one of the front windows was unlocked.

Dunlap volunteered to crawl through into the house. Once inside, he immediately opened the front door to let the smoke out, and then began searching the house for any residents. "The smoke was a little thicker" the farther into the house he went, Dunlap said—"I knew if [the homeowner] was inside, she was in trouble."

Finally, the carrier reached the kitchen, where he became aware of a "really strong smell." Glancing around, Dunlap saw that the oven had been left on—the food inside it was the source of the smell and the smoke. Dunlap turned the oven off. "It could have been so much worse," he said. "I don't know if it would have burst into flames."

Meanwhile, the neighbor was able to get in touch with the homeowner—as it turned out, she had left to go to the store and forgotten about the food in the oven. Thanks to Dunlap's prompt intervention, none of her property was damaged.

A neighbor later contacted the Postal Service to praise Dunlap, saying that Dunlap went "above and beyond" and that without his help, the house might have burned down. Dunlap, however, characterized it as part of the job. "We're the eyes and ears of the community," he said. "I'm just grateful no one got hurt."

A watchful eye saves missing child and dog

"I was pulling out of a driveway" after making a delivery on Aug. 5, 2021, Phoenix, AZ Branch 576 member **Michael Gambrell** recalled, "when I [saw] something out in the middle of the street."

Michael Gambrell



Peering closer, he saw that it was a stray dog, and immediately braked. When the dog ran off, however, Gambrell realized that there was still a figure in the road. “It was a young child, in just a diaper and a pair of shoes,” he said. As a new father, his heart plummeted over the danger the child was in.

Gambrell immediately pulled his vehicle out into the street, to block any incoming traffic from hitting the young boy. Then he got out, grabbed the child, and returned to the LLV. “I had the fan going, because it’s Phoenix, so it’s hot as blazes out,” the carrier said.

The CCA called 911 and reported the child’s whereabouts to police. While waiting for officers to arrive, he pulled

up cartoons on his phone. “I was thinking, ‘Oh, wow—how do I comfort this child, what do I do?’” Still concerned about the toddler’s heat exposure, he decided to drive to a nearby apartment complex, which he knew had air conditioning in the lobby.

At the apartment building, Gambrell was able to get the child out of the sun and feed him a popsicle. Eventually, officers returned his call with good news—they had located the child’s mother. Gambrell waited with the boy until police arrived with his mother.

Gambrell spoke with the mother and found out that the boy had accidentally opened the door and let out the family dog; he then had followed the dog into

the road. When the carrier found them, they were two blocks away from the child’s house. Gambrell reported seeing the dog with the child, and he promised to keep an eye out for the dog while finishing his route.

“I had delivered four more stops, and then I saw the dog,” the CCA said. He called the number that a police officer had given him, and the family was able to find and bring the dog back home.

Gambrell said that while he is always happy to help his customers, this incident really stood out to him. “It was especially significant because I had a son that was [at the time] only a few months old,” he said. “It was eye opening.” **PR**

Help on the way

On June 25, 2021, Darlington, WI Branch 2884 member **Becky Granberg** was delivering to a house on her route when she heard someone yelling inside the neighboring residence. “She had her windows open,” the three-year carrier recalled, which allowed Granberg to hear the customer’s cries for help. The carrier quickly rushed next door and entered the house. She found her customer, an elderly woman, lying on the floor.

The woman had been putting something away on a high shelf using a ladder, but had fallen off of the ladder and

seriously injured herself. While not able to tell the precise nature of the woman’s injuries, “I’m an EMT, and I knew there was something majorly wrong with her,” the carrier said. Granberg promptly called 911, and then waited with the customer until paramedics arrived. “I made sure she was comfortable, and that she wasn’t moving her legs,” the carrier said. Once emergency responders reached the scene, the woman was taken to the hospital, where it was found that she had broken bones in both legs. After undergoing surgery and a few weeks of recovery, the woman was able to return home, though she still needed more time to recuperate. “I was hand delivering her mail right to her, because she couldn’t get out of her chair,” Granberg said. The carrier said that she considered it part of the job, stating

“I hope everybody would do the same, given the situation.” She added, “It’s nice to know I could be there when she needed it.”

“I was walking [past] the yards” on his route on Sept. 22, 2021, Kansas City, MO Branch 30 member **Storm Lynn** recalled, when he saw an elderly woman lying on the ground in her back yard. When he stopped to see whether she needed help, “she said she couldn’t get up,” the three-year carrier said. Lynn attempted to help her stand, but he was hesitant to move her, given her frailty. The carrier was trying to decide what to do when the Kansas City postmaster called to see if Lynn could assist with another carrier’s route. Lynn agreed to help but told the postmaster about his current situation. The postmaster drove over to

the house to see if he could assist; while they waited, Lynn talked to the woman, keeping her calm. “She said she hadn’t been there long, but her lips looked dry, like she’d been outside all day,” the carrier said. The weather was very hot that day, and Lynn was concerned that she might need medical assistance. After the carrier and postmaster conferred, they decided to call 911. The postmaster stayed with the woman until help arrived, while Lynn finished his route. The postmaster praised Lynn’s attentiveness—without his alert, the woman probably would not have been discovered for some time. The woman was taken to the hospital for evaluation but has since made a full recovery. “I’m just glad I saw her, so she didn’t have to sit out there all day,” Lynn said. **PR**



Becky Granberg

Eye on the elderly

“It was right after the holidays” at the end of December 2021 when Buffalo-Western Branch 3 member **Jared Matesic** became concerned about one of his elderly customers. “It had been a couple days, and his car was in the [usual] position,” the six-year carrier remembered noting, “and the mail was starting to pile up.” Matesic knew the customer, an elderly man, as the man often came out to greet him while he was delivering. “It seemed out of character,” the carrier explained, for the man not to have been visible for days. Matesic decided to call in a welfare check; he recalled thinking, “Well, I hope that I’m erring on the safe side.” But his hunch was right—when police entered the residence, they found the customer on the floor, unable to stand and severely dehydrated. Matesic was later told by a neighbor that the man was taken to the hospital; the neighbor said that without the carrier’s intervention, the man probably would have died. Matesic said he was relieved by the outcome, which boosted his confidence in his intuition. “I thought maybe I was being overly cautious, but thank God I did it then,” he said. “From now on, I’ll err on the side of caution and do the welfare check.”

In August of 2021, Rockford, IL Branch 245 member **Matthew Seng** realized that one of his regular customers had not been picking up her mail. “I’ve been on this route for over 20 years, and you get to know your customers,”



Matthew Seng

the 28-year carrier said, and he knew that this customer typically picked up her mail every day. The customer also usually waved to Seng through her window, but the carrier had not seen her for several days. By Friday, with several days’ mail piling up, Seng was seriously concerned. “I made a mental note to check [on her] on Saturday,” the carrier said—after that, he would be going on vacation, and he was determined to make sure that the customer was all right before he left. The next day, however, the mail was still there. Seng asked a neighbor if he could get in touch with the woman, but “the neighbor said he couldn’t get a response,” he recalled, which worried him even more. The carrier decided to call police and request a welfare check. As Seng later found out from the woman’s family, officers had entered the home and found the woman lying on the floor, injured. The woman’s son told Seng that her doctors had said if she had been in the house for another day, she would have died. The woman did end up recovering, and

moved in with family after undergoing rehabilitation. Seng said that he was very happy with the role he was able to play in her rescue. “When you’ve been on a route as long as I have, you get to know people and their habits,” he said. “You know when something is wrong.” He added, “Being a letter carrier is more than delivering mail—it’s looking out for people. That’s part of the job: looking out for customers, watching over the community. I didn’t do anything that another letter carrier wouldn’t have done.”

On Aug. 21, 2021, Philadelphia, PA Branch 157 member **Lisa Garcia** was delivering on her route when she stopped to speak with one of her customers. The customer, an elderly woman, often came out to greet Garcia, but on that day, the 15-year carrier thought something seemed off about her demeanor. “When she came to the door, she looked out of it,” Garcia said. “I thought she might have woken up from a nap, but when I asked her, she said that she wasn’t feeling well.” At a second glance, the carrier could tell that the woman was ill. “You could tell just by looking at her,” she said, and noted that the woman also seemed disoriented. Concerned, Garcia informed the woman’s next-door neighbor about her condition, as she knew that the neighbor had contact information for the woman’s family. After the family was notified, they ended up taking the woman to the hospital, where she

was treated for flu symptoms. The family, including the woman’s son, himself a letter carrier, were extremely grateful to Garcia for her awareness, and praised her for going “above and beyond” for her customer. But Garcia said that she just views it as part of the job. “I have a soft spot for the elderly,” she added. “I think anyone would do the same.”

“I was doing a parcel delivery” on the morning of Dec. 3, 2021, Little Rock, AR Branch 35 member and city carrier assistant (CCA) **Joseph Beard** recalled; he was at the front door of a residence when he heard something unusual. “I heard him screaming through the door,” the CCA said. The person screaming was the elderly resident, who told Beard that he had fallen and could not get up. The customer was begging the carrier for help. “He directed me to the side door and told me it was unlocked,” Beard said. Following the man’s instructions, Beard entered the residence and found the injured man on the floor. “There was some dried blood, from his leg and his head,” the CCA said. Upon seeing the extent of the man’s injuries, he called 911. The man was subsequently taken to the hospital; he had been on the floor for 24 hours by the time Beard found him. But the carrier was modest about his role in helping his customer. “I’m glad I helped him—that was a long time he was [on the floor],” he said. “I’m just glad he was OK.” **PR**