

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.

Carrier's warning saves sleeping man from fire

On Jan. 8, Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Jax Ratjczak** was delivering to one of the houses on his route. "I went up to the porch to put mail in the box, and I heard the smoke detector," the three-year carrier recalled.

Initially, the carrier thought the alarm might have been set off accidentally, but he decided to investigate. "I peeked in the window, and I could see the flames," he said.

Ratjczak immediately called the fire department, and then began banging on the door to alert anyone still inside the residence. Eventually, a man came to the front door.

Given the noise and the flames, "I was sure no one was inside—the guy must have been sleeping," the carrier said. The homeowner appeared confused about what Ratjczak was doing knocking on his door. "I was like, 'Man, your house is on fire—you need to get out!'" Once the customer realized the danger, he quickly evacuated.

The carrier stayed near the burning building and was able to direct the firefighters when they arrived at the scene. Thanks to Ratjczak's timely call, "the whole house didn't end up going up [in flames]," the carrier said.

Fortunately, while there was significant property damage, nobody was injured in the fire. "The next day, the guy came up and thanked me—he said, 'I wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for you,'" Ratjczak said.

He comes from a postal family—his father is a retired carrier, and his mother and sister are active carriers. "It's kind of the family business," he said. But this day stands out as unusual even for someone used to the life of a letter carrier. "It definitely got my blood flowing," Ratjczak added.

A watchful eye helps call in firefighters

"I was just there at the right time in the right place," Lincoln, NE Branch 8 member **Anessa Darby** stated about her role in the events of Oct. 10, 2021. The city carrier assistant (CCA) had had to make an adjustment in her usual route due to construction on an apartment building. "I generally go around to the front, but because of the construction, I had to go backwards" on her route, Darby recalled. The change turned out to be fortuitous.

"I got to the second-to-last apartment for delivery and went in," the carrier said. When she came out, "I smelled something, and I thought, 'What's burning?'" Looking around, she spotted smoke coming out of one of the apartment complex's garages.

"I called the manager's office, and I said, 'You've got to get a maintenance worker out here,'" Darby said. She explained the situation, and then finished up her deliveries. By the time

she came out of the last apartment, a maintenance worker was standing nearby talking to a 911 operator.

Firefighters quickly responded, discovered an electrical fire, and were able to put out the flames before they spread to the main building. Darby later found out that while there were several bystanders near the fire, she was the only one who reported anything.

The carrier said that many people who lived in the apartment building came to thank her for her attentiveness. One of the residents called USPS to praise Darby and thank her for alerting people about the fire before it caused serious property damage.

"It's kind of nice that they recognize that we look out for them," she added. "All of us work extremely hard, and like the communities we work in. It's nice to give back."

Carrier alerts family about fire, helps evacuate

On June 7, 2021, "I was delivering, coming back across the street from the house," Youngstown, OH Branch 385 member **Marcus Merrell** recalled, when he noticed something terrifying at the residence. "The shed was on fire, which had caught the side of the house," the 15-year carrier said.

As Merrell later learned, the homeowner had just finished mowing his lawn and had put the lawnmower back in the shed before going inside his house. Unbeknownst to him, however, the lawnmower had somehow started a fire, which quickly spread to the shed.

"The shed was basically gone" by the time Merrell spotted the flames. Aware that the homeowner had two small children, the carrier said, "I ran and knocked on the door. On my way up [to the door], I called 911." He continued pounding on the front door



Anessa Darby

until the homeowner answered, accompanied by his children.

Merrell alerted him to the fire and urged the man to evacuate. “I grabbed one child, he grabbed the other one, and we ran across the street,” the carrier said.

While they waited for firefighters to arrive, the homeowner told Merrell that he had been sitting right next to the wall that was on fire, but that he hadn’t noticed anything until the carrier’s warning.

When firefighters arrived at the house, they “were able to get the fire out before too much damage happened inside the house,” Merrell said, which meant that the family did not lose their home.

Merrell was previously featured in *The Postal Record* in 2011, after he called 911 for a customer experiencing a medical emergency. But he dismissed his role in both events, stating, “I’ve got a tendency to be in the right place at the right time.

“I think being a letter carrier is the best job in the world,” he added. “In this job, we get to service the community—it’s the best thing ever.” **PR**



Marcus Merrell

Eye on the elderly

“I was delivering to the cluster boxes in an apartment complex” on Sept. 30, 2021, Battle Creek, MI Branch 262 member **Matthew Fee** recalled, when “I heard what I thought was a cat.” After hearing the sound repeated several times, however, the 25-year carrier realized that whoever was making the noise was human. He listened even more closely, and this time, “I could tell that it was a person calling for help,” Fee said. He was able to trace the cry to one of the apartments—an apartment, that, coincidentally, happens to be across the hall from where Fee’s grandmother lives. The carrier knocked on the door, and the woman inside asked him to get help. Fee went across to his grandmother’s apartment and called the apartment manager. While he waited for the manager, Fee also called 911 to request assistance. When the manager got the door unlocked, they were still unable to go inside the apartment, as the entrance was blocked by an obstruction. With the door partially open, they could see the elderly resident, who had fallen and seriously injured herself. Bleeding



Matthew Fee

and with multiple broken bones, she had been lying there for three days. “There was a big laceration on her head,” Fee said. “I called 911 back and said, ‘There’s blood everywhere—she needs firefighters, she needs an ambulance.’” Fee remained at the apartment until emergency services arrived and were able to get inside to rescue the woman. The carrier described the experience as “eye-opening,” adding, “She was lying there for three days, and I was the only one who heard her.”

In September of 2021, Lincoln, NE Branch 8 member **Kelli Reed** noticed that one of her customers’ mailboxes was full. The seven-year carrier knew that this customer usually picked up her mail quite punctually, and Reed became concerned. “She’s

mobility limited, and her caretaker was out of town,” Reed noted. When she approached the house, she could hear the woman’s dog inside. “The dog didn’t do its normal bark—it was a frantic bark,” she said. Reed knocked on the door and called out for her customer. “It took a minute to hear her, with the dog barking and the traffic going by,” she recalled. “I asked if she was fine, and she said, ‘No.’” The carrier called 911, and emergency responders came to the house. After officers gained access to the house, they asked Reed to go in and get the dog. Once inside, “the dog led me to the customer—she had collapsed in the bathroom,” Reed said. “I overheard her telling the paramedics she had been there for 24 hours already.” The woman was taken to the hospital, and then spent several months in a rehabilitation facility before returning home. The carrier said she felt “extremely grateful” that she thought to check on her customer. “I don’t feel like a hero,” she added. “I just felt like I was her guardian angel that day.”

On Dec. 20, 2021, Toledo, OH Branch 100 member **Jeffrey Alexander** was delivering on his route when the sister of one of his customers came running out of her house. “[She] came out and flagged me down—she was yelling out for me, and I knew it was serious,” the 30-year carrier said. The woman, who Alexander knew lived with her sister due to the former’s mental disability, explained that her sister had been lying on the floor for some time. Alexander immediately began asking follow-up questions. “I asked, ‘Is she talking...eating...drinking...?’” he recalled. After the woman said that her sister hadn’t been eating or drinking for three days, Alexander rushed into the house. There, he found the homeowner “barely conscious” on the kitchen floor. “I asked, ‘Can you hear me?’ but she kept muttering, ‘I’m cold,’” the carrier said. “She was drifting in and out [of consciousness].” Alexander quickly called 911. Paramedics arrived soon afterward and took her to the hospital, where she spent several weeks. While his customer was in the hospital, Alexander regularly took care of her dog

Eye on the elderly (continued)



Jeffrey Alexander

keeping an eye out, looking for something not right,” he said. “It’s a good feeling that you’re there to help when you’re needed.”

“It was right around Father’s Day” in June of 2021, West Palm Beach, FL Branch 1690 member **Michael Hill** said, when he became concerned about one of his customers. “[The customer] was pretty good about getting his mail from the mailbox,” the two-year CCA explained. But the mail had been piling up for two days and he had not seen the customer’s car move in the driveway, which also was unusual. Worried, Hill decided to call and request a welfare check. “I haven’t called [911] for a customer in the past,” the carrier said, “but I was

and brought meals to her sister. But the carrier was modest about his actions, saying that it was all part of the job. “We’re out here in these neighborhoods,

a 911 dispatcher for a few months, so I’ve been on the other end of it.” Hill said that he thought he might be being overcautious, but “at the end of the day, if it was something, better safe than sorry.” The carrier took over a different route shortly thereafter, so he didn’t hear about the result of his call until a co-worker asked Hill if he had called in a welfare check recently. When Hill said yes, the co-worker said that he had been delivering on Hill’s old route when a woman had come running out of a house. She asked him if he had been the one to call police, and explained that when officers had responded, they found her father having a heart attack. Thanks to Hill’s call, the man was taken to the hospital and was in recovery. Hill was later able to connect with the man (who was still in the hospital) and speak to him via FaceTime. “It was great to talk to him,” the carrier said. “He was really thankful. He said, ‘It feels really good to know there’s people looking out for you.’” Hill was modest about the praise, but said that as a letter carrier, he feels that looking out for customers is part of the job. “We get around,” he added.

“If anyone’s qualified to make that call, it’s us.”

On Oct. 18, 2021, Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Andrea Faulkner** was delivering on her route when she noticed that mail was piling up at one of the neighborhood residences. The house belonged to an elderly couple, Edward and Hillie Horton, and the carrier became concerned about their welfare. “I went to the front of the house and knocked,” the 17-year carrier said, “and I could see that the light was on inside.” Knowing that it would be extremely out of character for Mr. Horton to leave the lights on, Faulkner walked around the house, calling for Mr. Horton and identifying herself as “the mail lady.” She then went through the back gate into the backyard, where she could see into the kitchen—the faucet was running, and it looked like a meal was in preparation. “I got a really bad feeling in the pit of my stomach,” she said. The carrier went up to the back door and began knocking, and the door swung open—it had not been latched properly, and Faulkner was able to enter the house. Inside, she found

Mr. Horton at the bottom of the stairs. “I could see that he was gone,” she said. Faulkner quickly walked back outside and called 911; a short time later, police and emergency responders were on the scene. During a sweep of the house, they found Mrs. Horton confined upstairs in a seriously weakened condition. She was promptly taken to the hospital. As it turned out, Mr. Horton had died days earlier, but Mrs. Horton had been unaware of the accident. Her pre-existing health issues meant that she had been unable to care for herself without her husband’s assistance. Faulkner was able to provide police with her customer’s name, which helped them find and notify the couple’s family members. Mrs. Horton did survive; paramedics later told the carrier that Mrs. Horton probably would have lasted only one more day if Faulkner had not investigated. Faulkner described looking out for the elderly as a critical part of the job. “We have eyes on our neighborhoods in a way that no other [agency] has,” she said. “For me, it’s just natural,” Faulkner added. “I think of myself as a neighbor.” **PR**

Help on the way

Last summer, Ballwin, MO Branch 5050 member **Eric Myers** was on his way home from work when he noticed a small cluster of people by the side of the road. When he looked closer, he saw that they were standing over an elderly man, who had collapsed on the ground next to his bicycle. The 23-year carrier assumed that the man had succumbed to

heat stroke—“it was one of the hottest days of the year,” he recalled. Still, he wanted to be sure that the man was getting proper medical attention, since the bystanders appeared to be just staring at him. “I spent four years in the Army in the infantry, and I took this combat lifesaver class—learned CPR, learned other skills,” Myers said. With his training, he

thought he might be able to assist. After pulling over and parking his vehicle, Myers walked up and checked on the man. “He didn’t have a pulse, and he wasn’t breathing,” the carrier said. One of the bystanders was already on the phone with emergency services. “[The] 911 [operator] wanted to know if he was OK, and I said, ‘No, he’s not breathing—I’m going

to start CPR,’” he said. Myers began chest compressions, and he continued with CPR for several minutes until another bystander,



Eric Myers



Andrew Gebhardt



Marlow Hernandez

a doctor, offered to take over. When paramedics arrived on the scene, they defibrillated the man and took him to the hospital. Myers later heard that the man had had a heart attack, but that he had recovered. Myers said that while he was glad that he was able to help the man, he didn't really register his actions at the time. "Everything was happening so fast," he added. "I just knew I had to do something."

"I was down on the driver safety course" in July of 2021, Milwaukee, WI Branch 2 member **Andrew Gebhardt** recalled, when he saw an Irish Fest vendor walk past. "We have Irish Fest every year in Milwaukee, and vendors come [to sell their goods at the festival]," the 10-year carrier explained. This elderly woman was carrying a lot of products in her hands, which might have prevented her from seeing a piece of metal rebar on the ground until she tripped

over it. "She went face-first into the ground," Gebhardt said. "She had a 7-inch laceration on her forehead," and she was unconscious." The carrier, who had witnessed the entire incident, immediately rushed over to help. "I revived her and was putting pressure on her forehead," he said. When he realized that she was going into shock, the carrier directed several bystanders to get medical assistance. While they waited, he held a compress against the woman's head to prevent blood loss. Paramedics arrived and took the woman to the hospital, where she received 12 stitches. After two days at the hospital, she was able to rejoin the festival on the last day, where she reconnected with Gebhardt. "She started crying and gave me a huge hug," he said. Gebhardt, who is a retired police officer, said that helping the community comes as naturally to him in this job as his past one. "If someone needs help, I'm

going to help," he added. "It's just in my nature."

On Jan. 11, Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member **Marlow Hernandez** was delivering mail to the boxes inside an apartment building when he saw one of his customers, Lisa Steves, lying face down on the ground. "She was lying between the two boxes," the eight-year carrier recalled. "I got a little closer and started to yell her name." Upon closer inspection, Hernandez was worried because Steves did not appear to be breathing. "I rubbed her back," the carrier said. "Her face, her arms were pale." Hernandez quickly called 911 and reported Steves's condition. "I said, 'She's unconscious—I'm not sure if she's still alive.'" While the dispatcher sent an ambulance to the scene, the operator asked Hernandez to check Steves's pulse. "I checked her pulse—it was my first time in so long doing that—but there was no

pulse," the carrier said. When he relayed this information to the operator, she transferred him to another dispatcher, who asked him to perform CPR. "I've taken [CPR] classes, but it was more than 20 years ago," Hernandez said. "I've never had to perform it, and here I am, being directed to do it." The operator told Hernandez to turn Steves over and begin chest compressions. "I probably had done 10 [compressions] when [police officers] arrived—they got there quick," the carrier said. Paramedics were able to get Steves's heart started again at the scene, but she went into cardiac arrest again and died a short time later. However, Hernandez's role as a community helper was not over. "I didn't want to leave it like that," he said, so when Steves's family reached out to ask him about her last day, he went even further. "I talked to the family and explained what kind of a person she was—she was a really nice person." **PR**

Customer Connect adds up for USPS

By touching every address in the United States at least six days a week, letter carriers naturally develop special relationships with their customers. Since USPS's Customer Connect program began in 2003, 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. Below are some recent stories about Customer Connect leads submitted by letter carriers that have helped USPS earn new revenue.

A good rapport and sales pitch seal the deal for USPS

Pittsburgh, PA Branch 84 member **Ronald Manzini** had been keeping an eye on one of the businesses on his route for a while. The company, Grantsa, is an e-commerce business that regularly sent out massive deliveries using a competitor.

"They had a huge surplus of orders," the six-year carrier said. "They would have all these packages to go out, and after the third or fourth time, I thought, 'Well, this is something.'" The "something" was a promising

lead for the Customer Connect program. Manzini decided to approach the owners and ask them if they would consider switching delivery services to USPS.

"Their [shipping] volume was putting a bump in my routine, they were shipping so often," the carrier said. "So I said, 'Hey, if you give me your phone number, I can have my boss call you and you can get our [shipping] rates.'" "

Manzini's pitch was successful—after he passed the company's phone number through Customer Connect, the USPS sales team was able to

Customer Connect (continued)



follow up and close a shipping deal.

“All it took was letting the customer know that USPS has free tracking on

parcels, doesn’t have surcharges and offers free Priority Mail supplies,” the small-business senior sales specialist at USPS headquarters, Lou DeRienzo, said. “Our carriers are in a perfect position to share their knowledge about what the Postal Service can do for our customers.”

Manzini agreed that getting to know your customers is the best way of making a connection. “Everyone in town knows me as Mailman Ronnie,” he said. “I live on my route—this is my hometown. I build that rapport, regardless, but I know that [the special delivery rates] are something we have.”

The carrier stated that he thinks the Customer Connect program is a great thing for the community. “I look at it as doing the business a favor,” he said. “The Post Office is happy, the customer is happy, you’re happy.”

Manzini added that he thinks carriers boost the Postal Service’s reputation with their customers. “[It gives them] more of a confidence,” he said. “You chose [USPS] and there’s a reason—you see the same person every day.”

In the end, that confidence is financially beneficial to USPS: Manzini’s lead generated more than \$83,000 for the Postal Service.

Maryland CCA recognized for million-dollar lead

Rockville, MD Branch 3825 member and city carrier assistant **Karla Carter** submitted a lead that recently generated more than \$1 million in estimated annualized revenue for the Postal Service.

Carter was unaware of the Customer Connect program until Business Lead Development Specialist Andrea Burrows, along with Region 13 National Business Agent Vada Preston, Branch 3825 President Kenneth Lerch and Rockville Postmaster Gabriel Hamilton gave a presentation about the program in December of 2021 to the Rockville city carriers.

After the presentation, Lerch spoke with Carter about becoming the Customer Connect coordinator for Rockville, and she enthusiastically agreed to take on the position in addition to her role as shop steward.

The day after the Customer Connect presentation, Carter realized that Reaction Retail, a business that she had been regularly delivering to on her route, might be a good lead for the program. The store supplies cosmetics and perfumes to many high-profile retailers, including Walmart and Bloomingdale’s.

“I noticed this one business had so much going on,” Carter said. “They had a table with three signs [to direct the delivery services]: UPS, USPS and FedEx.”

Carter had already realized that this company was shipping hundreds of packages a day. The carrier had built a rapport with the warehouse workers, and she occasionally asked them questions about the business.

The CCA went out of her way to get the business any additional assistance it needed. One day, “the workers had asked me to get a bigger truck, because they had a sale going out,” she said. She promptly told her super-

visor, and was able to come back with the larger vehicle.

After learning about the Customer Connect program, Carter decided to use her already established relationship with the business to promote USPS. The CCA spoke with the manager, who “was great—she said thank you for the big truck coming.”

Carter asked the manager if she could pass along the business’s contact information as a Customer Connect lead, and the manager agreed. Back at the post office, “I told them, ‘I think this is a great lead,’ ” the carrier said. The million-dollar result

proved that she was correct.

On Feb. 15, a celebration was held at the Rockville Main Post Office

to recognize Carter’s huge contribution. The attendees included the district manager, the Rockville postmaster, the branch president and Regional Administrative Assistant Hugh McElroy, as well as more than 60 other city carriers. Carter was presented with a certificate, and Postmaster Hamilton provided a Panera breakfast for all of the city carriers and staff. McElroy praised Carter, stating, “Karla... loves being a carrier, is eager to learn, and has a great attitude.”

Carter, meanwhile, was eager to praise the Customer Connect program. “If you do care for your customers, love what you’re doing... it’s not only beneficial for the customers, it’s great to do for all of us, so we can continue having our jobs.” **PR**

