

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. For them, delivering for America is all in a day's work.

### Quick thinking saves family during house fire

"It was the Monday before Christmas" in 2021, Pittsburg, KS Branch 695 member **Joseph Shidler** recalled, and he was making a delivery to a house on his route when an unusual odor attracted his attention.

"The smell of smoke was coming from the side of the house," the eight-year carrier said, so he decided to investigate. It was a good thing that he did—as he walked around to look, he immediately saw that a corner of the house was ablaze.

Though the fire was not particularly large at that time, "after looking at it, I could tell that it had [burned through] into the wall [of the house]," Shidler said. He quickly called 911. While on the phone with emergency operators, he also searched for a garden hose or other tool that he could use to extinguish the flames, but could not find anything.

After he realized that he could not put out the fire himself and that the flames were spreading, the carrier rushed up to the front door to warn the residents. "I started banging on the doors and windows," Shidler said, until two children came to the door. "They were not aware [of the fire] until they came outside."

Once the carrier told them about the fire, the kids ran back inside to warn

their parents. The whole family was then able to evacuate safely.

Police and firefighters arrived a short time later and put out the flames before the house sustained significant damage. The fire was eventually traced back to an extension cord from a strand of Christmas lights.

Shidler's prompt warning meant that the family was able to stay at their house for Christmas, and the Pittsburg Fire Department credited the carrier's quick actions with not only saving the home, but the residents' lives as well.

But Shidler said that he felt undecided as to how much praise he deserved. "Part of me felt like I did do something amazing—the other part feels like it was a small fire and I didn't really do anything," he said. "But it could have been a lot worse, I've been told."

### Carriers' keen attention helps detect mail fraud

While USPS does have its own investigative agency, letter carriers are often on the front lines when it comes to detecting mail fraud involving their customers.

On Nov. 9, 2021, Central Florida Branch 1091 member **Jason Stephenson** was making his usual deliveries when, he recalls, "I happened to notice this lady's mail showing up at a different address."

The 21-year carrier knew that the woman lived a block away from the address on the mail and didn't think that she had moved, so he held onto the letter until he could deliver it to the correct address. After he brought it to the customer and told her about the situation, the woman confirmed that she had not moved.

A few days later, the customer told Stephenson that she had contacted the police—Stephenson's delivery had tipped her off to the fact that her identity had been stolen. "The lady who had done it had done [the customer's] tax

return and gotten her Social Security number," the carrier said.

The woman added that the letter he had brought her was a credit card bill taken out in her name that contained charges for \$6,500 in merchandise. Thanks to Stephenson's intuition, police were able to catch the perpetrator before she could inflict any more financial damage.

Stephenson was not the only one paying attention to fraudulent activity that month. Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 member **Christopher Lippy** became suspicious after two of his customers, a married couple, both placed temporary change-of-address forms within a short period.

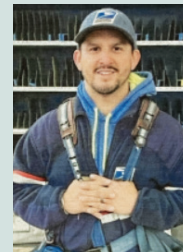
"[I got one] for her first, and I thought maybe [it was for] Christmas," the 32-year carrier said. "Then I got one for him, and then I tipped them off."

Lippy went up to the door and told the couple about the temporary requests. Both customers denied placing the requests. The carrier explained that he also had noticed a significant drop-off in the amount of mail he was delivering to them, and suggested that they may have been the victims of mail fraud.

After an investigation, Lippy's hunch was proven correct—someone had placed the requests through an online form and had been collecting their forwarded mail. The customers thanked the carrier for his attentiveness, saying, "We are grateful Chris picked up on it early or even more damage would have been done." **PR**



**Christopher Lippy**



Shaune Jimenez

## Neighborhood watch

Dec. 15, 2021, was an unusually windy day on Central Kansas Merged Branch 1122 member **Shaune Jimenez's** route, with wind speeds in the area reaching between 70 and 100 mph. That afternoon, "I was walking on my loop when I saw her out of the corner of my eye," the three-year carrier recalled. "Her" was one of his customers, Dolores Earnest, an elderly woman who lived by herself. Despite the weather, Earnest had gone out to retrieve the mail from her front porch. When she opened the door, however, it was forcibly pushed ajar by the wind, pulling her along with it. Earnest's hand was jerked so violently that the doorknob sliced into her palm, leaving a serious cut. Due to the injury and the strong winds, she was unable to return indoors. Jimenez saw her huddled on her porch and quickly realized that she was trapped out in the wind. Crossing the street, he went up to the house and helped Earnest back inside. Once she was safe, the carrier suggested calling an ambulance—"her hand was ripped pretty badly"—but Earnest wanted a friend to take her to the emergency room. While they waited for her friend to arrive, Jimenez kept her calm. "I was

just concerned for her," the carrier said. "I just wanted to put her at ease and make sure she knew that I wouldn't leave her until she had the help she needed." At the hospital, Earnest did end up receiving "a fair amount of stitches" for her injury, the carrier said, but fully recovered. Earnest visited the post office later to thank Jimenez for his assistance, saying, "He was definitely a hero to me on that day... He literally saved my life that day. I am a 91-year-old woman who could not have gotten up and inside my house by myself under the circumstances without his help." But Jimenez was modest about his role in the rescue: "I was just walking on my route. Anyone else would have done the same thing to help."

"I was doing overtime on another carrier's route" on Jan. 5, Central Iowa Merged Branch 352 member **Christopher Meyer** recalled, and he had just pulled up to a mailbox when he saw something that caught his attention. As he glanced over at the driveway next to the box, he noticed an elderly woman lying on the ground. The eight-year carrier could tell that she was struggling to stand up. To make matters worse, "it was

zero degrees out," Meyer said, and the woman was not wearing shoes. "Her boots were off—she had used those to try to push herself back up" to no avail, the carrier explained. Meyer quickly got out of his vehicle and walked over to the woman. Together, they were able to get her boots back on, and then the carrier got her on her feet and walked her home. She told Meyer that she had been lying on the ground for about 20 minutes before he had come to her rescue. Later, a video of the incident was posted on social media; the story was subsequently covered by the Des Moines CBS TV affiliate, KCCI Channel 8. Despite the attention, however, the carrier was modest about his actions. "I don't need praise—any other co-worker would have done the same," Meyer said. "If it was my mom or grandma [lying there], I'd want someone to stop and help them."

On Nov. 20, 2021, Parsons, KS Branch 477 **Scott Marlow** was delivering on his route when he saw fellow Branch 477 member and retiree **Arley Journot** come outside to pick up his mail. As the elderly man reached the box, however, "his eyes kind of fluttered, and he said he

started to feel dizzy," Marlow recalled. "He was going to collapse." The 26-year carrier immediately leaped into action—"I started to get out of the truck as he stumbled backwards"—and was able to reach Journot in time to prevent him from falling to the ground. As it turned out, the retired carrier's blood pressure had plummeted, resulting in his losing consciousness for a brief moment. Marlow said that he immediately recognized the symptoms, which is why he moved so quickly. "My mom has low blood pressure, and I know you're just going to black out," he said. Afterward, Marlow stayed with Journot until the retiree's son arrived to take his father to the hospital. Journot later said that he "was very thankful Scott was in the right place at the right time." But Marlow was modest about his role, insisting that "this isn't about me—it's about Arley." He explained that the reason Journot had experienced the medical emergency was that he had been outside all day building a wheelchair ramp for a community member. "[Journot] is so loved in our town, especially at the post office," Marlow added. "If there's a hero in this story, it's Arley, not me." **PR**

## Eye on the elderly

In early January, Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Michael Di Lella** noticed that the mail for one of his elderly customers had started accumulating in her mailbox. "She does everything via the mail," the 19-year carrier said, "so I found it very unusual that

[her mail] sat for a few days." Di Lella also was aware that the woman lived alone and had mobility issues, and he became concerned that something might have happened to her. The carrier knew that one of his other customers was a friend of the homeowner's

and had a key to her house, and he decided to alert that neighbor about the situation. The neighbor promptly went to the woman's home and found the woman on the floor. Di Lella was later told that his customer had fallen down the stairs and had been lying there

for several days, unable to get back to her feet. She was taken to the hospital, but has since recovered and moved into an assisted-living facility. While the neighbor credited Di Lella with saving the woman's life, the carrier described it as a part of the job, stating,

## Eye on the elderly (continued)

“I didn’t think anything of it.” He added, “If something’s unusual, we’re there every day [to notice it]. I just mentioned it to the right person.”

**S**t. Louis, MO Branch 343 member **Mark Williams** was quite familiar with one of his customers, Argie Tsifutis. “He lives by himself and waits every day for me to bring the mail,” the 32-year carrier said. So when a couple of days passed without a sign of Tsifutis, Williams became concerned. On Jan. 28, the carrier was worried enough to peer through a window. From that viewpoint, he could see the elderly man lying on the floor. “He looked like he was dead,” Williams recalled. The carrier immediately called 911, and then waited until paramedics brought Tsifutis out of the house on a stretcher. The customer was taken to the hospital, where he was treated for severe dehydration. After his recovery, Tsifutis called St. Louis Branch 343 President

**John McLaughlin** to relate the story and praise Williams for his role in the rescue. The customer explained that he had fallen out of bed trying to answer the phone. Tsifutis, who is 94 years old and partially paralyzed, also had accidentally knocked his phone off of the hook, leaving him unable to call for help. He had been there for two days without food or water before Williams spotted him. Indeed, the carrier was told by paramedics at the scene that Tsifutis most likely would not have survived another day. Williams said that he feels a lot of sympathy for his elderly customers, which motivates him to keep an eye on them. “When you’re in that situation, it’s terrifying—you’re probably panicking,” he added.

**I**n January, New Hampshire Merged Branch 44 member **Kayla Berridge** got worried after a few days went by without any sign of one of her elderly customers. “She

gets a lot of mail—I’ll go up to her door and she’ll come out and talk to me,” the four-year carrier said. “It’s very unlike her to not pick up her mail.” Berridge knew that the woman lived with a tenant, but she could see packages piling up as well, and she became concerned that something might have happened. A blizzard had been forecast for the upcoming weekend, so Berridge resolved to contact someone before the storm hit. After another day passed without

the woman collecting her mail, the carrier decided to call for a welfare check. An hour later, her supervisor called Berridge to let her know that police had found her customer. As it turned out, the woman had gotten trapped underneath a bookshelf the same week that her tenant went on vacation. The woman, who had been lying on a tile floor for several days, was hospitalized for hypothermia and is still recovering. The Newmarket police department praised Berridge for her actions in a post on its Facebook page, stating, “It is this department’s belief that Kayla’s knowledge of the people on her route, as well as her attentiveness, saved the life of this resident.” But the carrier said that she was simply grateful she was able to help. “I’m glad that I took the time to notice—I just wish I [called] sooner,” she said. “If we just look out for each other, things like this won’t happen.” **PR**



**Kayla Berridge**

### Join the NALC Veterans Group

The NALC Veterans Group is designed to provide NALC members—both active and retired letter carriers—who are also military veterans the ability to connect with fellow NALC veterans and stay informed on issues of importance to letter carrier veterans. It is free to join.

Members receive a pin as a symbol of gratitude for your military service and membership in NALC.

If you are interested in joining the group, complete the sign-up card at right and mail it to the address included. A fillable version is also available at [nalc.org/veterans](http://nalc.org/veterans).



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