

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.

Quick-thinking carrier douses house fire

Walking his route last July, Galesburg, IL Branch 88 member **Jake Pierce** heard popping noises from a home ahead of him.

It was shortly after July 4, and the six-year carrier thought it was the young children at the home playing with “poppers” that explode when you throw them on the pavement. But as he got closer, he saw flames and smoke—“No, that’s a fire!” he said to himself. A small fire had started on the outside wall of the house.

Pierce grabbed the next-door neighbor’s garden hose and doused the

blaze with water, calling 911 as he held the hose. With the fire mostly extinguished, the fire department arrived and took over, and Pierce continued on his route.

The carrier says it happened so fast that he acted from instinct before he could think about it. “You know what to do, but ‘is this really happening?’ is what I felt,” he said.

Carrier looks out for stricken woman

On an August afternoon last year, **Maurice Beckwith** was walking back to his truck after delivering a package. On the way, the Starkville, MS Branch 2291 member spotted a woman slumped in a car with the door open. As he was about to drive away, Beckwith thought to himself, “Let me make sure she’s OK.” Checking on the woman, he saw that she was unconscious, and he couldn’t wake her. He then determined that the woman wasn’t breathing.

Beckwith called 911, and the operator told him to begin CPR. A few minutes later, a police officer arrived and took over the CPR, but was unable to revive the woman.

Beckwith was glad that the woman



Maurice Beckwith

hadn’t been left alone any longer. “I was so concerned,” he said. “Hopefully she hadn’t been there all day.” Even though the woman did not survive, Beckwith continues to keep a close eye on his route: “I try to pay attention and be alert at all times,” he said. **PR**

Neighborhood watch

New Hampshire Merged Branch 44 member **Frank Dicostanzo Jr.** was delivering on a mounted route last October, and “when I looked in the side mirror, I saw a small child in the middle of the road,” he said. He was on a low-traffic residential street, so he presumed the child was with an adult and drove

to the next mailbox. But he checked again and the child was still in the street, so Dicostanzo stopped and went to the back of the truck. The child, about 2 years old and barefoot, approached him. Since it wasn’t his regular route, Dicostanzo didn’t recognize the child, who couldn’t tell the carrier where

he lived. Concerned that the child would run away or wander into heavy traffic on nearby roads, Dicostanzo placed the boy into his truck so he could search for his house. With the boy secured by a seat belt, playing with the steering wheel, Dicostanzo walked the area nearby to ask neighbors about the

child, but nobody knew him, so the carrier called 911. Soon after police arrived, a parent of the boy came outside and was reunited with the child. Dicostanzo brushed off the notion of being a hero. “If it was my kid,” he said, “I would hope that someone would do something similar.” **PR**

Eye on the elderly

Last October, Downers Grove, IL Branch 1870 member **Kimberly Gillis** was delivering on her route in Woodridge, IL, when she noticed something wrong at an elderly customer's home. "She had three days of newspapers scattered on her porch," Gillis said. As the carrier opened the mailbox, she saw that the mail had not been collected for a while. Gillis alerted a neighbor, who said she had a key to the house and would check on the elderly customer. Gillis continued on her route but circled back on the way to the post office. "As I was finishing the route," the letter carrier said, "the ambulance pulled up" to the woman's door. The neighbor had found the woman on the floor. She had been lying there for several days after falling. The neighbor later told Gillis that the woman had recovered and returned home with attendant care. "I know the routines of some of the customers. I can tell when they're home and when they're not home," Gillis said. "I'm glad I was there to say something and I noticed."

Delivering the mail one day last summer, Pittsburgh, PA Branch 84 carrier **Chris Smith** heard a faint voice at the doorstep of a house. "I heard a lady yelling for help," he said. He knocked on the door and then tried the knob, but it was locked. Smith went to the back door, which also was locked, but then through a window he saw an elderly woman lying on the floor. He told the woman that help was on the way and called 911, reassuring her as



Chris Smith

they waited. When police officers arrived, Smith helped them remove an air conditioner window unit so that one officer could climb through the window and rescue the woman. Smith then returned to the route. "I found out she was lying there at least since the night before with a broken arm," he said. The woman used a cane and couldn't get back up after a fall. Since it could have been several days more before she was discovered, "It's really good that I heard her," he said. Smith credited his service in the Marine Corps for noticing the woman's calls for help: "Being military, I take pride in being aware of my surroundings," he said.

Last July 25, Scottsbluff, NE Branch 1836 member **Jacob Wilkins** was walking his route when he noticed that a customer in his 70s who lived alone had not picked up his mail. The next day, the mail was still in his mailbox. Wilkins, who knows his customers well after 23 years on the same route, called police for a welfare check. The police came and knocked on the door, but they left when they got no answer. As the days progressed, though, the mail in the man's mailbox continued to pile up, and Wilkins became more concerned.

He called police again and this time, they broke open the door, finding the man unconscious on the floor. An ambulance soon took him to the hospital. Wilkins learned from an emergency worker who lives on his route that the man had suffered a stroke and might have died that day if he hadn't been rescued. The carrier visited his customer in the hospital and delivered his mail there. When the man



Jacob Wilkins

said he missed his portable radio from home, Wilkins tried to retrieve it, but couldn't get into the house because the landlord was out of town—so Wilkins bought the man a new radio. Wilkins downplayed his role as a hero. "I called in 10 welfare checks last year," he said, adding that "it's part of the routine" of having a small-town route with many isolated, elderly customers whose habits he knows well.

Four-year carrier **Jax Ratajczak** was on his route last October when he noticed mail piling up in a customer's mailbox. "He's in his 80s and lives by himself," Ratajczak said. The Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member knocked on the door and got no answer. He peered through the window and saw nothing unusual. He then consulted a neighbor, who knew nothing about the man.



Clark Fenton

"So I called the cops to do a welfare check," he said, "and they found him on the floor." Ratajczak, whose parents and sister are also letter carriers in the area, later learned from one of the emergency medical personnel who cared for him that the man had been near death but survived. He soon moved to an assisted-living facility. "I'd do it again in a heartbeat," he said about saving the man's life. This was his second time being called a hero in 2022. In January of that year, he saved the life of a customer by alerting him that his house was on fire, allowing him to escape (see the April 2022 *Postal Record* issue).

Clark Fenton, a T-6 and member of Salt Lake City, UT Branch 111, was delivering the mail on a sweltering day last September when he heard a strange noise from his truck. When the noise continued, he investigated and found a woman screaming for help from a back yard. The elderly woman had fallen and broken her hip. Lying in the sun, she was in shock and afraid she would die. "She had been lying outside for two hours," Fenton said. "I moved her to the shade of a tree and comforted her." He called 911 and then her children. As he waited for help to arrive, Fenton reassured her that she would be OK. Fenton, an eight-year carrier and a military veteran, visited the house about a month later and found that the woman had been released from the hospital and was recovering at home. **PR**