

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 202-662-2420 or at postalrecord@nalc.org. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.



Christopher Perez

Firefighters inspect the damage caused by the fire at a house on Perez's route.



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.

Letter carrier rescues customer from fire

Christopher Perez, a four-year letter carrier, had just finished one section of his route in Yorktown Heights, NY, on March 28 when he saw a white plume of smoke coming from an area he had just delivered to. At first, the Westchester Merged Branch 693 letter

carrier thought that maybe someone was putting leaves in a fire pit, but when the smoke turned black, he realized that burning leaves is not allowed in this development.

He got in his truck and drove back to the area, where he saw several neighbors gathered. This was a 55-plus senior community, so they had canes and walkers and were unable to do much when it came to the fire.

Perez first ran around the four-unit building, knocking on everyone's doors to make sure that they knew about the fire and were getting out. No one came out of one of the units, but he knew, or thought he knew, that the customer who owned the unit normally went to Florida in the winter. But the neighbors informed him that they had seen a man in the unit. Perez walked to the back of the building and saw the man come out onto the second-floor balcony in the back of the house.

"I'm telling the gentleman, 'Hey, I don't know if you know, but the house is on fire. You need to get out of the house,'" Perez recounted. "He looked at me and goes, 'Oh, I gotta get my keys and my phone.' And I'm like, 'OK, you better hurry up. You better hurry up. Come on, get out of the house.'"

Within minutes, the house was starting to go up in flames. "So, now I'm getting pretty antsy," Perez said. "I'm like, 'Dude, you really gotta get out of there, sir.' He kept saying that he can't find his keys. He kept continuing to go in and out of the house. I'm thinking, 'You know what? I'm going to go to the front door, kick in the door and bring him out, and that'll be the end of the story.'"

Little did Perez know that he wouldn't be able to get within 20 feet



Richard Berowski (l)
receives a commendation
for his heroic action.

of the front door because it was covered in flames. “At the time, I had a big beard that went down to, like, the middle of my chest,” he said, “and when I ran to the front where the fire was at, it literally curled my beard on my face. Now that plan is completely out, because there’s no way I’m running through a door that’s completely engulfed in flames.”

The carrier kept his cool and figured out his next steps.

“The flames at this time were at least 20 feet high,” Perez recalled. “I’m like, ‘My God, this guy’s not going to be able to get out, and the only way he’s going to be able to get out is if he jumps.’”

He continued: “So, I run to the back, and I’m like, ‘Sir, listen, there’s no way you can get out this front door. Can you please jump? If you jump, I’ll catch you somehow. We’re both going to get hurt, but I can guarantee you that’s probably going to be the best-case scenario, because you will die if you stay in this house.’ He was like, ‘No, I’m not jumping.’”

The man was in his 50s, and Perez remembered him saying that he couldn’t “afford” to jump due to the possible effects it could have on his body. Despite the man’s refusal to comply, Perez knew he had to do something.

“It was like a fight-or-flight situation, and I chose to fight,” Perez said.

He decided to move his truck underneath the balcony. He climbed up on the hood, then on the roof, then climbed over the banister. He made his way into the house and found the man in the kitchen, still looking for his keys and phone.

“I was like, ‘Forget about your keys and your phone. That’s replaceable, but you are not,’” Perez said. “Then,

I dragged him and pulled him out the door. He did not want to put his leg over the banister. I don’t blame him when you’re at a certain age—you’re not trying to go over no banister—but at that point, I’m like, ‘Dude, it’s do or die now. We’ve got to go.’”

To urge him to jump, Perez said, “I have a family, and I’ve got to make it home to them, and there’s no way that I can go home to my family and say that I left you behind. So, we both have to go,” and he just looked me in my eye and said, ‘Fine.’”

Finally agreeing to leave the building, the man let Perez help him over the banister and onto the truck.

Although the building was severely damaged, none of the residents sustained any serious injuries. After being demolished, the building is now in the process of being rebuilt.

Perez often helps out elderly customers in need on his route. On one occasion he performed CPR, bringing back his customer. Even as Perez was being interviewed by *The Postal Record* about the fire story, a customer with dementia suddenly collapsed in the street.

“I put him on my back, and I piggy-backed him up the little flight of stairs in the front of his house then brought him into his wife,” Perez said.

The carrier has received some media attention for his actions, but he’s brushed off any praise. “I feel like it’s something that anyone would do, you know?” he told News 12 New York.

Carrier saves child running into traffic

On June 2 around 11 a.m., **Richard Berowski** was delivering his route in Mohawk, NY. The Utica Branch 375 letter carrier was at the bottom

of a hill where he said people tend to drive “pretty fast” when he saw a young child alone, who he thought was about 4 or 5 years old, running in the road.

“I just went and grabbed his hand, because he was, like, right in the middle of the road,” the six-year letter carrier said. “I put my hand up, and it stopped the cars and stopped him.”

Berowski said he held the child’s hand tightly for what “felt like an eternity,” although it was only about two minutes. The letter carrier tried to talk to him and ask him questions, but the child did not respond. He apparently had slipped away from his mother on the busy street. Then his mother caught up with them, thanked the carrier and informed him that the child is nonverbal and autistic.

“How he got away that far from them [his family] without noticing, that’s beyond me,” Berowski said.

After the incident, the letter carrier went on with the rest of his route.

Reflecting later, Berowski said, “I was so glad I was there and I’m just really glad that people in the cars were observant, not on their phones or anything.”

Letter carrier helps unconscious man

While looking for another letter carrier whom he was going to help with deliveries on Aug. 8, Atlantic City, NJ Branch 370 member **Robert Dade** had driven all the way to The Point, at the end of a narrow strip of Longport—a borough of the Jersey Shore on Absecon Island. As the first-year letter carrier was driving, he noticed a man lying unconscious in the middle of the street.



Robert Dade

Dade parked and ran to the man. As soon as he did, four or five bystanders came to help. The man was pale, his lips were purple, he wasn't breathing and he had no pulse. Dade had been a lifeguard, so he immediately directed others to call 911 and began administering CPR. As he did, the bystanders continued to check the man's pulse. After about two minutes of CPR, "he started to get a little faint pulse," Dade said.

Another bystander took over compressions while Dade ran back to his truck to get a water bottle. He splashed some water on the man's feet—a technique he knew could stimulate the nervous system—and as soon as he did, the man began gasping for air.

Within about five minutes, the beach patrol arrived, followed by EMTs and police officers. Once they

Heroic carriers (continued)

used a defibrillator on the man and a suction machine to remove foam coming from his mouth, he was breathing on his own.

Dade was grateful for the help the man received from the other good Samaritans. "It was awesome to see the community at work," the carrier said.

After the incident, Dade continued with his route.

Dade found out from the beach patrol that once the man had reached the hospital, he had died. "It was crushing to hear," Dade said, but he added that he was glad he did what he could to "give him his chance."

"I'm still emotional over this," he said of the experience. "You just don't know what to do at the moment, but you try your best."

Letter carrier performs CPR on customer

On Aug. 6, **Jason Danliers** parked his truck outside a house on his route in Albany, NY, and completed his park-and-loop. As he returned to his truck, he was stopped by a girl who was about 12 or 13 years old. She asked Danliers if he knew CPR and if he could help her because her dad wasn't breathing.

"I didn't even think twice about it," Danliers said. "I just said, 'Sure, let's go.'"

The Branch 29 member followed the girl into the house right next to where he had parked. She led him to the bathroom, where her father was lying on his side.

"I checked his pulse and he wasn't breathing," the carrier said. "I was thinking to myself, 'We've got to get him on his back, because it's the only way to help him breathe and perform CPR.' It was a struggle to get the fa-

ther on his back because he was very heavy, and I was holding his head because I didn't want him to hit his head. The speakerphone was on, and the 911 dispatcher was instructing me to perform CPR and start compressions. So, that's when I started pushing really hard. I did like 30 compressions before EMS arrived."

The experience was definitely out of the ordinary for Danliers. "I never thought I would actually do that on my route," he said.

The paramedics had moved the man to the kitchen, where there was more space, but the whole time, the kitchen stove had been on, and smoke had started pouring from the kitchen. A firefighter yelled out, "Someone turn off the stove!"

Danliers did, and that's when he noticed that the kids were crying, "so I started to console the daughter and son," he said. "The kids called out, 'Not my dad, not my dad!'"

Despite all the life-saving measures, the man died.

"That's really hurtful to see that, you know, your dad's passing away in front of your eyes," Danliers said. "They're so young. That hurt, and I think about it, I still do."

Afterward, the six-year carrier returned to deliver his route, and later that day he made sure to give his own mother a hug. He later spoke with the family, which he said gave him "some closure."

Reflecting on the event, Danliers said, "I would do it for anybody. ... That's just the right thing to do."

Carrier responds to overturned truck

On March 11, Branch 421 carrier **Ernest Fuentes Jr.** was delivering

Ernest Fuentes Jr.



mail in a neighborhood in San Antonio, TX, when he saw a Ford F-150 truck that was going about 100 mph lose control on a curved access road and flip over. Shocked, the four-year letter carrier immediately ran toward the crash.

Another bystander who had been riding his bike in the area also came to assist. When the carrier got to the truck, he called 911 and he heard the driver yelling inside.

"He was just kind of like freaking out that he was in there," Fuentes said. "He couldn't open the door."

Fuentes tried to open the door, but the top of the truck was damaged. He instructed the driver to rock the door from the inside as Fuentes pulled it from the outside. Eventually they got the door open wide enough so the driver could crawl out.

When the driver emerged, Fuentes could see that he was dazed and bleeding from his face and arms due to the broken glass, but he was conscious and didn't seem to have sustained any major injuries.

Fuentes put his arm around the driver and tried to help him onto a large toolbox that had fallen from his truck. Fuentes thought the man seemed to be OK, he said, "so I was like, 'Oh, maybe he can walk to this toolbox, so I can assess him.' I should have known better. I let him go, then he fell over. I'm like, 'Oh, he can't walk over there on his own.'"

The bystander and Fuentes each took one of the man's arms and helped him to the toolbox. Then,



Fuentes saw the truck lose control and then rushed to help the driver.

Fuentes retrieved a bottle of water from his postal truck to rinse the glass off the driver. At that time, the bystander turned off the truck to ensure that it wouldn't start a fire.

Emergency services arrived soon after to take over the situation and, confident that the driver was in good hands, Fuentes returned to his route.

Despite praise for his good deeds, the carrier insists he was simply happy to make a difference. Fuentes served in the Army from 2004 to 2017 and related this experience to his military service. "I guess when I did all this, I was kind of already used to it," he said. "I didn't hesitate to help somebody."

Carrier stops boy from running into traffic

On Aug. 2 around 3:30 p.m., **Kimberly Hulett**, a 35-year letter carrier, was walking her route when she saw a young boy who was around 6 years old



running down the street. "He crossed over to the next lane and he was just smiling as he was running, like he was having so much fun," she said.

Although there were no cars near them, she knew one could approach at any time. So, the Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 letter carrier acted fast, grabbing his arm and taking him out of the road.

"I constantly kept asking him, 'Where do you live?'" Hulett said.

She asked him several more questions, but the boy didn't respond to any of them. She realized that he was nonverbal and possibly autistic, so she walked back to her truck to get her phone. "I called for the police to come, and so I'm telling the dispatcher what's going on. I don't see anybody coming after him," Hulett said.

In the meantime, because it was so hot that day, she invited the child to stand under the shade of a tree near her postal vehicle. Several times the child tried to get away from her, but Hulett said that, for his safety, "I wasn't gonna let him go."

She waited with him for about 15 to 20 minutes until someone pulled up, and Hulett asked if he knew the child. "Yes, that's my brother. My mother is in the house," he said. "I just happened to come home, and my mother was in the house crying and screaming 'cause she didn't know where he was. ... He is autistic."

After Hulett explained what had happened, the brother thanked her and the carrier left to finish her route.

"I'm driving, and next thing I'm just crying and truly, I'm thanking God that I was allowed to be there at that time to rescue him," Hulett said.

Heroic carriers (continued)

Letter carrier assists at scene of car crash

Richard Riggs, a San Mateo, CA Branch 1280 letter carrier, was walking his route in Pacifica on March 31 when he saw a woman in an SUV pull over, looking like she was about to park. Just seconds later, a man driving a large SUV came up from behind Riggs's truck, and the 36-year letter carrier noticed that he looked distracted. Instead of stopping or turning when he reached the woman's car, he struck her vehicle from the back, at about 25 mph.

Riggs immediately rushed to the accident scene to help. In the seconds it took for him to reach the woman, her two back-seat passengers were already out of the vehicle. However, the driver remained inside coughing from the airbag dust.

"I didn't realize there was that much smoke from an airbag deployment," Riggs said. "The whole car was full of smoke, and I thought, 'Where there's smoke, there's fire.'"

Riggs urged her to get out of the vehicle, but when she didn't respond or get out, he reached into the car, wrapped his arms around her and pulled her out. He then walked her to nearby residents, who gave her a chair to sit in.

Next, he went to help the male driver of the larger SUV. His door was jammed shut, so Riggs, filled with adrenaline, "just ripped that door open," he said.

After giving a statement to police, Riggs let his supervisor know what had happened and continued on his route.

"I felt good about it," he said. "I was there at the right time."

Later he ran into the female driver's son on his route, who expressed his gratitude for the carrier's actions.



Carrier saves customer from dog attack

On Aug. 11 around 4 p.m. in Port Arthur, TX, **Genese Robertson**, who was only four months into her letter carrier career, had just realized she missed a package, so she turned her postal vehicle around to deliver it.

The Houston Branch 283 letter carrier saw a woman in the street who appeared from far away to be playing with a dog, but when she got closer, she realized the woman was being attacked by a large pit bull. The dog had the woman's arm in its jaws and was violently yanking it "like how they tug a rope," Robertson described.

Robertson got close and rolled down the window of her postal vehicle. She used her dog-repellent spray on the dog and called 911.

"I was shaking real bad," Robertson said.

Other drivers and pedestrians were nearby, but no one else assisted.

Despite Robertson's efforts, the dog continued to attack, dragging the woman and biting her arm and leg. Robertson told the woman to come closer so that she could spray the dog more directly. She continued

spraying, using up two entire bottles and switching to bug spray when she ran out. Finally, the dog let up, and the woman was able to run into her house.

After the woman got to her house, the dog stayed outside her house, pacing and attempting to wipe the spray off its face onto the grass. When emergency responders arrived, the dog ran and hid under a neighbor's house. Robertson stayed until emergency responders got the scene under control, then was on her way for the rest of her route.

When Port Arthur Police Officer Shelby Harper arrived on scene, she noticed the mail truck had a "tremendous amount of blood on the side of the vehicle, [there was] a huge puddle of blood in the street, and [there were] bloody footprints all the way to the victim's residence," according to the police department. "There is no doubt that Mrs. Robertson helped to save the victim's life when she stepped up to assist a stranger in desperate need. Genese Robertson went above and beyond on this day."

About a week and a half later, Robertson ran into the woman, who had been hospitalized and had undergone surgery.

"She came and gave me a hug and told me 'Thank you'—that I actually saved her life," Robertson said.

The dog had chewed through the woman's arm to her tendons and bones, and she had lost feeling in her fingers. When Robertson ran into her again recently, the woman said she was slowly regaining feeling in her fingers.

"I felt good about being able to help her," Robertson said. "I mean, I just felt like I did what anybody would have done."

Port Arthur Police Chief Tim Duriso later presented Robertson with a certificate of appreciation “as a symbol of our respect and admiration for her courageous assistance to a citizen in need on Aug. 11.”

Letter carrier rescues elderly woman from fire

Heavy smoke coming from a customer’s trailer windows and loud smoke alarms alerted **Jairo Lopez** of a possible fire as he was working his Midwest City, OK, route on March 13. The Oklahoma City Branch 458 member had worked on his current route for about two years and knew that an elderly woman who was deaf lived there and that she wouldn’t have been able to hear the alarms.

The eight-year letter carrier knocked on the door and tried to open it along with the windows, but it was to no avail. So, he searched for help.

“I drove around to the other street where I had seen some maintenance

workers,” Lopez said. “I notified a maintenance worker, and he drove with me back to the lady’s house.”

The maintenance worker had a spare key to the woman’s home, so they went into the trailer together. They found the woman toward the back of the trailer. She was unaware of the fire, because she didn’t hear the alarms or see a sign of the fire and when Lopez reached her she was “unconscious or asleep,” Lopez said, “We took her out,” explaining that they lifted her “shoulder to shoulder” and carried her outside.

The fire was minor and resulted from a faulty wire in the oven. It was contained in time, leaving only smoke damage. The woman was fine afterward and hadn’t sustained any injuries. Lopez has seen the customer on several occasions since, and she often greets him when he is delivering mail.

Lopez never told anyone about the incident. His actions became known only after the property manager informed the post office about the carrier’s good deeds. “If I can help out, I’ll help out,” he said. “I’m not really a person that likes attention.”

Carrier helps repair technician after fall

July 14 began as just a gloomy and cold day in Stamford, CT, but suddenly a severe thunderstorm started with fast winds and pouring rain. At around 5:15 p.m., Branch 60 member **Derek Decou** was nearing the end of his route.

As he was driving, he said he noticed a wire falling across his side mirror, “and I’m like, ‘What’s going on?’ ” The 32-year letter carrier looked up and saw a cable repair worker at the top of an about 20-foot ladder. Suddenly, the

Derek Decou



ladder slid and fell into the road with the cable repair man on it.

“Someone could have easily ran over him, because people speed through there,” Decou said.

Decou got out of the vehicle and saw the repair man trying to crawl to his truck. When Decou reached him, the man was in intense pain, unable to even dial 911. Decou helped the man out of the road and into his truck—which was about 50 feet from where he had fallen—called 911 and waited with him until EMS arrived.

Once EMTs got there, Decou told the firefighters what had happened before going on his way to finish the rest of his route.

“I felt good about helping him and that I was there to help him, because it was a dangerous area,” Decou said. “That was a bad spot for him to fall.”

Letter carrier uses Narcan to save life

Over the summer, Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Alexander Skomra** had visited Philadelphia, PA, and happened upon a fire station that was giving away free Narcan, a medicine that reverses an opioid overdose. Thinking that he would never know when it might come in handy, the carrier picked up some. On Oct. 15, only

Jairo Lopez





his third day carrying mail alone, his decision ended up saving a customer's life.

Skomra had missed a delivery and went back to put it in the mailbox when a man came up to him asking if he happened to have Narcan. Remembering the Narcan he had in his bag, Skomra retrieved it from his truck.

They went to the living room of the apartment where a woman appeared to be overdosing. When Skomra arrived, the woman was making "this awful breathing noise," he said. Skomra administered the Narcan to the woman by nose.

"Within a couple minutes, she was fine," Skomra said. "She, like, came around and could answer questions and stuff. Before that, you could just see her eyes moving.

"I was glad I was there," Skomra said. "I should have already had left that area. It was kind of weird that it happened in a way for me to be able to be there to help."

Carrier hides woman running from assailant

Tiffany McCarty, a two-year letter carrier in Wichita, KS, was deliver-

Heroic carriers (continued)

ing mail on Feb. 26 at 10 a.m. when a young woman suddenly ran across the street toward her. She yelled to the Branch 201 letter carrier, "He's going to kill me!" and asked her to call 911.

"She was so scared and crying," McCarty said. "She was hysterical. ... She was only 21. ... I felt like I had to do something right then."

To hide her, McCarty had her sit on her LLV steps, which were facing away from the house she had run out of. As McCarty was calling 911, she saw the man whom the young woman was running from emerge from a nearby house. He had a gun raised just enough for McCarty to see it. After spotting the gun, McCarty crouched down on the floor of the LLV between a tray and her seat. The man looked around, seeing the mail truck, but did not notice her, so he went back inside the home.

"I was scared for her. I'm a mom, so I can only imagine [her] being one of my daughters," McCarty said. She added that she didn't feel scared for herself and felt as if she was "a bullet-proof vest for [the young woman]."

An emergency response team arrived in about 10 to 15 minutes. After McCarty spoke with them, she returned to her route.

Following the incident, she was still delivering mail to the assailant's house, which made her worry something would happen to her on her route.

"I was nervous for the simple fact that I was still on that route, and I wasn't sure if he would find out that the postal worker said something, you know?" McCarty said.

A few days after the incident, McCarty found out from a police report that the man had been arrested for aggravated robbery. He had stolen

toiletries, a charger, a debit card and a few other items from the young woman. McCarty is unsure of what has become of the assailant, but she is now working at a different station.

Letter carrier spots child walking down middle of road

Theodore May was walking his route on Oct. 21 when the Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member came across a child walking down the middle of a side street near the busy Main Street in Buffalo. The carrier had just gotten out of his truck when the boy's cries coming from the street alerted him that something was amiss.

"I was shocked," the three-year letter carrier recalled. "You see a 3-year-old, you're not thinking he's unsupervised. ... It was just him in the road ... so I was kind of in shock for a minute."

May knew there was a day care facility about half a mile away because it is part of his delivery route. May stayed with the child while a nearby resident called the business. The day care was unaware of the boy being missing, although May estimated that he had been gone for at least 10 minutes.

Concerned about the day care's loss of the boy, May reported the day care to the Office of Children and Family Services, the agency responsible for child care in New York state. "I just want to make sure this doesn't happen again to a kid," May said.

Reflecting on the incident, May remembered that there wasn't anyone around, saying, "If it weren't for me, he probably would have been gone." **PR**