

A tale on two levels



Philip Dine

This is a story of years-long collaboration between two letter carriers that resulted in the rescuing of an 86-year-old customer, which in turn allowed her daughter to travel from another state and see her mother one more time.

But it's a tale of teamwork on another level as well, with one of the carriers endeavoring to draw attention to the conscientious actions of the other, along with the broader aim of inspiring and promoting the ethos of selfless actions that make letter carriers essential to the well-being of the communities they serve.

When Brandon McCabe began delivering Route 14 out of Beaverton Main in Portland, OR—coincidentally

on his birthday in June 2020, after transferring from California where he'd carried mail since 2014—one of the customers he got to know well was Janet. She lived in a trailer park, had no nearby relatives, and her few local friends were unable to make the trek in times of need.

Janet was a "hardship delivery" on Brandon's route, which meant that despite the CBUs at the trailer park, he delivered directly to her trailer because she couldn't walk more than a few feet.

During his years on the route, the Branch 82 shop steward and Oregon State Association recording secretary/publications editor shared laughter and conversation with Janet. "I was able to help her out when I could," Brandon says, "and she would impart wisdom through stories of her life and things she had done to work through adverse times."

January of this year brought a rezoning of routes and Brandon's new Route 13 did not include Janet, whose mail would now be delivered by Peter Limbaugh, whom Brandon describes as "our safety captain and an outstanding, caring carrier."

To better serve the customers, Peter queried Brandon about his old route and the kind of help some folks might need. That information proved vital one June day when Peter spotted Janet lying on the ground outside her trailer, looking exhausted and somewhat out of it.

He helped her sit up on her steps, but "she seemed very confused, and she didn't know where she was, despite being right in front of her home," Peter recalls. Sensing that she needed medical help, even though she wasn't requesting it, he called 911.

The EMTs took Janet to the hospital, where doctors determined she had had a major stroke.

In real time, Peter informed Brandon, who was able to get ahold of Janet's daughter, who made the trip from California. Brandon also quickly visited Janet in the hospital. She was confused about who Brandon was, but when her former carrier informed Janet that her daughter was on the way, "she perked right up and started to chat with me about her daughter."

A week later, Brandon recalls, "we lost Janet."

Because Peter had prepared for residents' potential needs, Brandon says, then "trusted his instincts and did the right thing ... Janet's daughter and I got to spend more time with her and were able to say our goodbyes. Janet will always hold a place in my heart. I will remember her as being selfless and kind. And Peter will always be my hero for being attentive to Janet and calling for help when she needed it. He is a perfect example of a good human being and an excellent carrier."

Talking to Peter, a letter carrier since January 2021, two things are clear. For starters, he never would have reached out to us about his actions. "When Brandon said he wanted to write something about me, I thought he meant in our local publication. This isn't going to be just my local union," Peter noted with some bemusement, "this is going to be a national article!" Any credit, he insists, goes to Brandon for being able to immediately reach out to Janet's daughter.

Second, it is evident how much Peter cares about customer service, about the importance of the mail, and about the "hardship customers" because those are the people who need help and attention "the most."

Brandon, meanwhile, was motivated by more than a desire to shine light on his route successor. He wants to emulate "the senior carriers" he learned from and who "inspired me to do what is right," while also doing his part to inspire new generations to carry on the legacy in neighborhoods across this nation.

What strikes me about this tale is not that these two letter carriers are unique, but on the contrary—that they reflect so well what is unique about the letter carrier craft and those who ply the trade.

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