

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.



Rafael Pozo (above) alerted residents near a burning garbage truck (below) minutes before the truck exploded.

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 their 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 sounds alarm before garbage truck explodes

Smoke coming from a garbage truck alerted Arlington Heights, IL Branch 2810 member **Rafael Pozo** of a fire as he was delivering his route on the afternoon of Dec. 6, 2024. The 13-year letter carrier saw the driver get out of the truck and attempt to put out the flames with a small fire extinguisher, but the fire had already

reached about 15 feet high, so it was of little use.

After making sure that the driver was all right, Pozo called 911. Worried about the children who were leaving school for the day and going onto the residential street where the fire was raging, Pozo warned students and administrators.

Within minutes, firefighters arrived. They had only started setting up to fight the fire when the blaze reached the compressed natural gas the truck ran on, causing it to explode. Shrapnel flew everywhere, injuring three of the emergency responders, including a firefighter whose leg was hit with shrapnel.

"Those guys are the heroes in this situation," Pozo said of the emergency responders.

One teacher was about to drive up to her house when Pozo warned her, and she was able to avoid the shrapnel from the explosion.

"She would have been standing in her living room when the truck exploded," Pozo said. "Shrapnel flew through her living room window, destroying the interior of her house. She says that I saved her life."

The shock wave from the explosion caused substantial property damage in the immediate area. Sections of roof and siding were blown off onto nearby houses and windows were shattered. Parts of the truck were found several blocks away.

Although Pozo was far enough away from the explosion to avoid getting hit with shrapnel, he said, "My ears were definitely ringing for a couple of days after that," due to the extremely loud noise that came with the explosion.

This wasn't the last time this happened. Exactly six months later, on



June 6 around the same time of day and in the same part of his route, Pozo again called 911 about a garbage truck that was on fire. There were hundreds of kids outside for their end-of-the-school-year party. Pozo described the situation as being a lot “scarier,” so he made sure to warn them of the fire.

“If that thing blows up, you’re talking about dozens of kids getting hurt,” he said. “I was worried that it was going to fall on one of the kids.”

This time the truck driver avoided the explosion by dumping the truck load onto the pavement, preventing the fire from reaching the natural gas.

The fire department determined that the fires had been caused by a lithium battery, which are not supposed to be disposed of in the regular pickup due to their tendency to ignite if damaged or crushed.

Carrier applies first aid after customer is shot

Sydney Billingsley, a Dayton, OH Branch 182 member, was delivering her route on June 28 when she heard a man screaming for help along with dogs barking. Initially, the four-year letter carrier was unsure whether she was hearing correctly, but quickly realized she was, so she approached the house. She asked the man whether there were any dangerous dogs, and he said there were not.

When she entered the house, she found him lying in a pool of blood, having been shot eight times.

“I used to be a firefighter, so I’m no stranger to danger,” Billingsley said. “It was just an instinct. I just saw a man call for help, and I have some medical experience.”



She called 911 and used towels she found in the house to apply pressure to his wounds.

“I was lying across this man’s body,” Billingsley said. “I had my right arm over the top few wounds ... and then I had my left hand pressing on his left thigh.”

The ambulance came in about five to 10 minutes, while the carrier stayed on the phone with the 911 operator and asked the man questions.

“I knew exactly what to do: put pressure, keep him conscious and talk to 911 thoroughly,” Billingsley said.

The man survived the shooting, but after being released from the hospital, he was taken to rehab due to the loss of feeling in his legs.

“The person who heard the male calling for help and ultimately called 911 likely saved the victim’s life by getting him the medical attention he needed in a timely manner,” Dayton Police Sgt. Andrew Zecchini told the *Dayton Daily News*.

The Dayton police investigation led them to a suspect who, as of July 11, was facing two counts of felonious assault and one count of aggravated robbery.

Letter carrier calls 911 for fallen customer

Jennifer Carter, a one-year letter carrier, was finishing up her route on March 21 when she saw one of her elderly customers, Jim Reinert, losing his balance. The Salina, KS Branch 486 letter carrier was about 6 to 8 feet away from him and rushed to him, attempting to break his fall.

She didn’t make it in time, and Reinert hit his head on the ground. She started to ask him questions to see whether he was OK, then remembered that he was non-verbal, thus unable to answer.

“I felt so bad. I didn’t know, because he couldn’t tell me,” she said. “Is he having a stroke, a heart attack or does it hurt?”

He had fallen on the ground where sharp stickers from a plant had accumulated. They were stuck to his clothes, hat and head.

“I was trying to get his head off the ground to put my mail bag under it and pull the stickers out so at least he could be comfortable, because he couldn’t move,” Carter said.

She called 911, then comforted him for nearly 20 minutes until the ambulance arrived. Once emergency services and her postmaster arrived, seeing the situation was in good hands, she headed home.

Reinert did not sustain any major injuries, and Carter has seen him since.

“Every time he sees me, he gives me a thumbs-up,” Carter said. “He’s just the sweetest thing ever.”

Carrier performs CPR on unconscious driver

On her way back to the station after a long day of work including overtime,



Kerry Hurd

Heroic carriers (continued)

Kerry Hurd, an 11-year letter carrier, witnessed a commotion at an intersection. The Wichita, KS Branch 201 member saw a man pulling a child from a car and was worried that a kidnapping was in progress. She quickly realized that what was actually happening was that the child's mother was having a medical emergency at a stoplight.

Bystanders pulled the woman out of the car and called 911, but none of them knew CPR, so she was lying on the ground and not breathing.

Hurd stepped in and got to work on chest compressions, which she continued for 15 to 20 minutes. During the process, the woman intermittently lost and regained her pulse.

Despite fatigue and physical discomfort, Hurd continued, motivated by the sight of the woman's child.

"My knees were on fire, and I'm just like, 'It's OK, you know, they'll be here soon,'" Hurd said.

Emergency personnel soon arrived and took over, and Hurd returned to the station.

Since the incident, Hurd has not seen the woman and is unsure of her condition, but she has heard from another letter carrier at the scene that she seemed to be alive and moving while on the gurney.

"That's the only thing I really want," Hurd said. "I don't care about awards or anything. I just wanna see her [be OK]."

Letter carrier comes to stroke victim's aid

Lynn Juist, a Branch 3688 letter carrier, was walking her route one winter day in Willoughby, OH. The 20-year letter carrier was in a mobile home park when she found an elderly woman partially inside her trailer with her legs

hanging out of the door. At first, Juist thought she could have been cleaning, but upon asking if she was OK, the woman replied, "No, I need help."

"I immediately called 911," Juist said, and added that she thought to herself, "I'm gonna sit with her till the ambulance comes."

When the emergency responders arrived, she directed them where to go to reach the trailer.

The woman had apparently suffered a stroke while carrying in groceries and had been there for about half an hour. Since the incident, the customer has undergone rehab and returned home.

"I just had to help her," Juist said. "I'm just really grateful I was there."

The woman's family expressed gratitude for Juist's help by sending a heartfelt note "Their card made me cry: 'You saved our mom's life,'" she said.

Letter carrier comforts CCA attacked by dog

Toma Cook, a seven-year letter carrier, received a call from his supervisor one day in the spring of 2024 telling him that the new city carrier assistant at the station had been attacked and bitten by two dogs while she was delivering mail. The Sioux City, IA Branch 69 letter carrier was nearby and arrived at the scene quickly, where he saw that her legs were bleeding.

"I grabbed an extra shirt in the truck and took it to her real quick," Cook said.

He used it to clean and wrap her bleeding legs, which later needed stitches.

Cook was glad that he had been there to help, saying, "I believe if we want to keep carriers, that we should encourage them and help them out." **PR**

Toma Cook

