



Caretakers of the community

At the close of each year and the start of a new one, *The Postal Record* shines a light on letter carriers who deliver a special kind of joy to their communities. Whether on their routes, off the clock or after retiring, these are a few of the many carriers who go above and beyond to ensure that their customers and communities are cared for.

In this issue, we bring you stories about a branch that is working with a nonprofit to provide beds and bedding to kids in need; a carrier who raises money and collects donations for those in need who also spoke to youth at a local community center about his journey from poverty; a retired member who volunteered with honor flights to bring aging veterans to see the war

memorials in Washington, DC; a branch that donates money raised from their golf tournament to a different charity each year; a recently retired carrier who assisted the residents on his route by fixing things; and a branch that honored the memory of their recently deceased branch president by holding a blood drive.

These stories only scratch the surface. We know that there are NALC members and branches helping their communities year-round in many ways. If you have a story to share with us, please contact *The Postal Record* by phone at 202-662-2851, by email at postalrecord@nalc.org, or by letter at 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001.

Branch partners with organization that builds, donates beds for children

Every fall, Sioux Falls, SD Branch 491 comes together at a union meeting to pick a charity for which the members would like to contribute. In past years, they've voted to help the Ronald McDonald House, which pays for rooms and food for families that have children in the hospital, as well as adopting families for the holidays.

In July 2024, an organization called Sleep in Heavenly Peace (SHP)—which builds and donates wooden twin-sized beds for local children ages 3 to 17 who do not have one—got up and running in Sioux Falls.

Using its donations, the organization buys the lumber, and then volunteers saw, sand and pre-drill everything so that more volunteers can deliver and assemble the beds in the homes of the kids that need them. Each kid receives a bed, a mattress, a mattress protector, sheets, comforter and a pillow.

"They were really just trying to get their feet ... under them and get started," Branch Vice President **Stacy Douglas** said. But the charity needed help. "They were really running out of bedding. I mean, the organization itself is based 100 percent on donations and volunteers."

The organization immediately received a huge demand from families in the community as well as social services. "They had a goal of delivering 200 beds by the end of the year. With a goal that high comes a lot of need. The community has had some local sponsors step up financially for the materials to build the beds, several bed-building volunteer opportunities, but were running critically low on bedding to complete their goal," Douglas said.

The charity was looking for sheets, pillows, blankets and comforters for the finished beds, which prompted Douglas



Branch 491's donations to Sleep in Heavenly Peace in 2024

to think of the branch doing a drive. "For somebody to do a bedding drive, it really takes a lot of the financial burden off of them, because they can provide the bedding and not have to use some of their donations that they've gotten in some of these other places to go toward bedding," Douglas added.

The 21-year carrier, who also serves as South Dakota State Association president, had gotten involved with the charity individually as a volunteer once it opened. SHP's purpose seemed unique to her, which is why Douglas was drawn to help. "I didn't realize there was such a need in this community for children to have a bed to sleep in," she said.

She soon pitched it to her branch as a holiday service opportunity and was heartened that others wanted to help. "Postal employees in Sioux Falls stepped up and came together to help donate bedding to keep this charity moving forward," she said. That included employees in other crafts,



Branch 491 increased its donations in 2025.

too, including clerks, rural carriers, maintenance and mail handlers, as well as retired carriers.

The first year, they were able to collectively donate 35 complete twin bedding sets, 13 comforters, 18 sheet sets, four blankets and 17 pillows, along with some cash that was donated for the November drive. “It was so successful,” Douglas said. “And the carriers were really happy to just take part in it.”

Because of that, the branch once again elected in 2025 to help SHP. The other crafts and management are also once again joining in on the fun. “My best friend, Sara Johnson, is the president of the local APWU and is leading the charge at the distribution center,” Douglas said. “We also do bed deliveries together at least once a week.”

“Since last year’s bedding drive, several city carriers have come along on deliveries and have directly seen the impact it makes in these kids’ lives,” she said. “And so, carriers from all over the branch have helped with both of those parts of it.”

SHP has several builds throughout the year and is always looking for volunteers. “Several people from the union have stepped up to come to build, and they’ve stepped up to come to delivery, and they’ve brought their families in there,” Douglas said. “They take their own time to do this. And it’s such a huge thing.”

Douglas remembers her heartwarming experience with the organization early on. “One of my first deliveries was for a 16-year-old boy, and he said that was his first bed ever. And at the time, my son was 16, and that really hit home for me,” she said. “Now my son comes and helps me do deliveries.”

And the families helped couldn’t be

more grateful. “Kids say it’s life-changing—it’s better than Christmas. They really love having a bed,” Douglas said.

Another carrier had just come with her for the first time the previous week to assemble beds. “He said, ‘Everything you say in the office is true,’ ” Douglas said. “They had five kids. They had no bed. And they were just sleeping on the floor. And he was like, ‘I cannot believe people live like that and not have a bed. ... [It’s] something most of us take for granted.’ It’s such a big deal to these children. They were so excited, just jumping, just, like, hugging us, so happy. And he’s like, ‘I want to do more.’ ”

Sometimes reactions from happy SHP recipients come from unexpected places. “I was still wearing my delivery shirt, and I ran into a lady at the grocery store,” Douglas said. “And she said [that she] and her children fled for their lives from a very abusive situation. And she said, ‘You guys are the only reason my children have beds. ... You don’t know the dignity that gave my kids back, to have a bed to sleep on.’ ”

In the year and a half since Sleep in Heavenly Peace has been open in the Sioux Falls community, it has delivered 780 beds so far with the expectation of more than 800 completed by the end of 2025.

Those in need can go to the SHP website to apply for one. They get added to the waitlist, and it generally takes around two to three weeks. “But it’s just constant,” Douglas said. “As soon as we fill some beds, then we get more requests.”

Douglas says she has been deeply affected by this endeavor: “Just seeing the impact it’s made in the community and all the kids that I’ve delivered to,

it's really changed my life."

There are chapters of Sleep in Heavenly Peace all over the United States, Douglas excitedly points out. "There's probably one fairly close to you and you don't even know it," she said.

Carrier has become role model for his community efforts

Mike Wallace, a Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member, not only has served his community as a letter carrier for 10 years but goes out of his way to help his community outside of work, too.

His Facebook account has been a catalyst for his community giving projects. Several years ago, he saw a post from Cazenovia Manor, a rehabilitation center for men with substance use disorders, which asked for clothing donations. Wallace said many of the men had recently been incarcerated, leaving prison with nothing.

"Once I heard somebody is in need," he said, "it was a no-brainer for me."

Beginning in 2020, he gathered up his old clothing and organized a clothing collection and donation for the center via Facebook. When he drops off the clothes, he notices the looks on the men at the center's faces. "It's priceless," he said.

In the last year, the donations have slowed down, but he still drops off donations whenever he receives them, saying, "People still text me every now and then: 'Hey, you still donate to the place?'" Wallace always says yes. "I'm never going to turn down a bag of clothes."

Another time, his aunt was volunteering with an organization called Upward Design for Life, which furnishes homes for families emerging from homelessness, but she noticed

The carrier added: "The more you do as a union for your community, the closer that your union will be and the stronger you'll be. I mean, it really does bring everybody together. So that's really the best part."

that many of the people had either worn sheets and pillows or none at all. She asked for Wallace's help to collect donations for them. Wallace posted on Facebook again, asking his friends and community for donations. People responded generously, and he said he was able to raise enough money to purchase "a lot of sheets and pillows."

He's gotten such a reputation that the director of a local Buffalo community center reached out to him via his Facebook account and invited Wallace to speak to a group of kids at the Martha Mitchell Community Center.

The carrier talked with a group of 10- to 15-year-olds about accountability, preparedness and life skills. He came from poverty himself. "A lot of my uncles and older family members

Deborah Wallace Daniel
13m · 🌐
UNBELIEVABLE! My nephew not only donated sheets n pillows but today he reached out to his friends and look what happened. Amazing 🙌



A social media post about Mike Wallace's community service

Wallace with the kids he spoke to at the Martha Mitchell Community Center





Darron Baker (r) with his father and other veterans on an honor flight from Fort Dodge, IA

are caught up in drugs,” he said, so “it’s very important to me for the youth to see a guy like me... you can do it, too.” He was so well received, he plans to continue participating when the

program restarts in coming months.

Wallace is happy to help anyone in need, saying, “I’m a guy that likes to help and do things for the community.”

Letter carrier honors veterans with trips to Washington

For about eight years, Darron Baker of Fort Dodge, IA Branch 645 was on the board of a nonprofit organization that provided veterans with honor flights.

An honor flight is a special trip that flies U.S. military veterans who served sometime between World War II and the Vietnam War into Washington, DC, to visit those war memorials and other monuments. These trips include round-trip airfare, ground transportation and meals.

“It’s a wonderful volunteer experience. It’s just so much fun to see all those veterans and help them get out to DC to see all the monuments,” the retired letter carrier said. “It was a trip of a lifetime for the majority of those guys because they wouldn’t have otherwise been able to get out there.”

A typical trip begins two weeks before the flight, when they’d hold a supper for the veterans and their families to go over the itinerary and get everything in order.

There were usually around 125 veterans on a flight, the eight to 10 board members, volunteers for any veteran who needed to travel in a wheelchair, three nurses, EMTs and a doctor. In total, about 160 would travel on the flight.

On the day of the flight, the volunteers would get to the Fort Dodge airport at around 4:30 a.m. for a 6:30 a.m. flight. As the veterans would arrive, Baker and the others would check IDs and get things sorted. “Of course, a lot of them needed wheelchairs. That was what I did

a lot of, was getting the guys that pulled up to the curb into the wheelchairs and getting them into the terminal and getting them out to the plane,” he said. “We always had the fire department help us getting them up into the plane because we don’t have a walkway terminal in Fort Dodge.”

When they landed in Washington, DC, they’d unload the planes and get the veterans and their family members or volunteers onto three big tour buses. They’d divide the veterans into three-person teams, so no one would get lost.

“We always stop first at the Lincoln Memorial, with the Korean Memorial and the Vietnam wall nearby,” he said. “Then we go to the Navy Monument and the Air Force Monument. We would go to the World War II Monument, and we would go to Arlington Cemetery to watch the changing of the guard.”

As the veterans were at a memorial, Baker and the board arranged for a caterer to arrive and load the food onto the buses, so the vets could eat when they got back on the bus.

“We’d take a little tour of downtown DC, around the Capitol and the White House and all that stuff while they were eating,” Baker said.

Then they’d continue seeing the monuments before heading back to the airport to leave at 8:30 p.m. They’d arrive back in Fort Dodge at around 10 p.m.

“When we got back, then we had a huge crowd that was always there to greet them, coming back and welcoming



them home,” he said. “We announced all the guys as they got off the plane. It’s just a really neat experience for them.”

For Baker, he thinks the flights are important, especially for the military members who served in the Vietnam War. “They’d come home and they would get such a bad welcome,” he said. “People see them coming off the planes and they just didn’t like the war in Vietnam, and they took it out on the veterans, even though it wasn’t their fault.”

When people are cheering for them as they come back to Fort Dodge on these flights, “It just, I think, gave them a sense that people really appreciated what they did,” he said.

The board ran two trips per year—in May and September—taking veterans in the order the applications arrived. A typical trip costs close to \$120,000. To pay for the flights, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and other groups did fundraisers. “We had a number of organizations doing fundraising things, and the money just kept rolling in because it was such a good cause,” he said.

Thinking back on the flights he took, Baker remembered the WWII vet he

pushed around in a wheelchair on his first flight. “It was just such a joy, because he was still sharp as could be,” he said. “He could get up and walk around out of the wheelchair, but it was just so much fun to push him around and talk to him and hear his stories all day.”

About a year ago, the carrier convinced his father, who was in the military in 1952, to take one of the flights, despite not liking to fly. “He talks about that trip all the time,” he said. “So that was really special.”

Baker’s co-workers often asked him how a flight went. One letter carrier was a vet from the Vietnam era, and he was on one of Baker’s flights.

Baker has since retired from the Postal Service and from the honor flight board. “We have a new, younger board that has taken over and is going to keep it going,” he said.

He encourages anyone to get involved with local organizations that put together honor flights. “A number of states have the honor flight hubs. And if anybody has money that they want to donate, it all goes to pay for the veterans, because nobody gets paid,” he said of the volunteer effort.

Baker was part of a group that would take veterans, such as Jim Coleman (r), a retired member of Branch 645, on trips to Washington, DC, to see war memorials and other monuments.

Branch golf tournament raises money for local kids

Pride City Branch 229 in Pueblo, CO, has been holding golf tournaments for four years, using the money raised to help members of the community. When they first put on the event, they chose to donate to a local high school

basketball team. “We just decided we wanted to give back to the community and help out fundraising for local young kids to try to generate money for them,” Branch President **Donald Hemphill** said.

One of the teams from Branch 229’s tournament



This year, the branch elected to continue helping children in the area by donating all of the proceeds from this year's tournament—\$11,000—to the local Boys and Girls Club. "There's always young men and women that are underprivileged. So, we decided to reach out to the Boys and Girls Club," he said.

The branch holds the golf tournament each summer for close to 100 entrants at the Elmwood Golf Course in Pueblo. The club offers the use of the course at a 50 percent discount, and the branch holds a silent auction, and raffles baskets to raise more money.

The branch has an organizing committee of seven to eight people that handles the tournament. In addition to organizing the event, they all attempt to get sponsors for each hole. Hemphill said they often get so many sponsors that they have to double or triple up the sponsors per hole.

At the end of the tournament, the branch gives awards for the first-, second- and third-place winners, as well as one prize for the last-place finisher. Hemphill has "won" the last-place award two years in a row. "I'm not a golfer," he admitted.



William Raymond

Carrier goes above and beyond for customers on his route

Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **William Raymond**, retired this year after carrying the mail for a decade, capping a career that began in the Navy at age 17. While his mail-carrying days amounted to only a decade, he cared for his customers so well that they won't forget him.

Raymond's good deeds weren't flashy, and he didn't seek recognition for them. He just saw people on his route in Cadillac, MI, who needed help and got the job done. He often came back off the clock to do errands for them.

"I've replaced and installed three mailboxes because some of the elderly people can't do it," he said. "So, I come there and I don't charge them. I just came and put in their mailboxes for them. One got taken out by a snowplow, and I dug that hole out in the spring and I replaced the mailbox for them."

For another customer, an elderly retiree, Raymond put up a mailbox and also added handrails for his door because he knew the man had taken a fall in the past.

Raymond's simple brand of friendliness brought smiles to his patrons,

demonstrating that sometimes the small gestures are the most meaningful.

He would stop and talk to the residents of an assisted-living facility on his route each day, sometimes accepting cookies from them. A former Dish Network manager, Raymond once had a chance to help a resident there with an important mission: getting Frank Sinatra on her television.

"One lady, oh my goodness, she loved Frank Sinatra, and she had the Dish Network, and she would flip the buttons, and she'd be all messed up," he said. "So, she would stop me when I come by, and I'd go in her house, and I'd get her back on her Dish Network to get her Frank Sinatra."

Sometimes his service was nothing more than companionship.

"There was another lady who couldn't leave her porch. So, I would stop and talk to her every day. She was 97 years old," Raymond recalled. He also kept a close eye on people's property and even took some to doctor's appointments after finishing his route.

An appreciative customer nominated him as a hero, writing, "He will be sorely

missed, not only as an exceptional representative and employee of the USPS, but as a daily reminder of the importance in treating everyone in life with concern, dignity and respect.”

Raymond says his only regret is that

he didn’t join the Postal Service immediately after leaving the Navy, because he loved the job so much.

“I wouldn’t trade anything,” he said. “The Post Office was great. Never a boring day.”

Branch holds blood drive in memory of former president

In March of last year, **Carmon Haynes**, the recent past president of Rome, GA Branch 536, started noticing that he was feeling lightheaded and having other symptoms. He went to his doctor and was diagnosed with Leukemia, a cancer of the blood and bone marrow.

Haynes had been a fighter all of his life and he wasn’t going to stand down against Leukemia. Haynes had been in the Air Force and joined the Postal Service after his military career ended. He was an outside steward serving all over Region 9 (Florida, Georgia, North and South Carolina) and Branch 536 president for 10 years, from 2015 to 2025.

“He was very passionate about his job,” current Branch President **Madison Vassari** said of Haynes. “Ornery as hell. He was a big Georgia Bulldogs fan. So, I had equated that tenacity to a bulldog-like tenacity.”

While he could work with managers when they were open to working with him, he wasn’t afraid to fight when management refused. “Rome in 2023, I think, filed the most grievances out of anywhere in the Georgia district—I think somewhere upwards of 1,300 grievances—that year,” Vassari said. “We had a very unagreeable OIC who just stonewalled a lot of stuff. Because she did that, and because Carmon understood the contract, he just kept churning out those grievances. By do-

ing that, he was able to secure us hundreds of precedent-setting decisions for dozens of different contract violations.”

Haynes had beaten cancer once, having battled throat cancer into remission in 2019. He tried to continue working after the second diagnosis but came to lean on then-Vice President Vassari for the branch work while Haynes did outside steward assignments. But by May, doctors told him that he was suffering from a rare and intensive strain of Leukemia and that his odds of surviving the next few years were not good. At that point Haynes resigned as president.

“He still offered support and guidance because he was very, very knowledgeable about the contract,” Vassari said. “And he offered support as much as he could.”

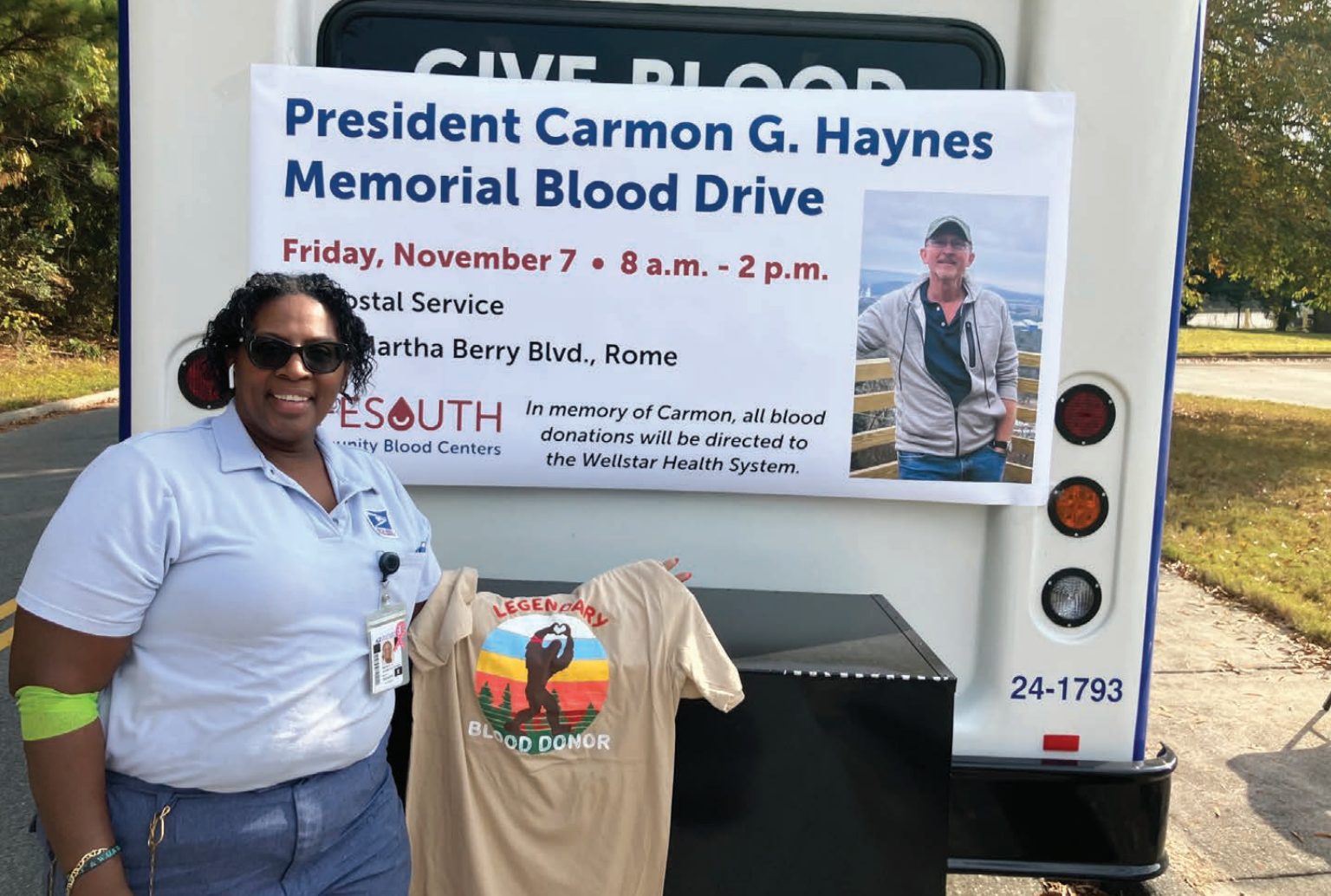
“I saw him one time while he was receiving treatment. He had not yet shaved his head, but he had certainly lost some of his hair and some of his weight,” Vassari added.

The chemotherapy treatment left Haynes immunocompromised and he had to be quarantined. Doctors soon concluded that he was unresponsive to the treatment and decided to send him home. He died on Oct. 1.

Haynes’s girlfriend told the branch that the best thing they could do to honor him would be to donate blood. Vassari arranged with the local Lifesouth Community Blood Centers to send a



Carmon Haynes



Nicole Moore, a member of Rome, GA Branch 536, shows off a T-shirt after donating blood for the first time during the drive to honor Carmon Haynes.

bloodmobile to the Rome USPS facility on Nov. 7. The hope was that they could hold a blood drive while Haynes was still alive, but after he died, they turned the event into a remembrance.

Although postal workers can take up to four hours of administrative leave to donate blood, with management approval, the branch arranged for the bloodmobile to arrive in time for letter carriers to be able to donate before they left for street delivery. Although the officer in charge and the manager of postal operations (MPOO) knew Haynes and were agreeable to the blood drive, they encouraged Vassari to hold it right outside of postal property to reduce paperwork. He quickly got permission from the city to hold it on a trailhead by the installation.

The drive was an instant success. “Someone from every craft donated,” Vassari said. “We had some managers donate. The MPOO donated. It was great, too, because they put up banners and stuff.”

The letter carriers and co-workers shared stories. “I would say it was

cheerful,” Vassari said. “A lot of shared memories of Carmon, and I think people were just very happy and proud.”

They even had a handful of walk-ins who were on the city property and saw the bloodmobile and decided to donate. “I got to actually talk a little bit about him to some of the pedestrians that came up,” Vassari said.

For a facility that has about 45 NALC members, the blood drive registered 19 donors, three of whom were unable to donate that day. The team collected 14 units of whole blood and two units of double red blood cells. That is a special type of donation, which returns plasma and platelets to the donor, and is especially valuable for trauma, surgery and chronic conditions like sickle cell anemia.

“Once separated by our components team, it will be sent to local hospitals and provide life-saving support to patients in need,” Lifesouth told the branch.

“I thought that was just awesome,” Vassari said. “Just such a great way to show some support to Carmon.” **PR**