

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](mailto:postalrecord@nalc.org). We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

# Honoring heroic carriers

**H**eroism, 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.

## Carrier runs into burning building twice

**Misty Newman** had just finished a route on Jan. 31 in Hermantown, MN, and was in her postal vehicle rounding a corner. As she did so, “a giant orange flaming tower shot up right to my left,” she said.

“The initial explosion was taller than all the trees and all the neighboring buildings,” the Duluth Branch 114 letter carrier said. “It was very loud and very scary.”

Newman realized the explosion was at the retirement community she sometimes delivered mail to. Worried, she turned into the complex where the one-year letter carrier immediately made her way to the flames.

“I honestly didn’t think about getting hurt,” Newman said. “I literally don’t remember any actual thoughts going through my brain other than, ‘Get there. Help them.’”

“There were some younger girls standing outside one of the doors yelling, ‘She won’t leave! We can’t get her out!’ and I just went right past them into the apartment,” Newman said. “I spent probably a minute arguing with a lovely old lady [Helen] about her

quiche being in the oven, and how she didn’t want it to burn until I dragged her out to my car. I drove her maybe half a block away just to get her away from the flames.”

Without fear, Newman went right back to the site of the explosion. She knew there were about a dozen large buildings with six apartments in each and wanted to make sure all the residents were able to get out.

“On the other end of the housing complex, the lady [who lived there, Nancy] was still inside, so I grabbed her and took her to my car,” she said, and added, “I tried going back a third time, but there was a police officer there then, and she wouldn’t let me back in.”

Newman said, “The fire hydrant was between my vehicle and the house that was burning, so I actually had to stay there until midnight, because I couldn’t drive over the fire hose,” and there was no other way of leaving the area.

For about an hour and a half before the residents were shuttled to the community center, Newman made sure Nancy and Helen—who was insistent on going back for her quiche—stayed in the car. Despite having saved her life, Nancy was mad at Newman, too, because the carrier had dropped some of Nancy’s pill bottles and hadn’t grabbed her cell phone.

“Nancy kept getting out and trying to fight the cops and the fire department and the owner,” Newman said. “She’s this little 5-foot-nothing 76-year-old, and she was chest to chest screaming at him. It was entertaining.”

Newman talked to other residents who informed her there were two people who were unaccounted for. She lamented the people she couldn’t save and felt guilty that she didn’t go back for them, too.

“I felt I could have saved them,” she said. “I found out when I stopped back



Misty Newman



The fire that MacLeod spotted

by two days later that I couldn't have. They were entirely too close to the initial explosion. They passed instantly."

After the residents left, Newman "sat in my car and cried," she said. "As soon as I got out of my own head and calmed myself down enough to not cry, [that] was when they located and brought out the first body and I lost it all over again. I blamed myself for not saving the two that passed, even though I know I couldn't have saved them all."

Since the incident, she has received therapy and has been working a lot to keep herself busy.

Looking back, Newman called running into a burning apartment without any safety gear "stupid." But she said she felt it was something from the different roles she has filled in her life—being in the Army National Guard from 2002 to 2008; being a nurse from 2014 up until she became a letter carrier; and as a mother of four—that drove her to act without thinking when it came to saving lives.

When she returned to the site two days later, she found out from an apartment manager that the fire was caused by an explosion of the boiler system.

The building where the explosion occurred is still vacant, and it's estimated that it will be about a year and a half before it is restored. The rest of the facility was opened by the next day following some small repairs.

Residents in the building where the explosion occurred lost nearly everything but what was on their backs. Newman said, "Two potholders is all that was left of [Helen's] apartment 'cause she was wearing those" while she waited for her quiche to bake.

City officials in Hermantown later called out Newman's bravery during a press conference.

As a newer carrier, Newman rotates routes, but she was on the route with the senior complex again at the end of February. While she was there, she said, "A lot of the residents came out to talk to me and thanked me." Although she appreciates the praise from the residents, Newman said she felt saddened because the family of one of the residents who died in the explosion was there.

The carrier had spoken to Helen, Nancy and each of their families, and by the end of February they had planned to have dinner together. "I promised Helen a quiche since I let hers burn," Newman said.

## Carrier alerts resident of spreading house fire

**Mark MacLeod**, a letter carrier in Ilion, NY, noticed an "unusual" amount of heavy smoke coming from his customer's chimney on Jan. 29, he said.

The 24-year letter carrier approached the homeowner, who was outside inspecting the house and believed



the issue had been resolved. MacLeod passed by the house again about 15 minutes later, after having delivered some parcels, and discovered the situation had worsened—it was clear the home's attic had caught fire.

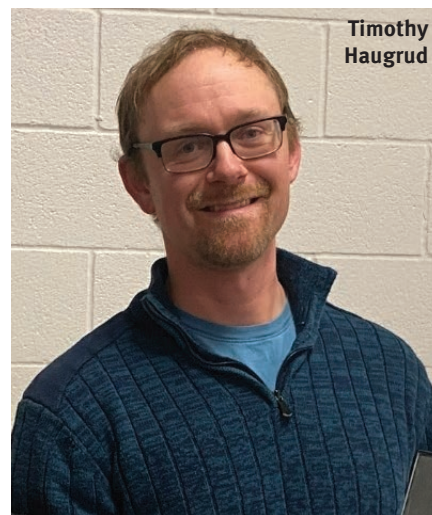
"I was surprised at how fast it went up" in flames, the Northeastern New York Branch 358 carrier said.

MacLeod immediately stopped his postal vehicle and pounded on the door to alert the resident, who had gone back inside and was unaware the fire had spread.

"It's just kind of fortunate that I was there," MacLeod said.

The homeowner ran outside and called 911 while MacLeod moved his vehicle to clear the way for firefighters. Because the local fire station was nearby, crews arrived quickly and were able to contain the blaze before it destroyed the wooden house.

The blaze caused smoke damage and subsequent water damage from the firefighters putting out the flames. MacLeod said it "was bad enough that he had to move out," but the carrier later spoke with the homeowner, who thanked him and said that repairs were fortunately covered by insurance and were underway. The resident plans to move back in during the spring.





The car that Mack rescued a woman from

## Letter carrier calls for wellness check

**Tina Antin**, a Huron, OH, letter carrier helped an elderly resident, Florian Tilosanec, whose mail was piling up. A few months earlier she saw Tilosanec take 20 minutes to mow a small strip in his front yard.

“I feel like this is someone I have to keep an eye out for,” the Branch 583 letter carrier said.

In mid-January, following a snowstorm, the carrier noticed something unusual.

“There are a bunch of newspapers in his front yard, and then I looked at his mailbox and I’m like, ‘Hmm, that’s weird,’” Antin said of the unemptied mailbox. “He’s here every day getting all of his mail and newspapers.”

After returning the next day and seeing the items still untouched, she knocked on the door but received no response.

“Something in my gut was like, ‘I feel like something bad has happened,’” Antin, a seven-year carrier, said. So, she called the police to request a wellness check.

Officers arrived about 20 minutes later and forced open the door after contacting relatives and receiving permission. Inside, they found Tilosanec unresponsive on the floor, where he had been for several days.

He was taken to the hospital, and a relative later told the carrier that Tilosanec had survived and spent about a week in the intensive care unit before being transferred to a rehabilitation facility, where he is expected to make a full recovery.

“Tina Antin saved Mr. Tilosanec’s life by being aware of her customers and taking notice and action when

something did not seem right,” Branch President **Anthony Ross** wrote to NALC. “Tina is a hero and should be recognized for her actions.”

## Carrier helps distressed teen

Fargo-West Fargo, ND Branch 205 member **Timothy Haugrud** noticed a teenage girl walking about a block behind him while delivering his route on Dec. 6, 2025. When she caught up, she asked the six-year carrier for help and requested that he call the police, which he did.

“I just dropped what I was doing, immediately did that,” Haugrud said.

The carrier contacted dispatch and told officers he would stay with the teen until they arrived. He walked with her to his postal vehicle, where he gave her a jacket and mittens because she was underdressed for the below-freezing weather.

The girl told him she had run away from a nearby residential mental health treatment center for youth ages 10 to 17. She had been away from the facility for about a half-hour when she encountered the carrier.

Officers were already searching for her and arrived within minutes and took over the situation.

“I’m glad she asked for help and assumed and trusted that I would be able to provide a small amount of help,” Haugrud said.

Later, co-workers showed the carrier a community Facebook post from the girl’s mother thanking the letter carrier for helping her daughter, whom she had recently adopted from foster care. He learned that the teen was having a mental health crisis at the time she ran away.

“He quite literally saved her life just by showing her kindness, and I thank



Terrance Mack

him from the bottom of my heart,” the girl’s mother later said.

The carrier brushed off any accolades, insisting that his actions were just part of the job. “We’re in these neighborhoods day in, day out, and you have all sorts of unexpected opportunities to do good for people,” Haugrud said. “I work with a lot of great people, and I think almost any of the other letter carriers I’ve worked with would have done more or less the same thing.”

## Letter carrier helps woman who crashed car into a pool

Anderson, SC Branch 1871 member **Terrance Mack** was delivering mail on his route one day in late September 2025 when he saw a woman driving on a busy road having what appeared to be a medical emergency. She lost control of her vehicle and crossed multiple lanes of traffic before veering off the road.

The car narrowly avoided several oncoming vehicles, a telephone pole and trees before ending her journey in a residential swimming pool. The five-year carrier turned back to see what he could do to help.

As he and another man ran toward the scene, the woman was still experiencing a seizure in the car as water slowly began rising.

“Her eyes was going in the back of her head, and she had her arms folded and she was shaking,” Mack said. “The water started with her ankle, and then it started coming up towards her hip.”

The men were able to stabilize the vehicle from the side of the pool and

tried to get the driver's attention. After the woman came out of the seizure, she lowered the window and unbuckled her seat belt. The men then pulled her out through the driver's-side window.

During that time the homeowner came out, and the pair asked him to call 911.

Emergency responders arrived about 10 minutes later, although Mack said, "It seemed like forever." Even though the woman had stopped seizing, she appeared disoriented and repeatedly asked what was happening.

"I'm just happy nobody got hurt, because that situation could have been a whole lot worse," Mack said.

## Carrier helps elderly customer after fall

**Kevin Stover**, a Lexington, KY Branch 361 letter carrier, was driving his route on a winter day in Lexington. As he stopped his truck he noticed something odd—the elderly resident's door was open, and it almost never was.

He went up to deliver her mail and "heard a faint noise, and I thought, 'This isn't right,' so I approached the entrance, and I found her laying there," the six-year carrier said. "She said that she had fallen sometime before, and that she didn't know where her phone was, and she wasn't sure what to do. She asked me to call the ambulance and I did, then I stayed with her there until they arrived."

As he talked to her, he noticed that she seemed to be confused and said he was "lucky to find the door open." He believes she was there for about a day or so. The carrier also notified neighbors about what had happened.

Stover was glad he was able to help, and said, "It made me feel like part of the community and in addition was proud to be a postal worker, because



Kevin Stover

they know their community and can therefore help accordingly."

## Carrier shelters patrons from gunman

As **Stephen Au**, a letter carrier since 2013, was walking his route at around 9 a.m. on Feb. 26 in Milwaukee, WI, a man rolled down his car window to tell the letter carrier there was a home invasion occurring in the house Au was walking toward. The Branch 2 member then heard gunfire coming from the house and called 911.

The resident of the house, who Au recognized as Rhonda Downey, was running out of the house with her dog "screaming and hollering, asking for help," he said. Seeing her in distress, Au brought Downey into his truck to hide from the attacker.

"I was just worried about getting her safe, away from him, so he wouldn't shoot at her anymore," Au said.

A news article published by a local NBC affiliate reported that the alleged attacker—Sincere Nequon Blake—told police he was under the influence of ecstasy during the attack.

A few minutes later, another woman, Sam, came out of the house with another dog, followed by Blake, who was armed and allegedly trying to steal her car and money. In the time between Downey and Sam coming out of the house, Blake allegedly attempted to sexually assault Sam, the two women told Au. Per NBC, Blake "faces multiple charges, including attempted first-

degree sexual assault, armed burglary, second-degree recklessly endangering safety, false imprisonment and possession of a firearm by a felon."

Sam walked with Blake out of the house and to her car, but as they were walking, the man heard the sirens and froze in his tracks. Sam ran, and Au sheltered her and her dog in his truck, too.

"I just kept them safe from the guy with the gun," Au said.

The letter carrier stayed and talked to the police about what he had seen

and made sure the women were safe before returning to his route. Au was glad he was able to come to their aid. "I was happy I could be there," he said. "I felt pretty good about it."

Branch 2 President **Rob Kosier** commended Au for his actions, saying, "He saw people in danger and stepped in. He stayed calm and did what needed to be done. That decision very likely kept someone from getting seriously hurt."

## Carrier notices pile of mail, calls for help

Just past 9 a.m. on March 9, **Derek Paquette** was on his route in Clinton, MA, when the Worcester Branch 12 letter carrier dropped the mail of Ruth—an elderly customer on his route—into her mailbox. As he did so, he noticed something was off—there was already several days' worth of mail in the mailbox.

"I said to myself, 'I had Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday off, and this was Monday morning,'" Paquette



Stephen Au

said. “This lady, she’s the type of woman that as soon as she hears the top of the mailbox closed, she opens the door when you’re walking away and then it’s, ‘Hey, Ruth,’ ‘Hey, Derek, how you doing?’ ”

He went to deliver to the other customers’ mailboxes, which were steps away from Ruth’s, then looked over the banister and noticed her car was parked down there.

“Ruth is approximately 78 to 80 years old, so it wasn’t like her not to grab her mail,” Paquette said. “So, I started banging on the window, and then I banged on the door and I got no response.”

He went down the stairs to his truck and called his boss to request a wellness check for the customer, and his supervisor let him know that police were on the way.

Paquette went back to Ruth’s door and continued banging. A few minutes later, an officer showed up and asked him what was going on.

“He’s banging on the window, and I’m banging on the door,” Paquette said. “We still had no response, and he took out his flashlight, and he shined it through the window, and fortunately she waved at him.”

Then the fire department came and were able to get into the house. The letter carrier didn’t want to be in the way, so he provided the emergency responders with his contact information and went back to his route.

Paquette later found out from town police officers that the woman had been on the floor since Thursday, and that they didn’t “know how long she would have made it” if the letter carrier hadn’t noticed the unusual behavior and called for help.

Ruth’s niece called Paquette and thanked him for helping her aunt and told him that Ruth had a bilateral pel-



Derek Paquette

vis fracture. She had to go to rehab and will go into an assisted-living facility afterward.

“I don’t really feel like a hero. I feel like it’s a part of my job,” Paquette, a nine-year carrier, said. “I’ve been on that route for nine years. I know everybody. I know people’s habits. It’s part of my job to look after the customers.”

Branch 12 President **Michael Cipro** praised Paquette, saying, “This act reflects the very best of public service. Derek Paquette’s vigilance, dedication to the people on his route, and willingness to act likely saved a life. His actions embody the Postal Service’s commitment to looking out for the communities we serve and demonstrate how our employees go above and beyond their daily duties to care for others.”

## Letter carrier helps pull man from crash

On March 23, during the middle of her delivery route in Lubbock, TX, 10-year letter carrier **Toni Smith** witnessed a vehicle veer erratically across a busy intersection. The driver plowed over the curb of a concrete median and a traffic sign before coming to a stop on the other side of the street halfway in the access road, partially blocking traffic. The Branch 2589 member and a nearby truck driver who had also noticed the situation stopped to help.

“It was a no-brainer,” Smith said. “I needed to stop and render aid.”

They found the driver actively



seizing inside the vehicle, partially collapsing into the passenger-side floorboard. The car was still running with the doors locked, and fluids were leaking from underneath the car. There were no other people in the car, but two dogs were inside.

Taking action, the truck driver forced open a rear window enough for the letter carrier to climb inside.

“I didn’t think twice about jumping in and helping him,” Smith said.

She unlocked the doors, and the truck driver shut off the engine.

“We could hear him choking and gagging,” Smith said. “His face was busted up pretty bad with his left eye swollen, nose bleeding, as well as his mouth. His left leg was twisted up in the passenger floorboard.”

Together, they repositioned the man to prevent choking. The carrier physically supported the man, holding him upright and reassuring him while waiting for emergency responders.

Other bystanders stopped to call 911 and manage traffic. Emergency responders arrived quickly, took the man to the hospital, and cleared the scene. The carrier then resumed her mail route.

The police told Smith that they were unable to update her about what happened to the driver, which Smith said “has been bugging me since it happened,” but that she hopes he is doing well.

Smith was happy with her actions, and so was her branch. “She didn’t take any recognition and continued on and delivered the rest of her route that day,” Branch 2589 President **Kevin Perry** said. “This selfless act makes Toni a great human being and makes NALC proud to have her in our ranks.” **PR**