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.

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 helpful 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 frees child from being strangled by car seat strap

On Jan. 6, Winston-Salem, NC Branch 461 member **Charles Koontz** was pulling up to a mailbox on his route in Lexington when he heard someone yelling, "Call 911!" The 33-year letter carrier parked, grabbed his phone and ran toward the vehicle where the commotion was coming from. When he arrived, he saw a woman with the door open, and inside he saw a child with the shoulder strap of the car seat across his neck choking him and keeping him locked in.

"This kid was screaming and turning red in the face," Koontz said.

As the child struggled, the strap tightened.

"I realized this child was in danger," he said.

He quickly called 911 before trying to cut the strap with a utility knife he had on hand. But the knife was too dull, so he told the woman he had heard yelling, the child's grandmother, that he needed scissors. The grandmother told her granddaughter, who was about 5 or 6, to get some scissors, but they were in a place she couldn't reach, so she showed Koontz where they were and he grabbed them.

"She must have known the direness of the situation, and she didn't bat an eye," he said. "I think that she was the angel that needed to be there."

He went back to the car and cut the strap with the scissors, freeing the boy. A few minutes later, emergency responders arrived and, seeing that the situation was under control, Koontz returned to his route.

After the incident, Koontz saw the family again, who said the child was doing OK. Both the grandmother and the parents of the boy thanked him, with Koontz describing them as "grateful as can be." Whenever Koontz sees the daughter, he tells her, "You're my angel," reminding her of the role she played in saving her brother.

As a letter carrier, Koontz said the most important thing is to "pay attention. I mean, really pay attention. Know your customers."

Charles Koontz

Carrier comes to aid of fallen customer

On Aug. 7, Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member **Bernaldino Ocasio** put a customer's mail in the mailbox, then noticed the frames of neon green sunglasses poking out from a bush nearby. Removing his own sunglasses, the three-year letter carrier realized that lying in the bush was his 89-year-old customer Jimmy.

Jimmy was mumbling and incoherent when Ocasio tried to speak to him. Ocasio said he fireman-carried Jimmy into his house, being "very gentle with him when lifting him and placing him down." The carrier put his customer on the stairs to sit, placed a cold rag on his head and gave him water. Then, he

Heroic carriers (continued)

pressed Jimmy's Life Alert button that he was wearing and called 911.

While they waited for emergency responders for about five to seven minutes, Ocasio moved Jimmy into a kitchen chair, kept the rag cold and talked to him. He tried to feel Jimmy's pulse, having been taught by his wife, who is a nurse.

"It was pretty faint, but I waited till the ambulance came, and they took care of it from there," he said. It was suspected that Jimmy had suffered heatstroke.

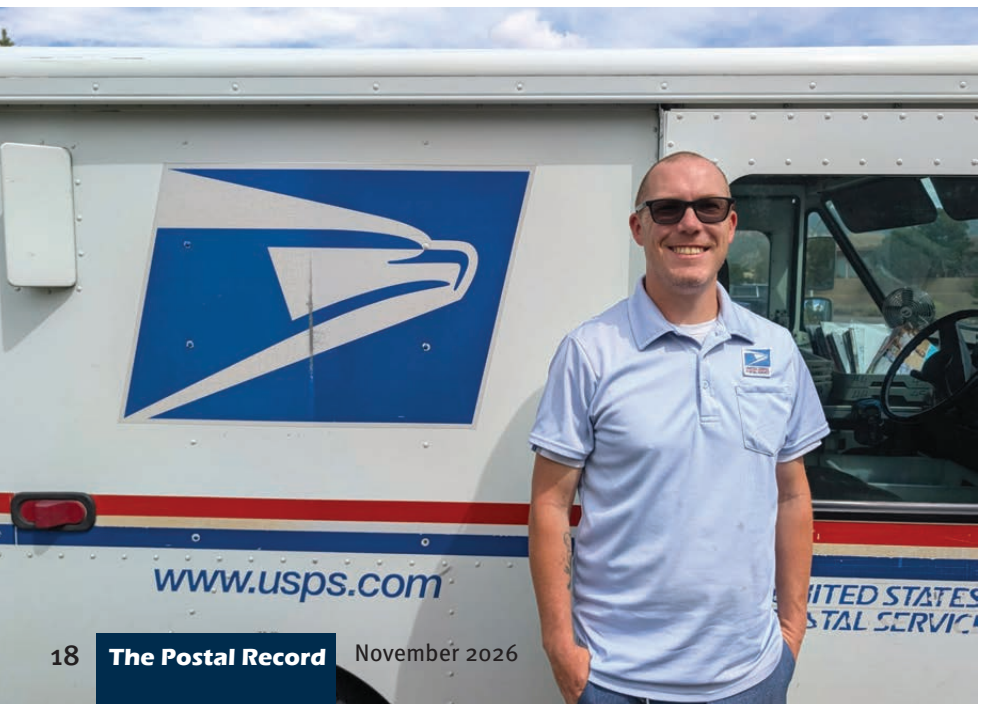
This wasn't Ocasio's first time interacting with Jimmy. He had seen the man a few times before, and he would bring water to the carrier.

Since the incident occurred, "every day I'd, you know, I'd go past his house, I'd knock on the door," Ocasio said, but he never saw Jimmy.

A co-worker who was working that route another day passed along a message of gratitude from Jimmy to Ocasio. Ocasio was just glad that when Jimmy was in trouble that August day, he was able to help.

"I felt great," Ocasio said about helping Jimmy during the incident. "That's what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to help each other out."

James Jarm Jr.



Carrier helps customer battling blaze

James Jarm Jr., an Albuquerque, NM, letter carrier, was delivering mail one April morning around 10 a.m. when he started to smell smoke that he described as smelling like burning leaves. The Branch 504 member saw a bit of smoke coming from the next street over but thought nothing of it. He moved on to the next delivery, but as he did, he noticed a "huge flame" over someone's house.

"I thought that was a little not right," Jarm said and drove to the site of the flames while calling 911.

When he arrived, he saw a bush, part of a house and two cars parked in the front driveway of a house that were all on fire—one car was completely engulfed and the other partially. Jarm estimated that the flames went up nearly 12 feet.

"I saw the homeowner outside spraying the house [with water from a hose]," Jarm said. "And when I got out, I saw the neighbor and started telling her that I already called 911. They would be here pretty soon. And then all of a sudden, the homeowner passed out."

Jarm and a neighbor on the scene grabbed the homeowner and pulled him away from the fire.

"His arms were already burnt badly," he said.

The firefighters showed up about two to three minutes after, "so luckily the house didn't burn down."

Although there wasn't much damage to the house, the two cars and bush were destroyed, and the homeowner

was in the hospital for a couple weeks due to the burns he sustained. A few weeks later, the man's family saw Jarm and asked if he was the one who helped during the fire. Jarm confirmed that it was, and he said, "they were very happy and said thank you and everything."

Carriers aids customer with medical emergency

On one of the hottest days of August, Providence, RI Branch 15 member **Johnathan Garcia** was walking his route in Coventry when he saw his elderly customer Teresa standing in her driveway looking down. The 13-year letter carrier approached her and saw that she was dripping with sweat and had snot coming from her nose.

Concerned, he asked if she was OK, and she said she was.

But then "she kept saying 'no' to me," Garcia said. He asked Teresa if she wanted him to walk her to her house or call for an ambulance, and she said no.

"Then I realized she soiled herself, so I knew something was wrong," he said. "So, I called the ambulance and then she just started to have dead weight. She kept slouching down and down. At that time, I was able to hold her with one arm and then she just kept trying to go down, and I had to throw my mail to the ground and my satchel."

He continued to hold onto Teresa as she sank down.

"I was trying to get her to the shade, but every time I tried to move her, she would say, 'Ow, no,' and that's why I didn't want to move her," he said. "So, I just stood there while waiting for the ambulance to come. I had to put my knee under [her] so all her weight could sit on my knee so I could relieve some stress off my arms."

During this time, she remained conscious but appeared confused and was talking but not making sense. Despite that, Garcia continued to converse with her, because he said he just wanted "to know she's still alive."

"I was nervous and anxious, and I just kept saying to myself, 'Please somebody come out and see what I'm doing so they can come and help me, 'cause I felt my arms getting weaker and weaker,' " Garcia said.

After a while, a man in a truck came by and helped hold up Teresa, so Garcia could let go and rest his arms. A few minutes later, an ambulance arrived. Paramedics told Garcia that Teresa had a temperature of 110 degrees and had suffered heatstroke. The paramedics wanted to get ice from her house, but all her doors were locked. One neighbor came out and provided ice for Teresa, and another gave Garcia water on the hot day.

After Teresa was loaded into the ambulance, Garcia returned on his way to finish his route.

Garcia is happy to have been there at that time and says he was lucky he was a bit behind on his route that day.

"It happened for a reason at the right time, yeah," he said. **PR**

From l: Postmaster Jeremy Nunes; Providence, RI Branch 15 President John Barbery, Johnathan Garcia, NALC shop steward Evan Cohen and supervisor Ashley Deblois

Know a hero? Nominate them.

Visit nalc.org/heroes and select "Click here to download NALC's Hero Nomination Form." Complete the form and send it to NALC Headquarters by mail or email.