

## 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 202-662-2489 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.

## Team Letter Carrier to the rescue

On Aug. 28, 2018, three city carrier assistants—Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126 members **Taylor Morris, Tavares Anderson and Ziana Taliaferro**—were splitting the mail to deliver within a subdivision, helping Taliaferro complete a route.

"All of a sudden, we turned to our left and saw a woman chasing her car," Anderson said.

The woman apparently had been helping someone in a wheelchair and had forgotten to put the car in park, Morris said. Because of that, "It started to roll downhill," he said.

The vehicle had dragged the woman a couple of feet when she tried to re-enter the vehicle and stop it a second time, but it began to roll over her.

Because they were not supposed to leave their postal vehicles unattended, Taliaferro stayed with their LLVs. "My first thought was to call police," she said, and she did so.

At this point, Morris yelled to Anderson to catch up to the woman.

"I got into my mail truck to go after her," Anderson said. As he began driving, he saw Morris chasing the runaway vehicle on foot.

"I was kind of in the moment," Morris

said. "It felt like a mile."

"He ran so fast," Taliaferro added.

Morris ran a couple of hundred feet to catch up to the car and was able to get inside, press the brakes and put the vehicle in park. "The car was about 10 feet away from hitting someone's house," Morris said. "It was literally sitting in their back yard after I stopped it."

Morris turned around inside the vehicle after it was stopped. The driver's mother and child were inside. "It was crazy," he said. "I didn't even know anyone was in the back seat."

The driver sustained multiple cuts on her arm, but the woman and child were fine, though shaken up. Police officers and firefighters soon arrived to investigate. While Taliaferro continued on the route, Anderson and Morris explained what had happened.

All three carriers were praised for their actions by their local post office supervisors and union officers.

"I felt like if we didn't see that, something horrible could have happened," Taliaferro, a first-year letter carrier, said, adding, "I feel like we were at the right place at the right time. We're very happy that she's OK."

Anderson, a second-year carrier, said, "For me, I feel like I was just there." He gave credit to Morris, telling him, "You saved the grandmother, a baby, a lady and the residents."

"I'm happy that lives were saved," he added. "Much worse could have happened."

Morris, also a second-year letter carrier, said he was "uncomfortable" being called a hero. "I was just doing what anyone would do, hopefully," he said.

## Alert carrier knew something was up

Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member **Christine Garcia** was delivering mail on her route one day last summer



Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126 member Taylor Morris, along with fellow members Tavares Anderson and Ziana Taliaferro (not pictured) jumped into action when they saw a car rolling over its driver.

when she detected something out of the ordinary at an elderly customer's house. "I smelled smoke through a crack in the door and heard the dog barking," she said.

The dog was usually outside the home, she knew, and as she got closer, she could hear a smoke detector beeping inside the home. She checked to see if the windows were cracked to let smoke escape, but they were not.

She grew worried that the woman could be in harm's way. "I started knocking and ringing the doorbell,"

she said. She then alerted a neighbor, who called 911.

Firefighters soon arrived and determined that the woman had fallen asleep on her couch while food was burning on her stove. She had heard neither the smoke detector nor Garcia.

Garcia was credited by firefighters for helping to save the woman and the home. The three-year letter carrier said she is fine with being called a hero "as long as I saved a life and she can spend time with her loved ones." Garcia added, "I hope someone would do the same for my family."



Christine Garcia

## Fiery hillside no match for this carrier

On Aug. 6, Spokane, WA Branch 442 member **Todd Eklund** was getting out of his LLV to deliver a park-and-loop when he saw a bright flash. The city carrier assistant then looked over and saw flames coming up the hill next to the house at the end of the block.

Eklund went running toward the house. There had been construction on the highway below the house, and traffic was at a standstill. A person in a



Todd Eklund

stopped vehicle had tossed a cigarette out of the window.

"It set the hillside on fire," Eklund said, adding that the flames were 30 feet high and quickly traveled to within two feet of the woman's home.

He called 911 and knocked on the door, guiding the customer and her four dogs get out of the house and across the street to safety. "The gal didn't know the house was on fire," he said. They also made sure an adult foster care center next door was aware so it could make precautions.

Firefighters soon arrived to take care of the blaze. "It bubbled the paint on the house, but the house was not damaged," Eklund said.

He returned to the home after work the following day to check on the grateful customer. "She gave me a big hug and a kiss," said the carrier, who was being hailed as a hero.

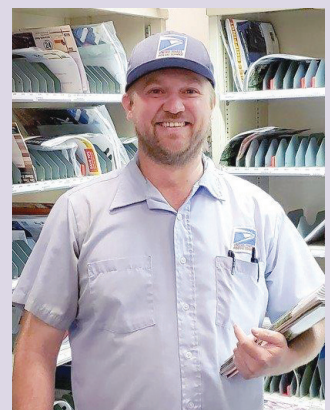
Eklund, a two-year letter carrier, said the moniker was "humbling, but I don't think I did anything above and beyond. The main thing was that no one was hurt."

## Eye on the elderly

"I noticed this guy's mail piled up," Boise, ID Branch 331 member **Jason Elliott** said of delivering mail on July 13 to the home of his elderly customer, Richard Major. That was unusual for the man, who normally collected his mail on a daily basis. There also were two newspapers outside, something the carrier had never seen before. The city carrier assistant called his supervisor, fol-

lowed by 911 for a wellness check. First responders soon arrived to help Major. It turned out that the man had fallen a few days earlier and wasn't able to get up. "He had been lying on the ground for three days," Elliott said, adding that the man now is doing well. The patron's daughter-in-law, Kathy Dzuck, told media outlets that the family was grateful. "It would be a whole different story we

would be talking about if it hadn't been for Jason," Dzuck told KTVB-TV. "He is a hero. Dick would not have lasted another day. They told us he was starting to shut down." Elliott brushed off any mention of heroics. "I'm just doing my job," the two-year letter carrier said, adding that he's been taught, "If you notice something out of the ordinary, call and check up on people." **PR**



Jason Elliott



## Proud to Serve

Riverside, NJ Branch 1908 members Nancy Rust and Scott Maloney were recently recognized for their good deeds. Pictured (l to r) are Rust, Branch President Dave Rust, Region 12 National Business Agent Dave Napadano, Maloney and Postmaster Joe Potts.



Scott Maloney

### Helping the youngest and the oldest in whatever ways possible

Delivering mail on Aug. 13, Riverside, NJ Branch 1908 member **Scott Maloney** was walking along a busy street when he noticed a toddler on the opposite side.

“He was unattended, in a diaper, about to walk into traffic,” he said. “I went into ‘daddy radar mode.’ ”

Without hesitation, the city carrier assistant secured his mail, rushed over, grabbed the toddler and got him safely off the street and out of traffic.

Maloney could not see any guardians around. “I went around knocking on doors,” he said. When his attempts to locate the child’s home failed, he called the local police department and the postmaster. He stayed with the toddler until police arrived.

Officers later told him that they had been able to find the toddler’s parents, who lived on the street the carrier had been on. Maloney found out it was a home that he had gone to. “No one wanted to come to the door,” he said.

That was not the first time that the carrier had stepped in to help some-

one. Late one Saturday afternoon in winter 2018, Maloney was shadowing regular carrier and fellow Branch 1908 member **Nancy Rust** when an elderly customer came out of her house. She was frantic, Rust said.

The woman told the two carriers that her husband had fallen in the house and she could not lift him back into his chair. “Is there anything you can do to help?” the woman asked.

Maloney and Rust went inside the house and saw the man down on his knees. “He was not able to get up with his own power,” Rust said.

The man had fallen trying to reach his walker. He needed to be turned around and lifted back into his chair.

At first, the two carriers tried to lift the man and then turn him, but then realized it might be easier to actually move the chair behind him.

“We tried to rearrange furniture so that we could hoist him up,” Maloney said. It took a few attempts, but Rust added, “Scott and I were able to lift him up and get him into the chair.”

“He was a little groggy,” Maloney said. “He was in a suffering kind of state.”

When the woman assured them that

the situation was under control, Maloney and Rust continued on the route.

They later found out that the man had died a few days later. “That was heartbreaking,” Rust said. The woman told them she was grateful that the carriers had taken the time out of their day to help them.

Rust said she had been on the route for five years and had gotten to know her patrons. “I just do what I do and I love my customers,” the 18-year postal veteran said, adding, “I think Scott is more of a hero.”

Maloney, a first-year letter carrier, deflected any praise. “I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time,” he said. “I love the routes we carry and the people of the community. I’m always happy to help in any way I can. I was doing what literally any human being would have done.” **PR**

### Help on the way



Brittany Batt

**G**rand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Brittany Batt**, in her first month as a letter carrier, had just finished delivering to an apartment complex on July 19 and was heading to her next stop. She quickly realized that she had forgotten a package and turned around to go back to the complex. Upon pulling into the driveway, the carrier noticed

a 13-year-old lying on the ground, shaking. “I pulled up and got out of my truck,” Batt said. “He was lying in a pile of blood and bile. His glasses were broken.” The carrier quickly called 911, grabbed the first aid kit from her vehicle and, along with a cyclist, approached the young teenager to render aid. The boy apparently was having a seizure, and Batt

and the man made sure that he did not injure himself further. An ambulance soon arrived to take the teen to the hospital. Batt said it would be “extreme” to call her a hero for her actions. “I just happened to be there,” the first-year letter carrier said. “I’m getting to know my customers and what they need. I think most people would do that.” **PR**

## Neighborhood watch



Lisa Light

“As I approached the porch,” Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126 member **Lisa Light** said of delivering mail on April 20, “I smelled a strong whiff of gas.” Concerned, she quickly rang the doorbell. When the patron, Robert Quintero, opened the door, she told him, “I smell natural gas out here on your porch.” Though the man said he couldn’t smell the gas, he did say that they recently had used a generator while the power had been out and thanked Light for letting him know. Since Quintero’s wife uses oxygen, he thought he should be on the safe side and so he called the local gas company. Within 20 minutes, a gas crew member showed up and found a major leak in the line to Quintero’s generator. “I want to formally cite and thank Lisa for preventing a potential disaster,” the customer wrote to the local post office. The 24-year letter carrier said she was “honored” to be called a hero, but brushed off any praise. “It was a good thing he didn’t just blow it off,” Light said.

Los Angeles, CA Branch 24 member **Maphunziro**

“**Maurice**” Varela was delivering his route one day in 2017 when he approached the home of an octogenarian couple he knew. The carrier said the man, John, who suffers from dementia and Parkinson’s disease, always comes out to say hi. But that day, “he didn’t come,” Varela said. John’s wife, Ann, called out to Varela, who ran toward her. She came to the fence and told Varela that her husband had fallen as she tried to help him out of the car after returning from a doctor’s visit. Ann had called her daughter, fellow Branch 24 member **Pamela Johnson**, but she wouldn’t have been able to get there for at least an hour due to traffic. “He wasn’t able to get up,” the carrier said of John. He helped by picking up his customer, carrying him into the house and placing him on the couch. “On behalf of the Johnson family, we would like to thank mail carrier Maurice for being so generous in helping my father,” Pamela wrote in a letter to *The Postal Record*. “He only suffered a few scrapes and bruises, but it could have been worse lying on the concrete in the elements. Since then, my father passed away...but we will always remember Maurice for his kindness.” Varela, a 25-year letter carrier and Marine Corps veteran, said he tries to have a good relationship with his customers. “They look forward to us coming every day,” he said. “We become part of their lives, and they become part of our lives.”

Something concerned New Jersey Merged Branch 38 member **Demetrius Jennings** as he delivered his route on June 20. “I noticed a little kid in the middle of the street looking confused,” he said. “Three to four cars passed by.” The toddler was wearing pajamas and had no shoes on. The carrier soon ran to the home of a customer he knew. “I noticed he was crying by the bushes,” Jennings said. He didn’t think the child belonged there and went over to the boy and asked, “Are you OK? Are you lost?” The boy said he was lost, but couldn’t answer any other questions. “He didn’t know his name, how old he was, where he lived,” Jennings said. The carrier called his postmaster as well as the police and waited with the child. Officers soon arrived, and when they could not find the toddler’s home, they brought him back to the police department. Jennings was later contacted by the boy’s parents and found out that the child had been at home being watched by his grandmother when he followed his mother out of the house and down the



Demetrius Jennings



Todd Bettgenhauser

street without her noticing. He had wandered about a dozen houses down the street from where he lived. The 13-year letter carrier and Army Reserves veteran denied any heroics. “It’s just something anyone should do,” he said. “I hope if it was my kid, someone would do it for me.”

Western Massachusetts Branch 46 member **Todd Bettgenhauser** was delivering his route on May 31 when he smelled a strong odor of natural gas coming from the side of a customer’s home. He had correctly detected a natural gas leak before, so, sensing that something wasn’t right, the carrier decided to knock on the door. “I figured I’d let her know,” he said. “She had kids there.” The woman came outside with him to inspect the situation, and told him that she had had work done in the yard recently and that something might have happened at the time. She soon reported the issue to the local gas company. The utility later fixed a fracture in a line connected to the home that had caused the highly flammable gas to escape. The customer described Bettgenhauser’s actions as “professional, courteous and helpful.” The 13-year postal veteran just called his actions part of the job. “We’re out there and we see a lot of different things,” Bettgenhauser said. “I was just helping someone out. I would definitely do it again.” **PR**