

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 202-662-2851 or postalrecord@nalc.org. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

Despite the sometimes extraordinary circumstances, most letter carriers take their role as heroes in stride. From being the first on the scene to going above and beyond to make sure all is well in the neighborhoods they serve, these men and women make a difference in the lives of patrons who find themselves in situations where a little extra help is just what is needed. Here are the stories of some of those special letter carriers.

Observant carrier saves fallen customer



photo by Jack Foley/Herald News

Fall River, MA Branch 51 member Gil Canuel recently received recognition for helping to save an elderly patron on his route after seeing a pile of unattended mail. Pictured (l to r) are Ed Hill, Mayor Will Flanagan and Canuel.

Seeing a few days' worth of mail outside 82-year-old customer Edward Hill's home on Dec. 2, Fall River, MA Branch 51 member **Gil Canuel** became worried about Hill's health. The 25-year postal veteran had been on the route for the past 17 years and said that he knew that Hill, a retired city firefighter and Korean War veteran, was an avid newspaper reader and was always happy to talk to him about the latest news. "I noticed that the man had two newspapers sitting there," he said. "And his car was in the driveway. It just didn't feel right."

Canuel knocked on the door, but

didn't get a response, so he went to a neighbor next door, who said, "If the car's there, he's going to be home." They were both concerned, so the neighbor called police.

Responding officers soon arrived and found Hill lying under his kitchen table, where he had been stuck for about two and a half days after falling and breaking his hip. Hill's son told the *Herald News* that Hill had crawled across the floor in an attempt to reach the kitchen table where his cell phone was, but on the way he suffered a minor heart attack.

"I thank you," Hill's son told Canuel during a ceremony that awarded the carrier with an honorary citation. "I think we know what the results could have been." And because of Canuel's actions in Fall River, Mayor Will Flanagan is pushing for adoption of the Carrier Alert program, which helps identify where elderly customers live and whether letter carriers should keep an eye on them.

This wasn't the first time Canuel has helped out in a situation like this. Eight years ago, he called the police when he noticed that an elderly customer on his route had stopped retrieving his mail. Police were able to rescue the man.

Canuel brushed aside praise for himself, but noted during the ceremony: "I know they initiated in Congress the elimination of door-to-door delivery, but this is one of the things that would go missing by doing that," he said.



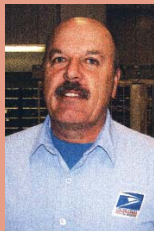
Oak Brook, IL Branch 825 member Janet Larsen

Oak Brook, IL Branch 825 member **Janet Larsen**, a T-6 carrier, was making a delivery to a house on Aug. 10 when she saw something in a customer's mailbox. "My first thought was that it was someone putting their vacation mail on hold," she said. She became very concerned when she realized that it

was a suicide note, addressed to the regular carrier. Hoping she was not too late, she quickly called 911. Responding emergency crews found the man inside. "He had taken an abundance of pills," Larsen said. "He was barely alive." The man's wife had been terminally ill and had recently died. He expressed his gratitude to Larsen, but the 23-year postal veteran doesn't think she is a hero. "We are out in the public every day," she said. "It is just part of our job. We are there to help people in the community."

A truck driver, **Greg Gentry**, was loading his truck at the Perryton, TX post office on May 25 when he fell face-down on the loading dock floor. Paula Hall, the clerk at the retail window, came to see what caused the loud noise and tried to get Gentry to respond. Unsuccessful, she called for help. Another post office worker, Lorie Newman, called 911. Gentry began to turn blue and he stopped breathing. The two turned him over on his back and Perryton Branch 3303 member **Rene Schwalk** helped Newman start CPR. Paramedics arrived soon to take over the CPR. Medical responders said the CPR that Schwalk and Newman performed had saved Gentry's life.

Lima, OH Branch 105 member **Susan Highley** was going about her route on May 20 when she heard a customer using a power saw in his backyard as she placed his mail in the mailbox. "All of a sudden, I heard someone screaming, 'Help me! Help me!'" she said. The carrier ran to the back of the house and saw that the elderly man had cut off part of his finger with the saw. "I can see the bone," the man said. He was alone and bleeding profusely. Highley quickly called 911. She then remained with the man to keep him calm so he would not go into shock before paramedics arrived. Highley also called the man's wife at work to notify her and arrange for her to meet the customer at the hospital. The 27-year postal veteran was commended for the aid and immediate attention she provided her customer, though she brushed off any praise. "It wasn't really that big of a deal," she said of her actions.



When Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member **Greg Stueber** noticed mail going uncollected at customer Jack Lilly's house on Saturday, Aug. 13, he became worried. "Customers usually tell me

when they're going on vacation," he said. He quickly contacted a neighbor, and asked, "Have you seen Jack?" The neighbor tried to call Lilly, but didn't get a response. When the pile of mail was still there Monday, the carrier again checked in with the neighbor. They were both very concerned, so the neighbor entered the home. He found Lilly on the floor, unconscious with a very faint pulse, and he called 911. The man had been on the floor for five days and was later found to have a blood clot in his heart. Doctors at the hospital credited Stueber with saving Lilly's life. "Without Greg's action,

Jack would have died," Lilly's parents, Kathleen and Bill, wrote to the local postmaster. "Greg went above his normal duties and is a hero to our family." But Stueber, a 25-year carrier, said he just tried to keep an eye out for his customers. "It was just watching out for your fellow person," he said. "It's the human thing to do."

Stephanie Wood was worried when she saw a pile of mail building outside the home of Mr. Marriott, who is disabled, on Aug. 4. She knew that he picked up his mail every day, so this accumulation was unusual. When the Smithfield, UT Branch 6308 member headed next door to deliver, "his neighbor came out as I was going up." Wood asked the neighbor if she had seen or heard from Marriott. She said she hadn't, but she had a key, so she and another neighbor went to the house to check on the man. The neighbors found Marriott inside lying on the floor, where he had been for 36 hours after he fell and was unable to get back up. They called emergency crews to take the man to the hospital. The neighbors reported that doctors had told them that Marriott would have died had he not been found when he was, because of Wood's concern. "I was just doing what anyone else would do," Wood said. "Heroes are people who run into burning buildings, not someone who sees a problem and checks on it."

On May 16, Greenville, SC Branch 439 member **Rodney Siegfried** had just deposited mail in a customer's mail slot when he heard a cry for help. The customer told him that she had fallen and couldn't get up. The carrier called 911 and then went to the next-door neighbor's house to get a key to open the door. Responding EMS units discovered that the woman had dislocated her hip when she had fallen nearly four hours earlier. She was unable to get to the phone, and Siegfried was the only person who had heard her calls. ☒

Sometimes, carriers are saved by patrons

Carriers aren't the only heroes in their communities—on occasion, the residents are, too. On July 22, during a heat wave, carrier **Mary Denise Ortmann** was doing her rounds on the first day on her readjusted route. The Hazelwood, MO Branch 5847 member had evidently pulled up in her LLV and subsequently collapsed from heat exhaustion.

Luckily, customer Karen Mull, who was outside

watering her flowers, noticed. "I was totally out of it," Ortmann said, noting that Mull took every step she possibly could. "She got water, elevated my legs, called my husband and secured my truck." She also made sure the carrier got medical attention, and she called Ortmann's supervisor. And, after spending two days in the hospital, Ortmann was OK. "She really went above and beyond," Ortmann said of Mull. "She may have saved my life."



Eye on the ELDERLY

ON JULY 7, DEBRA BURZYCKI WAS STARTING her deliveries for the day when she noticed her 80-year-old customer Marvel Kononowech lying in his yard after falling and struggling to get up. The Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 member went to the man and helped him to his feet and inside his house before continuing her route. "Thanks be to God for people like her," Kononowech wrote in a letter to the post office. "You're very lucky to have her for a hardworking gal."

WHILE DELIVERING HIS ROUNDS ON Monday, Aug. 1, Jason Snavelly saw a pile of mail and newspapers at an elderly customer's house. "I noticed the mail wasn't picked up from Saturday," he said. Knowing this woman's habits and that this was unusual for this customer, he became concerned and knocked on the door, to no response. He then went next door to the neighbor's house to see if they had seen the woman, but they hadn't. So, he called the police to ask them to do a welfare check to see if the woman was OK. Officers had to break in to the house to gain entry, and found that the customer had died. The Wichita, KS Branch 201 member took time to contact the patron's family and discuss the situation with them. The woman's family expressed their gratitude to Snavelly for his concern for their mother's welfare. "Jason is a fine representative for the Wichita postal system and deserves whatever recognition you can bestow upon him," the woman's son, Roger Marshall, told the post office. But Snavelly was modest about the praise. "I don't think I'm a hero," he said. "I was just doing my job."

NOTICING AN UNUSUAL PILE-UP OF MAIL at an elderly customer's house worried carrier Davena Howell on Oct. 7. "I just got a weird feeling," the Alliance, OH Branch 297 member said. "She always picked up her mail." So, she knocked on the door and rang the bell—no response—and then peered in through the window but didn't see anything. Howell then went to a neighbor to ask if he had seen her. He told the carrier that she was a woman who kept to herself, but he would usually see her come and go in her car and hadn't seen her in quite a while. Knowing that the woman lived alone, Howell called the local post-

master, who came to the scene. He also looked through the window. "He said he saw a hand outstretched," Howell said, and he called 911. Responders broke into the house and took the woman, who had been on the floor four or five days, to the hospital. Doctors said the woman would have died if she had been there for another day. Howell laughed off the idea of being called a hero. "We're kind of like the eyes of the city," she said. "I'm just doing my job."

WHEN CARRIER DAVID DUFF JR. CAME across an elderly patron on his hands and knees one day in May, he knew he needed to check on him. He went over and asked if he was OK, and the man responded that he could not get up. So, Duff helped the man stand up and then called 911. The Tacoma, WA Branch 130 member stayed with the man until the arrival of paramedics, who said the man had broken his leg. Duff was commended for his thoughtful actions.

WHEN JIM DAVIS SAW A SMALL PILE OF mail outside 82-year-old customer Fred Kline's house on a Friday, he was concerned. He knocked on the door, but when no one answered and Kline's dog didn't bark as it usually would if it were inside, Davis didn't panic. But, when he saw an even larger pile of mail when he returned the next day, Saturday, Oct. 1, the Saginaw, MI Branch 74 member took action. "I've known this guy pretty much my whole life," Davis said; growing up, Kline was one of Davis' Scoutmasters, and they also attended the same church. "He had a routine, and I knew his routine



Alliance, OH Branch 297 member Davena Howell

He was prepared

Alert letter carrier helps save his former Boy Scout master

BARBAR BARBER
Saginaw News-Examiner (300 971 2445)

SAGINAW — Postal carrier James A. Davis knew something was wrong with his former Boy Scout master when the mail started to pile up.

Davis, 55, noticed 82-year-old Fred Kline's mailbox out Friday. A day later, an ever larger pile of mail "rained a red flag."

"You know him for pretty much all of my life. He's been one of my Scout masters," Davis said. "You got to know people's habits."

He had knocked on the door the previous day a Friday, but when no one answered and Davis' dog didn't bark as it would if it were inside, he didn't think anything was wrong. When he returned the next day Oct. 1, and saw the mail still there, he knocked again.

This time, the dog barked and Kline, who had lived there since 1960, didn't answer. Davis went and tried knocking again, he said. "At that point I called 911, because I had a really bad feeling that something happened and I wasn't right."

A Saginaw police officer and medical authorities found Kline and Davis' dog. Officers Justin Stearns and another officer searched for a bathroom door, a broken one in a window in a door to get into the house and saw the man lying on the floor for three days, the report said.

Kline said he was in his kitchen when he apparently suffered a mild heart attack, fell and broke his hip.

"I didn't even know that I fell," he said. "I was there alone, just until the next morning."

All credit goes to Jim Davis. Kline thought he heard someone and yelled for help.

"I did yell, but I don't think it was loud enough," he said. "He dragged himself around the room and couldn't reach a wall-mounted telephone."

"I don't even know if I probably passed out a couple times."

Authorities rushed him to the hospital. Scott A. Grosvenor, Kline's son-in-law, was first to get word of what happened.

"He was very embarrassed," said Grosvenor, 55, of Rockford Township.

Kim Grosvenor, Kline's daughter, said her father is a diabetic who had not had an insulin shot, water or drink for three days. "So he was quite delirious when they did find him," she said.

He's now in rehabilitation at Carenet Inn, 6700 Westland.



Fred Kline



U.S. Postal Service mail carrier James A. Davis called police after mail piled up for three days at the home of Fred Kline, 82, of Saginaw. Kline had fallen in his home, leaving him to die and ended up lying on his back for three days before Davis' arrival.

An article in *The Saginaw News* about Saginaw, MI Branch 74 member Jim Davis' heroics in saving his customer.

pretty good." He knocked again. This time, the dog barked, but there was no response from Kline. The carrier went around to the back of the house and knocked again, and still got no response, though he could see a light on. "At that point, I called 911, because I had a really bad feeling that something happened and wasn't right," Davis said. Responding officers looked through a window and spotted Kline lying on the floor. They then broke out a window in a door to gain entry to reach the man, who had been lying there for three days. Kline was alert but shaking, and said he had fallen in his kitchen and broken his hip after he suffered a mild heart attack. The man also was a diabetic and was in dire condition since he hadn't had any insulin, food or water in days. Kline told *The Saginaw News*, "I didn't even know that I fell. I was there alone, just me and the dog. I didn't wake up until the next morning." He had yelled at some point, but wasn't heard, so he dragged himself around, trying to reach a phone, but was unsuccessful. Davis was just glad he could be there to help. "If we weren't delivering mail on Saturday, I don't think he would have made it 'til Monday," he said. Kline's daughter, Kim Grierson, credited Davis with saving her father's life. "I think the world of the mailman," she told the *News*. "I told him he was a godsend. He saved my dad's life." Despite being in a similar situation at least a dozen times on his route before, Davis downplayed his role. "I don't feel in my own mind that I am [a hero]," the 27-year postal veteran said. "To me, it was just doing what I do." ☐