

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

**Barbara Langdon received a lot of media attention for her actions in helping to save her customers from a fire.**



# 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.

## Heroic carrier helps save entire family from fire

Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Barbara Langdon** was on an extra delivery route on Jan. 24 when she saw thick, black smoke emanating from a chimney. "I thought that was odd, and within a second, it started shooting out a side porch," the carrier told local NBC TV news affiliate WHEC and would later tell a nationwide television audience.

Langdon, a 32-year postal veteran, then drove into a driveway next door to see if someone was home who could come help her in the house. But as she was running to the neighbor's house, Langdon heard a woman screaming. She turned around and saw a 67-year-old customer hanging out of a window.

"She told me that she had a 4-year-old grandson in there, so I kept screaming as she was trying to find him, but the smoke was so dark, she couldn't even move to find him. So he was calling back to me as I was trying to get him to come to me," Langdon told WHEC. "I decided I need to get her out, because she looked like she was starting to fail."

There was so much black smoke out of the front and the side, the carrier knew she couldn't get in those doors. "So I just ripped the curtains down, put them on the ground so that she wasn't in the snow, pulled her out and covered her with my coat," Langdon said.

A passerby arrived within minutes and tried to find the baby, but couldn't. Firefighters arrived soon after.

Inside, the smoke was so thick that visibility was only six inches. Firefighters had to feel their way around on the floor, but they soon found the woman's 25-year-old daughter on the kitchen floor, along with her 4-year-old son, and pulled them from the house through a window. When crews went back inside, they found her seven-month-old daughter and got her out as well. The family members were all unconscious when they got outside—but they were alive. The children had suffered some burns, and the adults had injuries as well.

Investigators said the fire had started in the basement. The staircase from there to the kitchen acted like a chimney, funneling the smoke up the main floor where the victims were. In addition, there were no working smoke detectors in the house.

Fire Chief Don Johnson told WHEC, "Chances are, a fire this bad—smoldering for a while and with no smoke detectors to warn them—the [carbon monoxide] and the smoke just overcomes you. You just don't wake up from that."

Langdon said she was just in the right place at the right time. "I just don't know anyone who could have just sat there and watch it, seeing someone there, and knowing there were other people in the house," she told WHEC. "I want to thank the firemen. There were so many of them who went into the house to risk their own life."

Because of her actions, the carrier appeared on Steve Harvey's television talk show on Feb. 25 as that week's "Harvey's Hero." Langdon denied that she was a hero. But Harvey hugged her and insisted that she was, and the studio audience repeatedly interrupted her story with applause.

"I'm a grandma myself, so I was dying to get this baby out," she told Harvey. "I was just doing something someone else would have done." **PR**

## Eye on the elderly



Phillip Love Jr.

As Chicago Branch 11 member **Phillip Love Jr.** was going about his route one Saturday last October, he came upon a horrible sight: his elderly customer, who is handicapped, was lying outside in the rain. “I thought, ‘What happened to this woman?’” Love said. She had apparently gone out to get the newspaper and had fallen. “I saw the door open,” the carrier said. “I went into the house and started yelling.” Love knew that the woman lived there with her family, and that there normally was a housekeeper. He got the attention of the woman’s daughter, who was upstairs. She checked on her mother regularly, but she hadn’t realized her mother had left the house. The daughter and Love went back to the woman. They covered her with coats, and Love dialed 911. When emergency

personnel came, the 27-year postal veteran directed the vehicles to the house. “He is our hero and truly deserves to be recognized for this,” the woman’s daughter, Charlene Kirshenbaum, wrote to the postmaster general. “You know in these days of cutbacks, this is one valuable employee of our government whose job should never be cut.” But Love said his actions weren’t a big deal. “I was just at the right place at the right time,” he said. “I was grateful that I was there to help her.”

On Feb. 5, **Michelle McLeod** saw that elderly customer Manuela Rodriguez had a full mailbox from the day before. Since the woman hadn’t told her she was going on vacation, the South Florida Branch 1071 member was worried and asked neighbors Jose Caragol and Manny Aquera if they had they seen her. “They said ‘No,’” McLeod said. “I told them that her mailbox was full of mail and that is unlike her, because she picks up her mail every day or her sister who lives with her will do so.” Aquera agreed, and noted that he also hadn’t seen the woman’s kitchen light on recently. He said he would look into it. The next day, when McLeod came back to deliver the mail, Caragol and Aquera stopped her and said they had called police,

who found both ladies in bad condition in the house and who said it was a good thing that McLeod had asked about them. Aquera had called Rodriguez’s son, who’d said that he had not heard from his mother or her sister in at least a week. “According to Manny, Ms. Rodriguez was delirious and disoriented, and her sister had not eaten in a week or more and had lost 40 pounds,” McLeod said. Both women were taken to the hospital. After a week, one woman succumbed to her injuries. “I’m just glad at least one of them was saved,” McLeod said. “I try to get to know my customers and know their routines.”

On Saturday, Nov. 24, 2012, Bennington, VT Branch 252 member **Martin Mosher** was delivering mail on his mounted route when he saw customer Barbara Vigsnes, who is in her 80s,



on the ground in front of her house. He quickly parked and went over.

“She had flipped off a step coming out to get the mail,” the carrier said. “She had broken her nose and suffered a concussion. There was a lot of blood around.” Mosher immediately called

911 and waited with Vigsnes until help arrived. The woman was taken to the hospital and later returned home to recuperate. The 13-year postal veteran said he thought that anyone would have done what he did. “‘Hero’ just seems to be a big word,” Mosher said. “I couldn’t see just driving away.”

**Gary Dixon** grew worried when he saw three days’ worth of mail outside the home of an 86-year-old customer on Jan. 5. “She’s almost always outside,” he said. And even when she isn’t there when he comes by, the mail always is picked up. The South Central Indiana Branch 828 member knew that this was unusual, so he told a neighbor, who said he hadn’t seen the woman recently. He then spoke with the local fire inspector, DeWayne Turpen, who checked on the woman fairly regularly. Turpen went to the woman’s house and knocked on the door. He could hear the woman, but she was unable to move. “She had fallen down and was too weak to get off the floor,” Dixon said. The fire inspector was able to get inside and found the woman on the floor, where she had been for two days. Dixon, an 18-year postal veteran, said he just watches out for his customers. “If you’re paying attention, you can notice little things like that,” he said. **PR**

## Fire and rescue

While delivering mail on Saturday, Sept. 29, 2012, Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member **William Busching** had just parked his vehicle to begin his relay. When he walked up to the door of a home, he noticed wisps of smoke billowing from the front door. Busching stepped back, looked up, and saw heavy smoke coming out of the ridge vents. The carrier called 911 to alert emergency services to the house fire. He went to the front door and opened it, yelling into the house to try to find out if anyone was home. He was not able to get inside because of the heavy smoke. After getting no response, he then closed the door and went to the back yard, where he found the resident's dogs, safe. Local firefighters were assisted

by five other area departments, and the house was saved. The fire chief credited Busching for his actions, saying if the fire had not been called in when it was, the house might have been a total loss.

On Saturday, Nov. 24, 2012, carrier **Gerry Atilano** was delivering a parcel to a customer's door when he heard a popping and crackling sound. Unsettled, the Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member looked around the side of the house and noticed ashes flying: The attached garage was on fire. Atilano called 911 and reported the fire, saying that he was unsure if there was anyone inside. The carrier waited until the local fire department arrived. As he waited, Atilano knocked

on the door to ensure that no residents were inside. Once firefighters arrived, the carrier continued with his route. The fire department informed the local post office that if it weren't for the immediate action taken by Atilano, the entire home might have burned down.

As Tacoma, WA Branch 130 member **David Castro** drove along his route on Saturday, Sept. 29, 2012, he noticed smoke pouring from customer Shalonda Johnson's house. Castro pulled over to the side of the road and saw Johnson attempting to get her daughter over the fence, and so the carrier helped both of the women to safety. Johnson later contacted the local postmaster to extend her gratitude for Castro's efforts. **PR**



### Right place, right time

**John Mullady** was delivering to an NBU box on Aug. 8, 2012, in 112-degree heat, when "I thought I heard someone calling out, 'Help me!'" he said. The origin of the plea seemed to be right in front of him, but the Phoenix, AZ Branch 576 member couldn't see anyone.

Mullady heard the cry again. "I knew something was wrong," he said.

He quickly put the remaining mail back in his truck and went to a nearby gated area, but no one was there. He went to the front of the building, rang the bell, and a patron, Ron, answered—but said there was no one in trouble there.

Mullady heard the cry for help again. "I knew it was the 90-year old woman who lived across the street," the carrier said. Mullady knew the woman well because she often came outside to her mailbox when he delivered.

He ran to the house and found Margaret lying on the floor just inside the locked security screen door of her condo.

She told Mullady that she was in pain from a fall in her kitchen and that she had spent 45 minutes crawling to the door. As Ron called 911, "I talked to her and tried to comfort her," Mullady said. Margaret pleaded for them to knock down the door, but there was no way to get in through the metal security door, so they could only wait for emergency personnel. Mullady got down on the ground, reached through the narrow opening at the bottom of the door and held Margaret's hand, while reassuring her that help would soon be there.

Paramedics arrived a few minutes later and went to work on what they believed to be a broken hip. Once Mullady saw that Margaret was in good hands, he continued on his route.

The 33-year postal veteran didn't claim any heroics; he was glad he was there. "I was just happy to be able to do it," he said. "She could have easily passed away in the heat." **PR**

## Neighborhood watch

On Aug. 9, 2012, postal worker Randall Lovings had been informed by the local sheriff's office that an elderly man was missing in the area. So, he sent through the carrier network at his post office the description of a man with dementia who had wandered from his home. Central Florida Branch 1091 member **Harold Bean Jr.** heeded the alert, and was on the lookout while on his route. Bean spotted a man who partially matched the description. "I pulled over and called his name," he said. "I asked him his name and made sure he

was the right guy." The carrier called 911 and waited with the elderly man for the sheriff to arrive to return him to his home. Bean said if it hadn't been for Lovings, who alerted him, he would have never known. "I would have driven right by the guy," he said. "I just happened to be the one who found him."

While on her route one day last August, Myrtle Beach, SC Branch 4645 member **Kim Courchesne** and the route inspector, Postmaster Kim Williams, were approached by residents

to ask them to keep an eye out for an elderly man with Alzheimer's disease who had walked away from caretakers at his home. They continued on the route and kept their eyes open, and they spotted him within a few blocks. Courchesne drove back to let the residents know he had been found, and Williams walked the man back home.

While delivering the mail on Sept. 26, 2012, Lincoln, NE Branch 8 member **Shannon White** heard a child crying. The cries came from a 3-year-old boy, who was

lying on the ground near the window of an apartment complex. When it became apparent that no adult was around and the boy might be injured, White called 911 and stayed with the boy until police and paramedics arrived. The child apparently had fallen from a third-story window. A local newspaper reported that the boy had a bruised left cheek, but had no life-threatening injuries. According to TV reports, neighbors said they heard the toddler crying for a long time and wished they had checked on the situation sooner. **PR**

## Help on the way

Rochester, NY Branch 210 member **Michael Grevell** was walking his route on Sept. 20, 2012, when he found customer Paul Schuyler unresponsive on the sidewalk. "It sounded like he was snoring, and I didn't know what was going on," the carrier said, so he called 911. "The operator talked me through CPR," he said. He had taken classes before, and his actions kept Schuyler alive until the local fire department arrived. Grevell found out that Schuyler was a volunteer firefighter, so the carrier stopped by the fire hall the next day to check on his customer's condition. Fire officials told him that Schuyler was treated for a heart problem. To help him, they had to induce a coma and slowly bring him out of it. Grevell was just happy he could do his part to save his customer in a "surreal" situation. "I was kind of beside myself and very scared," he said.

On March 29, 2012, **Felicia Kershaw** was delivering her route when she came across customer Robert Mulvey in his car parked on the side of his house. He was slumped over, seemingly unconscious, with one leg hanging out of the car. The Joliet, IL Branch 305 member grabbed the car keys, immediately took them to the front door of the house and alerted Mulvey's wife, Ann. Together, Kershaw and Ann assisted in reviving Robert and they were able to get him into the house and resting properly in a chair. It turns out that Mulvey, who is in his late 70s, had been to the hospital for a dialysis treatment and was in such weak condition upon returning home that his leg became stuck while he tried to get out of the car, and he eventually passed out from the effort. Because he parked on the side of the house, his wife was unaware that he had returned home. Ann Mulvey thanked Kershaw for her ac-

tions, saying that without her help, he might have remained in that exposed position for several more hours.

**Helen Marie Diaz** grew alarmed when she noticed an unpleasant odor and an accumulated pile of mail outside a customer's home on Sept. 7, 2012. The South Florida Branch 1071 member knew how much the woman depended on her mail, and she suspected something might be amiss. So, Diaz knocked on neighbor Bonni Rubinstein's door, asking if she had seen the woman. She hadn't, and after they checked in with another neighbor, they called police. Responding officers found the woman dead inside the home, and a son with disabilities who was in bad shape who was taken to the hospital. "Marie's actions saved a life as well as reminded our small street that we need to be more aware of one another," Rubinstein wrote the postmaster general. "She

is an asset to the USPS and we are proud to have her on our route!"

**Albert Ferraioli** was going about his route one day last winter when he saw his customer, Robert Stipicevic, on the floor of his house. The Long Island Merged, NY Branch 6000 member tried the door to Stipicevic's house, but couldn't get in, so he went to the man's next-door neighbor, who had a key. Ferraioli called an ambulance and waited for help to arrive. He discovered that his customer had been on the floor for 20 hours, unable to lift himself up. "I would like to commend your mail carrier Al for saving my life by his quick actions," Stipicevic wrote in a letter to the local post office. "I was dehydrated and near death as I was one step away from kidney failure. I am fine now and looking forward to a new life thanks to him." **PR**

## Eye on the elderly



Cleveland, OH Branch 40 carrier **Jason Jones** noticed mail piling up at the house of a customer he knew well, 91-year-old Jack Clair, one day in early January. “He’s one of my number-one customers that come and greet me every other day,” Jones told the local ABC

TV news affiliate. “He’s looking forward to his mail.” But for at least three days, the carrier didn’t see Clair, and he didn’t see footprints in the fresh snow. So, Jones called 911. “They

said they’ll check into it and I was done working for the day and that was it,” he told ABC. “But when I came back the next day in the morning, I still didn’t see any footprints from Mr. Clair and his car still hadn’t moved. So I called the police again,” Jones said. Officers showed up and en-

tered the house, finding Clair unconscious on the floor, dehydrated and malnourished. Clair’s neighbor, Duane Todd, told ABC, “I felt that the postal man needed to be recognized for the job he did because if he hadn’t notified someone, Mr. Jack would’ve died.” Jones was just glad he could help. “You look out for others, and you expect others to look out for you,” he said.

While delivering on Saturday, July 7, 2012, Connecticut Merged Branch 20 member **Walter Fleming** noticed the previous day’s mail was still in a customer’s mailbox. The patron, George Moran, was an elderly man who lived alone and had previously asked Fleming to keep an eye on him

during his rounds, so the carrier was worried. Fleming knocked on Moran’s door and, getting no response, he entered the apartment. The carrier found Moran lying unconscious on the living room floor. Fleming checked to see if Moran was alive, then immediately called 911 and waited with the man until an ambulance arrived. Moran’s family wrote a letter expressing their thanks and appreciation for saving their father’s life. “He looked forward each day for his mail person,” they said. “Walter, you did an outstanding job that Saturday, 7 July 2012; you saved his life that day.... We hope that the United States Postal Service has or will honor your heroism.” **PR**

## ‘When something is off, you can tell’

On March 13, Santa Barbara, CA Branch 290 member **Manny Chavira** saw that an elderly customer’s mail had not been picked up as it normally was. “It was an average day. I was doing my rounds...it seemed weird,” the carrier told the *Santa Barbara News-Press*. “I called my work to see if there was a hold that we missed, but they didn’t have anything.”

So, he alerted a neighbor next door, who hadn’t heard anything from the woman. They also noticed that the woman’s car was in the driveway. They called the police, but “they weren’t able to do anything,” Chavira said. They just said that the woman was probably on vacation.

But, the carrier said, “It didn’t seem right.” So, Chavira and the neighbor con-

tacted a former neighbor who was still good friends with the woman to check on her welfare. Chavira and the neighbors went to the house and called out the woman’s name. The former neighbor lifted the screen off an unlocked window. Inside, the group found the woman on her bathroom floor, where she had been for three days or possibly longer. “She couldn’t remember what happened,” Chavira said. But, he added: “She’s alive; she’s OK.”

Alicia Bair, the woman’s neighbor, told the *News-Press*: “She had been through a lot of trauma. All I can say is that he saved her life.”

Chavira, a 15-year postal veteran, brushed off accolades, saying he is just familiar with his route. “When something is off, you can tell from being out here every day,” he told the newspaper. “There’s a happy ending to it. The neighbors are the ones who are the true heroes.” **PR**



An article in the *Santa Barbara News-Press* describes Manny Chavira’s heroics on his route.