

## 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. We'll follow up with you to obtain news clippings, photos or other information.

From top: Greensboro, NC Branch 630 member Roxanne Ufret and Burlington, NC Branch 2262 member Mickey Wheeley recently were interviewed by local print and TV media for their heroics.



# 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.

## Saving a 'postal family'

The smell of smoke emanating from the roof of a nearby building startled Greensboro, NC Branch 630 member **Roxanne Ufret** as she went about her route on Saturday, Jan. 23, 2013.

"I thought it was coming from the chimney of a nearby home, but it did not smell like a wood fire," she said.

She went up to the house and could hear the smoke alarm buzzing, so she rang the doorbell but received no response.

Ufret then heard a thud behind the door. "I got really nervous," she said.

Ufret rushed next door to the neighbor's house and filled her in on the situation. Ufret called 911, and the neighbor tried to call the homeowner but wasn't able to reach her.

Firefighters soon arrived to put out the blaze, as Ufret returned to her route. Firefighters reported that the fire was electrical and was believed to have started in the attic. The "thud" that Ufret heard was a microwave that had flown across the floor after a wall burst from too much pressure.

Two dogs inside were also saved—two animals that surprisingly did not make any noise during the chaos.

"I'm glad they had a smoke alarm. It could have been a lot worse," she said.

Ufret also said she's happy that she has a walking route. "I would not have heard the smoke alarm if I had been on a riding route," she said.

But she maintains that she simply came along at the right time. "I don't think I'm a hero," the 20-year postal

veteran said. "They're part of my postal family."

## Carrier saves patron after caretaker neglect

On Oct. 7, 2013, Burlington, NC Branch 2262 member **Michael "Mickey" Wheeley** was making deliveries to apartments on his route when he noticed three or four packages of medicine from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) still in the cluster-box mailbox for one of his customers. Wheeley felt something wasn't right, so he decided to take the medicine and mail to check on the person.

"I went to his door, and he mumbled, 'Come in,'" Wheeley said.

When the carrier entered, he saw a man in a chair, unable to get up and walk—or even function—by himself. "He was trapped in his recliner," he said.

The man told Wheeley that he was by himself, because his caretaker and her substitute had had a scheduling misunderstanding. The customer said he was recovering from a stroke.

Wheeley gave the man some water as well as his mail. The customer told the carrier that he hadn't had any food or medicine in three days, and that the caretaker had left him only a little bit of water. When Wheeley asked if he wanted something to eat, the man asked for chicken nuggets.

The carrier left the apartment and called his supervisor, who called 911. Emergency responders arrived and took the man to the VA hospital because he was a Vietnam War veteran.

"He was glad to see somebody...he was just sitting there with no TV, nothing to eat, and a little bit of water," Wheeley said. "If he'd have stayed another day like that, he would have been in trouble."

When the man returned home from the hospital, the 30-plus-year postal veteran followed through on his promise—he got his customer some chicken nuggets.

The carrier downplayed his actions, though. "I'm certainly no hero. I just checked on him," Wheeley, an Air Force veteran, said. "It made me feel good, being a veteran helping a veteran."



## Carrier catches twins tossed from a burning building

**Jermaine Shirley**, a newly hired city carrier assistant, was on his way to work around 7 a.m. on Dec. 19, 2013, when he smelled smoke coming from his own apartment building in his neighborhood in the Bronx borough of New York City.

Shirley, a member of Greenwich, CT Branch 759, headed downstairs and smelled the smoke getting stronger. He told New York's *Daily News* that he had followed the scent to a second-floor apartment. He then ran through the building, knocking on doors to alert residents to the danger.

While the letter carrier was outside helping his own wife and baby to safety, he heard his neighbor, Everdean Codner, calling for help from a third-floor apartment.

"I tried to make it through the

front door but there was nothing but smoke," Codner told the *Daily News*. "I couldn't get through. The smoke was heavy. It pushed us back inside.

"I wanted to get my babies out and I ran to the fire escape," he said, referring to his 11-month-old twin boys, Israel and Ishmael.

Spotting Codner with one of the boys, Shirley quickly climbed on top of a single-story shed located below the building's fire escape. "I told him, 'Drop the baby,'" Shirley said.

Codner complied, dropping them one by one into Shirley's waiting arms below. Once the twins were safely on the ground, "I had to jump from the third-floor fire escape," Codner told the paper. "My wife had to jump from like halfway down the ladder."

Fortunately, everyone managed to



Jermaine Shirley

get out of the building without serious injury, including the twins.

"They're fine, thank God!" their mother, Nikalia Codner, told the *Daily News*. "It really is a miracle."

"We're here today because of our neighbor's quick response," Everdean Codner said. "It's the best holiday gift you could ever ask for."

Shirley downplayed his actions, however. "It was just instincts. They just kicked in right away," he said. "I have a family, too. I would want somebody to do the same for me."

## Help on the way



Wayne Zuckerman

driveway, looking frantic. She was calling for her grandson to come outside and help her. He then saw that the woman's husband was slumped over inside his van. A neighbor's son saw what was going on and ran over to help. "While the wife watched from her wheelchair, I pulled the man from his van and laid

him out on the driveway," the carrier said. The woman had talked to a 911 operator, and was told to start CPR. Because Zuckerman had worked at a medical center for 10 years before starting with the Postal Service, he knew CPR. "It was quite different than practicing on a dummy," the carrier said. "The five minutes or so that it took the police and paramedics to arrive felt like an eternity, during which time I continued in the hope of seeing some sign of life."

A police officer was the first to arrive, and Zuckerman continued doing CPR until the arrival of paramedics, who pronounced the man dead. "I knew the man because he used to walk for exercise in the area, and I'd wave and say hello," Zuckerman said. "He went for a haircut that

morning, and it seems he had heart trouble for some time. His wife wondered why he wasn't back yet, and had looked out her window and seen him slumped over in the van in the driveway. We don't know how long he'd sat there." Zuckerman was credited with being a hero for trying to prolong the man's life so that his family could say goodbye. He said he only regretted not being to get there sooner. "I just felt like I stepped up and did what needed to be done," the 14-year postal veteran said.

**G**rand Rapids, MI Branch 56 member **Ron Groening** was on the street delivering his route one day last fall when he saw a young man collapse. He rushed over to him. "I could clearly see he

was having problems with his breathing," Groening said. The man confirmed this by motioning to Groening that he couldn't breathe easily. The 19-year postal veteran proceeded to contact 911 and stayed with the man as they waited for assistance to arrive. "He was getting to the edge of panic," Groening said. "I kept him calm and collected." Once paramedics arrived to attend to what turned out to be an asthma attack, the carrier continued on his route without telling anyone about the incident. A local bishop who witnessed Groening's actions called the post office to explain what had happened. The carrier brushed off any talk of heroics, though. "Anybody would have done the very same thing for someone else," he said.

## Help on the way



**Kimberly Suits**

On Saturday, Aug. 31, 2013, Southern Illinois Merged Branch 1197 member **Kimberly Suits** was delivering her route on one of the hottest days of the summer when she saw a man lying in the weeds of a vacant lot. “I thought he was dead,” she

said. The carrier went over to him and tried to talk to him. “I was asking questions, and he was answering,” she said. She found out that the man lived in a nearby group home for the disabled and had collapsed from the heat while walking back from a local store. Suits led him to the porch of the nearest house for some shade. An elderly resident had seen the man but was unable to help, so she went to the police station to report it. A responding officer came by within minutes. “They were able to get him to the car and get him back home,” Suits said. “He’s been my buddy ever since that day.” After seeing that the man was in good hands, Suits resumed delivery of her route. But the 24-year postal

veteran said she’s not a hero. “I would hope anyone would do that for me if I collapsed in the heat,” she said.



While delivering mail to an apartment building on June 28, 2013, Ishpeming, MI Branch

386 member **Jim Fulsher** saw something odd down the hallway from him. “I noticed some feet on the ground sticking out,” he said. Fulsher hurried over to investigate. He didn’t see any life bracelets or medical tags on the woman to indicate any medical issues. She was conscious, but could not speak. “She was holding

her upper chest, and she was having trouble breathing,” he said. The woman was trying to lift herself up off the ground, but couldn’t. Fulsher called 911 and kept speaking to the customer to keep her conscious. “I stayed with her and held her hand and waited until help arrived,” he said. When paramedics got there, they diagnosed the customer as having a seizure, and took her to the hospital. Fulsher, who learned that the customer has since made a recovery and returned home, doesn’t think of himself as a hero. “I think just about anybody would have done it,” the seven-year postal veteran said. “We’re out there every day, and we cross so many paths.” **PR**

## Looking out for ‘my special people’

Arlington Heights, IL Branch 2810 member **Shelly Sauers**’ customer Mr. Ryan always picked up his mail. On March 27, 2013, though, the carrier saw an accumulation at Ryan’s house from the day before.

“I felt something was wrong,” Sauers said. “I decided that I’d keep a close eye on the situation the next day or two to see if it continued to pile up.”

The next day when she arrived at his house, she still saw a pile in his mailbox and became concerned. So, she knocked on the front door and listened, but she didn’t hear anything. The carrier thought that with the Easter holiday weekend, perhaps Ryan was visiting friends and forgot to tell her, but it still was unusual for him to do so.

The next day, the mail was still in the box and advertisements were on the door. “I felt sick to my stomach. I was determined to make sure I did everything I could to make sure he was OK,” Sauers said.

She knocked on the door, but there was still no answer, and she did not see Ryan

when she looked in the windows.

Sauers tried the front and back doors to see if he had left one open, but they were both locked. She then walked to a neighbor’s house to ask her if she had seen Ryan lately, but she had not seen him in a few days.

Sauers went back to the house and pounded on his door, then checked the garage and saw that his car was there. Figuring that Ryan was in the house, Sauers called police and told them the details of the situation, and that Ryan had no immediate family.

She then continued her route and was only on the next street over when “I heard sirens and knew they were headed his way,” she said.

After she finished the block, she went back to Ryan’s home. A neighbor came running up to her, saying, “Shelly, he’s in there.”

The officer came out and told Sauers that they managed to pry open the bathroom window and saw the top of his knees in the tub, so they broke open the back door.

“When they got to Mr. Ryan, he was somewhat coherent,” Sauers said. “He said he had fallen and was lying in the tub for an hour. Mr. Ryan was unaware he was in there for three and a half days.”

Sauers maintains that she was just doing her job. “I just went with my instinct. I knew something was there,” the 15-year postal veteran said. “I’ve known my customers a really long time, and they’re more like friends.”

When Sauers went to visit Ryan in the hospital, he said to her, “Shelly, I knew you’d be the one to find me. I knew you would figure it out. I owe you so much.”

Sauers told him in return, “You owe me nothing; I look out for my special people, and you’re one of them.” **PR**



**Shelly Sauers**



## Eye on the elderly



David Morris III

On Saturday, June 28, 2013, Florissant, MO Branch 4839 member **David Morris III** was delivering mail on another carrier's route when he came across an elderly customer lying on the ground with her small dog. The woman was crying and frantically screaming for help. Next to her in the street was a large dog that had attacked her small dog and had knocked her to the ground. The woman was seriously injured, with her foot dangling from her leg. Morris shielded the customer by pulling the LLV between the dog and her. "As I pulled up, the dog backed away," he said. He got out with his can of mace, aided the woman, called 911 and waited for the paramedics to arrive before he continued delivering the route. On Monday, the woman's husband came outside and asked the regular carrier to thank Morris for helping his wife. The husband said that cars had passed her by, school-age kids were getting off the bus, and that the situation could have been even worse than it was.

The woman had emergency surgery to reattach her foot and was scheduled to undergo rehab to learn to walk again. "The lady was pretty lucky," Morris said. But he doesn't think he's a hero. "I happened to be there at the time," the nine-year postal veteran said. "I was just glad to be able to help."

While delivering her route one day in June 2013, Cleveland, OH Branch 40 member **Janet Wey-Gebacz** found mail from the day before in her 100-year-old customer's mailbox. The carrier then noticed two newspapers in the door and saw the garage door partially open, so she began knocking loudly. "I didn't know if I should stick my nose in, but this customer always takes her mail out of the box," Wey-Gebacz said. Hearing no response, she ran to a relative's home two doors down. "No one answered there either," Wey-Gebacz said. She was about to slip under the garage door when a police cruiser came down the road. The carrier flagged down the police officer, who said he already had checked on the woman, but it turned out to be a misunderstanding—that was for a different resident across the street. The carrier insisted, and the officer entered the house and found the centenarian conscious but in desperate need of medical attention. The woman had apparently fallen in the basement and had been lying there for a day and half with a broken shoulder and four broken ribs. The customer's granddaughter was extremely grateful to the carrier. "My grandmother has Life Alert, but she wasn't

wearing the pendant, so no one knew there was a problem," she told the USPS. "Janet is responsible for saving my grandmother's life." But Wey-Gebacz brushes off any accolades. "I believe it's part of my job to watch out for customers who are senior citizens," the 26-year postal veteran said. "If you see something wrong, you're going to do something."



"I heard this lady saying, help, help," Harrisburg, PA Branch 500 member **Justin**

**Falduts** said as he went about his route on April 19, 2013. When he looked, he saw that his elderly customer, Nancy Haubrich, had fallen into the bushes outside her house and was dazed. He asked if she was OK, and Haubrich told the carrier that her knee had given out as she was walking. She asked him to help her to a neighbor's house to get help. "She's a sweetheart," Falduts said of his customer. As the carrier delivered mail the next day, he saw Haubrich out in her yard talking to a neighbor and went to check on her. "I cannot thank the postman enough for what he did for me that day—for being so reassuring and offering to help and actually helping make that awful experience a little easier," Haubrich wrote to the post office. "I really don't know what I would have done—I live on a very quiet street where everyone helps each other, but on Mondays through Fridays after they go to school or work in the morning, you don't see anyone out until they return

from school or work many hours later.... I want to make sure that I complimented Mr. Justin Falduts for going that extra mile in helping a senior citizen." But the 13-year postal veteran downplayed his actions. "I was there at the right moment," Falduts said. "Anyone would have done it."

Crown Point, IN Branch 1624 member **Sharon Patterson** was walking her route the morning of May 15, 2013, when she noticed that a 90-year-old customer was in trouble. "I was getting ready to deliver the mail at the lady's house," Patterson told the *Northwest Indiana Times*. "I looked over and saw her lying on her garage floor, and she was saying, 'Help me, help me.'" The woman asked Patterson to get her into a lawn chair, but the carrier wasn't able to. "I was trying to talk to her and keep her calm," said Patterson. "She asked me to get her neighbor two doors down. I got the neighbor right away and sat there with her and called 911 and waited until the ambulance came." Meanwhile, a public works employee, David Dickerson, was working nearby. Dickerson, who is also a volunteer firefighter with EMT training, heard the emergency call and rushed to assist Patterson until emergency crews arrived. The woman apparently had fallen in her home and had then crawled out to the garage to get attention. "She had called out to joggers, and they didn't hear her," Patterson said. But the 19-year postal veteran brushed off any mention of heroics. "I think anyone, if they would have come along, would have done the same thing," Patterson told the *Times*. "I was just glad I was able to help her." **PR**