

## 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.

## Seeing flames, vet springs into action

**Willie Shannon** pays attention, and it pays off. On a hot day in July 2022, the carrier pulled up to a four-plex to drop off the mail when he smelled smoke. It was fire season, so there were a lot of forest fires burning, and smelling smoke wasn't out of the ordinary; but that day, the Sacramento, CA Branch 133 member had the where-withal to look up.



Willie Shannon was honored for drawing attention to a fire.

"I wondered if someone was barbecuing," Shannon said, but he didn't see anyone. Then, he noticed flames shooting up at the end of a balcony. He started pressing on his horn, hoping to get the attention of somebody who lived there.

Thankfully, a resident of another unit came running down from the pool two buildings away. After Shannon pointed out the flames, the resident

ran to grab a hose nearby and started spraying the flames.

Meanwhile, Shannon called 911 and went to warn the other residents. The fire department arrived quickly and put out the flames. The carrier later learned that the fire had started from a cigarette butt becoming embedded in a beam, and firefighters had to cut that part out. If Shannon hadn't called 911, firefighters said, the blaze

## Eye on the elderly

**Ryan Ritchie** knows his customers on his route in Wildwood, NJ, well. The Cape Atlantic, NJ Branch 903 member has carried the mail since 2010 and has a routine with one of his elderly customers, Jane—she hears him shut her mailbox and comes to the door to fetch it each time before he leaves. But one day in February, Jane didn't show up. Ritchie

knocked on the door and got no answer, so he continued his route. The next day, though, she still hadn't brought in her mail, so he knocked on the door again. Concerned when she didn't answer, he checked with a neighbor, who also hadn't seen the woman lately and called police. When officers arrived, they found Jane unable to move after

having suffered a stroke. She was taken to a hospital and, after recovering, returned to her home. She told Ritchie later, "I could hear you. But I couldn't even reach my phone to call for help." The carrier said "She was extremely happy" that he was there for her and expected her at the door, he said, adding, "We have a bond that I'll never forget." **PR**



Ryan Ritchie

might have started back up, even though the flames appeared to be squashed by the hose.

The 20-year Air Force veteran said of being called a hero: “I just happened to be there. But I guess it feels good, you know. I’m just glad I was alert enough, since it’s fire season and we’re always smelling smoke.”

## Carrier comes to aid of injured dogwalker

One cold January day, Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Nick Nichter** was parked in front of a house on his route, an ice storm pelting down around him. It was extremely slippery outside, so the letter carrier was being extra careful. A woman walked by

with a large Newfoundland—“She was a professional dogwalker; I saw her every day,” Nichter explained. On the other side of the street was a woman walking two dogs he’d never seen before. One of the dogs was off leash.

Upon noticing the other dogs, the Newfoundland got excited and started pulling toward the other side of the street. The dogwalker was pulled onto a patch of ice and slipped, breaking her arm. “There was blood everywhere,” Nichter recounted.

Immediately, the six-year carrier jumped out of his vehicle and grabbed the Newfoundland. However, the dog from the other side of the street came running. “His owner said, ‘My dog is not friendly; he’s going to attack the

dog,’” Nichter said. He held onto the Newfoundland and threw his bag at the unfamiliar dog, who started biting the bag. The woman grabbed the dog and they left.

Nichter stayed with the dogwalker until emergency services arrived, which took about 25 minutes. While the woman was in the hospital, a neighbor cared for the Newfoundland. She was in the hospital for an entire day, and told Nichter that she still doesn’t have full use of her arm.

The carrier doesn’t feel like his actions were particularly heroic, though. “It feels like nothing out of the ordinary,” Nichter said. “Every day at the Postal Service feels like a good day for the community.” **PR**

## Help on the way

It was a cold day in February 2022 when Newington, CT, carrier **Benito Vargas** was delivering on his route and noticed a man lying face down on a driveway. The Hartford Branch 86 carrier ran over to the man, and when he reached him, he realized that the man had fallen on black ice, hitting his head and losing consciousness. Vargas took the man’s pulse, which was faint. The eight-year carrier remembered that the man was married, so he ran to the man’s house to alert his wife. Vargas then called 911. “I tried to make him comfortable on the ground until the paramedics and police showed up,” the 20-

year Army veteran said. The man’s injuries turned out to be significant, and his wife said of the situation, “I can only imagine what might have happened if Benito hadn’t been there.” Vargas downplayed his role in the situation. “I don’t feel like I was a hero, because this is something that anyone can do,” the carrier said, “but they feel like I was a hero, because I don’t know how much time he was on the ground, and if I wasn’t in the area, they might not have figured out that he was on the ground.”

On a hot day in September 2022, Salt Lake City, UT Branch 111 member

**James Fenton** was delivering on his route and passing through a street when he heard someone screaming for help. He searched for the source and quickly found a woman fallen behind parked cars in a driveway. The woman, Linda Stone, explained that she had fallen an hour and a half before and was unable to move. She also didn’t have any way to call for help. The six-year Army veteran called 911. Realizing that Stone’s injuries were serious, Fenton kept her alert by talking to her to stop her from going into shock. Stone told Fenton that she was afraid she’d die from the heat. Fenton called some of Stone’s



James Fenton

family members to help keep her calm. Emergency services arrived soon after and Stone received medical attention for what was determined to be a broken hip. Fenton said of being called a hero: “It’s pretty cool, but it sucks that someone had to get hurt for that to happen.” **PR**